

# DAVID MYATT AND THE “PINCH OF DESTINY”

## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF MYATT?

An Interview with David Myatt, April 2022

By Nameless Therein



### FOREWORD BY NAMELESS THEREIN

This interview was intended as more than a series of thoughtful and challenging questions for David Myatt. When I sat down to compose these questions, I realized two things. The first was that most critics tend to repeat the same misinterpretations of his work rather than engage it from the diversity of perspectives required to understand his ideas. The second was that apologists of his work tend to repeat what Myatt has already written numerous times, threatening a dogmatic approach to something that requires a radical openness and fluidity. Neither are fully equipped to address his work.

In an effort to break out of that circle, I decided to do a test. Let's call it the Lothian test. The Lothian test pairs two of the most compelling minds I have known in a dialogue spanning over two thousand years. The first was my ex-Harvard professor, a wise and erudite Protestant. The second was David Myatt, whose influence cannot be overstated. Both men significantly shaped my spiritual and intellectual worldview in their own way.

I felt it was time for these two figures to have a conversation. Having received the intellectual legacy that my ex-Harvard professor passed down to me and having been entrusted with some of the wisdom he imparted, I wanted to re-open that dialogue with Myatt.

The dialogue concerns the relationship between faith and reason in Western thought over the last two thousand years of intellectual and religious history. It involves the confrontation between Hellenic and Christian thought, pagan pluralism and religious monism, abstraction and particulars, religious and secular faith, as well as human and divine reason. From Thomas Howard to William James and Emil Cioran to Mother Teresa, it is my hope that this interview will contextualize David Myatt’s work in a new and insightful way, one that will help equip and inspire a new generation. Just as each individual must make their way through their own “pinch of destiny” on the quest for meaning, so too must everyone undergo their own form of the Lothian test. But in measuring one’s success, one must stand on a needle point: one that punctures all pretense and draws out truth, as a wise man once told me.

With that, I present the interview.

Nameless Therein  
A hot day in summer  
July 18, 2022

**Nameless Therein:** You have stated that your philosophy of *pathei-mathos* is expiative.<sup>1</sup> As expressions of that expiation, you mention that your writings and reclusiveness “do little to offset the deep sadness felt, except in fleeting moments.”<sup>2</sup> In your “desire for a numinous non-religious expiation,”<sup>3</sup> your life may be said to resemble a kind of secular restoration of the Fall. Insofar as your non-religious expiation resembles what Wilfred Cantwell Smith describes as faith, involving “man’s capacity to perceive, to symbolize, and to live loyally and richly in terms of a transcendent dimension to his and her life,”<sup>4</sup> the “deep sadness felt” about your past is perhaps offset less by what you have learned and more so by who you have become. In this – in the way your own *pathei-mathos* has shaped you – one can sense sincere atonement. Could you comment on how *pathei-mathos* can help one “live loyally and richly in terms of a transcendent dimension to his ... [or] her life”?

**David Myatt:** I admit I do not presume to know – I do not even now understand – “how *pathei-mathos* can help one live loyally and richly in terms of a transcendent dimension to someone’s life”.

All I do know is what I wrote over a decade ago about something which somehow in some ineffable way seemed to personally work for me:

“the so beautiful sound of birdsong in English woods and fields in early May; or perhaps the sight of small cumulus clouds slowly passing beneath the sky of blue in Summer when Sun so warms us that we stop to wipe away the sweat upon our brow; or, perhaps, that so special scent of a meadow field in middle June after rain when Sun, re-emerging from passing stormful cloud, dries us and our so fragile land, and we are moved – so moved, so still, amid the country silence – that we lie down awhile beside the Hawthorn

hedge to feel again this simple English paradise of field, farm, life, and burgeoning birth.”<sup>5</sup>

But this, such a heritage, such a still so very numinous place, is not an option for so very many around the world that I can only and so fallibly suggest it might possibly be such a Nature in such a place as still exists, and a personal loyal love of partners and of family bound together through personal honour.

**NT:** On the subject of faith, Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that “faith is that quality of or available to humankind by which we are characterized as transcending, or are enabled to transcend, the natural order.”<sup>6</sup> This points to an interesting disparity you previously highlighted regarding the activities of your extremist decades, which were marked by a desire to “bring-into-being some-thing that ... [you now recognize] would not and could not, in centennial terms (let alone in millennial or cosmic terms) endure.”<sup>7</sup> In the desire to “stop or somehow try to control, to shape, the natural flux of change ... [and] to preserve, whatever the cost, what we or others after us might bring-into-being,” you noted the underlying belief that you and your associates “would or could do what no one in human history had been able to do: make our presencings immortal, or at least immune to the natural cycle of birth-life-decay-death.”<sup>8</sup> Having since rejected those beliefs, in addition to the activities and writings of your extremist decades, how would you now reconcile the desire to create enduring works capable of transcending the natural order with a rejection of politics, religion, and violent social activism?<sup>9</sup>

**DM:** Again I have no abstractive, generalized, ideological supra-personal answers. All I have is my feeling, my intuition, my fallible learning that it is a personal loyal love and a very personal honour in the immediacy of the moment which matter.

**NT:** Could you comment on how to reconcile the tension between the universal application of pathei-mathos to our species across thousands of years of human history on the one hand and the recognition of our own mortality as a human species on the other? In other words, how is pathei-mathos meant to endure according to what you call the “Cosmic Perspective”<sup>10</sup> in light of our own mortality, and particularly without a “religious” dimension that transcends the natural order? Might pathei-mathos’ endurance be immanent rather than transcendent, presented in our mortality rather than beyond it? And how might this relate to Aeschylus’ original sense of πάθει μάθος (pathei-mathos) with respect to “[the immortal Zeus] guiding mortals to reason”?<sup>11</sup>

**DM:** Is there or should there ever be anything which is or which is suggested as a ‘universal’ or a religious or an ‘ideological’ supra-personal application or causal abstraction? Something believed or hoped to be enduring?

My own fallible experience is that there is not and perhaps should never be again, since all supra-personal suggestions or applications or abstractions however denoted in my experience and in respect of my classical learning immediately or sooner later are the genesis of hubris and suffering.

Thus and yet again I am returned to a personal loyal love between two people and/or their family and to a very personal honour in the immediacy of the moment.

**NT:** William James said that religion is “the individual pinch of destiny’ as the individual feels it.”<sup>12</sup> James’ characterization of religion was largely a response to the question, “What is the character of this universe in which we dwell?”<sup>13</sup> In order to address this question, he noted that one “must go behind the foreground of existence and reach down to that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence, intimate or alien, terrible or amusing, lovable or odious, which in some degree everyone possesses.”<sup>14</sup> In “[t]his sense of the world’s presence,” we become either “strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant, about life at large.”<sup>15</sup> And our reaction, he says, which is “involuntary and inarticulate and often half unconscious,” is the “completest of all our answers” to the above question.<sup>16</sup>

In making cosmic meaningful tragedy from the individual to the broader context of our species, it seems that this “pinch” has been present throughout your life and your philosophy despite your “desire for a numinous non-religious expiation”<sup>17</sup> and your view that mainstream religions no longer provide “a satisfactory answer to the question of suffering ... [or of] what may be required for us to consciously change ourselves for the better.”<sup>18</sup> In reaching down to “that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence,” how would you describe your reaction to that “sense of the world’s presence,” and how has that changed over the course of your life?

**DM:** We human beings especially of the male genus and often because of centuries of so-called “thinking” make matters of existence, Being, and morality seem complicated, and offer our own suggestions as to how matters could or perhaps should be.

But over the course of my life I seem to have learned that the suffering such suggestions cause and the hubris of humans continues. The invention of causal abstractions continues, century after century. And the Cosmos with its billions of galaxies and its perhaps billions of life-habitable planets continues. So, we humans here on Terra Firma are what? Some transient fallible persons sallying forth – and killing, causing suffering – on behalf of some ancient or modern abstraction such as some religious faith or some nation-State or on behalf of some personal instinct we seemingly cannot control?

Simply expressed: there should no longer be an aspiration for a broader supra-personal meaning.

**NT:** William James’ description of religion seems oddly in keeping with what, in paraphrasing Cicero, you have described as the essence of ancient European paganism.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, your characterization of the ancient sense of *pathei-mathos* as wisdom arising from personal suffering<sup>20</sup> also seems in keeping with the Pyrrhonian sense of *ataraxia* (ἀταραξία) or “freedom from worry,”<sup>21</sup> which is reached by raising “oneself above a condition of misery and despair” through self-mastery and fortitude.<sup>22</sup> With respect to the ancient question, “How can we keep from suffering?”<sup>23</sup> your life and writings seem to fluctuate between resilience and renunciation. In this, there seems to be an almost Stoic undertone with respect to how the ideas that have shaped your worldview do not resemble “an interesting pastime or

even a particular body of knowledge, but ... a way of life."<sup>24</sup> You have mentioned the influence of Marcus Aurelius on your thinking, which may explain that undertone.<sup>25</sup> Looking back, how do you view the Stoic notion of *elevating* sorrow rather than abolishing it<sup>26</sup> in order to overcome and then meaningfully reshape it in our lives? Does this resilience in the face of tragic renunciation have any bearing on the overarching theme of honor throughout your life?

**DM:** As ever these days, I am wary of a general term – in this case Stoicism – being applied to describe what a person or some persons wrote be such writings ancient or otherwise. In this matter before answering a specific question I would have to read critical editions of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and the necessary others, and then undertake my own translations and commentaries with particular attention to what words such as *tempus* and πένθος and εὐδαιμονία in their work may have meant and implied to those writers and their contemporaries and not what is meant or assumed now by such terms as ‘time’ and ‘grief’ and ‘good fortune’/‘happiness’. Such a task would occupy me for perhaps a year if not more. One of many comparisons of interest might be between Seneca's *De Consolatio ad Marciam* and how *Antigone* is portrayed by Sophocles and *Klytemnestra* by Aeschylus.

But from previous readings of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and some of the necessary others I would in regard to honour answer in the negative given how I now understand honour as an individual feeling related to the numinous which cannot be abstracted out from a personal moment in the form of some written or aural code, ethical or otherwise, or become a basis for or a part of some -ism or some -ology.

**NT:** On the subject of religion and the previous question on Stoicism, I am reminded of the Romanian nihilist Emil Cioran's vitriolic but insightful words from his little-known article, “A Bouquet of Heads.” Remarking on Christianity and Stoicism in the ancient world, he says the following:

The Greco-Roman twilight deserved a better enemy, a better promise, a better religion. How can you believe even in the shadow of progress when you remember that those Christian fables, with no trouble at all, smothered Stoicism! If Stoicism had been able to grow and spread, to seize hold of the world, man would have *come through*, or almost. Resignation, made obligatory, would have taught us to endure our suffering with dignity, to silence our voices, to face our Nothingness coldly.... To accuse no one, to stoop neither to sadness, nor joy, nor regret, to reduce our connection with the world to a harmonious play of defeat, to live condemned and serene, never imploring the deity but rather putting him on notice.... That was not possible. Stoicism, overrun from all sides and faithful to its principles, had the elegance to die without a struggle. A religion founds itself on the ruins of wisdom, but the tactics used by religion are scarcely appropriate to wisdom.<sup>27</sup>

Many would agree that you have endured suffering with dignity over the course of your life. But rather than founding your legacy on the ruins of wisdom, you appear to have forged an existential crucible from which many now draw inspiration. How would you like to see that

inspiration embodied in the lives of those who look up to you? And if those ruins were a monument to the past, what virtues and activities would you like to see take their place?

**DM:** My answer can possibly be deduced from my previous one. Just as my fallible understanding is that honour cannot be abstracted from a personal moment to become some sort of principle or guide, so my similar fallible understanding is that a person who learns by means of *pathei-mathos* cannot be or rather should not become such a guide or even an example and certainly should not assume any sort of guiding role.

**NT:** In a 2017 interview, you noted that both the Numinous Way and the philosophy of *pathei-mathos* now seem to you “a rather wordy and a rather egoistic, vainful, attempt to present what I (rightly or wrongly) believed I had learned about myself and the world as a result of various experiences.”<sup>28</sup> You add that, in your solitude and now concentrating on your translations, you live “each day as it passes ... unconcerned about what my being – and my relation to Being – is now or perhaps should be.”<sup>29</sup> In some respects, your withdrawal into solitude resembles Mother Teresa’s confession of feeling a “deep loneliness,” having previously confessed that her “own soul ... [remained] in deep darkness [and] desolation” as she began to doubt her faith.<sup>30</sup> In this, there may be an element of truth in what Emil Cioran says of solitude: “Solitude is not a gift, it is a mission: to rise to it, to take it upon oneself, is to renounce that portion of baseness needed to guarantee the success of any enterprise whatever, religious or otherwise.”<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, C. S. Lewis’ point that “[e]very mode of being in the whole universe contributes to ... [man]; he is a cross-section of being”<sup>32</sup> carries some weight. These two tensions additionally seem to resolve in the words of Gregory the Great (540-604), who said that “because man has existence (*esse*) in common with stones, life with trees, and understanding (*discernere*) with angels, he is rightly called by the name of the world.”<sup>33</sup>

The sentiments expressed by all of these figures point to an important concern: In your solitude and your lack of concern with what your being and your relation to Being is now or should be, one senses the danger of also losing concern for your relation to other beings, and specifically to other human beings. In the shadow of commonality you share with those who take inspiration from your work, what do you hope to wager in the eclipse between how they see your life and how they speak your name – perhaps not as the name of *the* world, but certainly as a name of theirs?

**DM:** The question of possibly “losing concern for your relation to other beings, and specifically to other human beings” has bothered me and does bother me and the only answer I have is again that of honour in the immediacy of the living moment which seems to me the only numinous exception to ‘not interfering in the world’ however good one believes one’s interference to be.

All this means seems to me to amount to doing what is honourable when personally, in the immediacy of the moment, confronted with someone or some many doing what is dishonourable in relation to another person or persons or to another living being. My intuition is that a person of honour either instinctively knows what is dishonourable or has learned so from personal experience.

**NT:** In a letter to his brother Henry James during the completion of his great work on the *Principles of Psychology*, William James said, “I have to forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast to European science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Alfred North Whitehead notes that James was alluding to a “new tinge to modern minds ... [as] a vehement and passionate interest in the relation of general principles to irreducible and stubborn facts.”<sup>35</sup> Whitehead elaborates on this, noting that:

All the world over and at all times there have been practical men, absorbed in “irreducible and stubborn facts”: all the world over and at all times there have been men of philosophic temperament who have been absorbed in the weaving of general principles. It is this union of passionate interest in the detailed facts with equal devotion to abstract generalisation which forms the novelty in our present society. Previously it had appeared sporadically and as if by chance. This balance of mind has now become part of the tradition which infects cultivated thought. It is the salt which keeps life sweet. The main business of universities is to transmit this tradition as a widespread inheritance from generation to generation.<sup>36</sup>

Whitehead’s observance that the wedding of particular facts with abstract generalizations marks a distinct shift from the “disruption of Western Christianity and the rise of modern science” in the sixteenth century<sup>37</sup> to a “new colouring of ways of thought ... [which] had been proceeding slowly for many ages in the European peoples.”<sup>38</sup> The new mentality this gave way to “altered the metaphysical presuppositions and the imaginative contents of our minds; so that now the old stimuli provoke a new response,” which Whitehead notes was “more important even than the new science and the new technology.”<sup>39</sup> Given that this wedding of particular facts with abstraction was in large part responsible for a new way of thinking that shaped the whole of Europe, do you find it problematic that much of your writing has a tendency to be interpreted as pulling this wedding apart or even declaiming a divorce (two examples being the emphasis on individual or particular experience and the negative sense of “causal abstraction”)?

**DM:** A marriage and a pulling apart of or a conflict between what? An idea, an ideal? Another idea? A generalization termed ‘Europe’, a generalization termed Western Christianity; another one named modern science? Another termed our present society? And so on.

My focus in the past ten or so years has been on the personal and interactions between individuals such as personal love based on a loyalty between individuals and the families that two such individuals can bring-into-being biologically or otherwise. Such persons, such interactions, can and do sometimes cause suffering; but is this and has this been on the scale of that caused by ideologies, ideas, ideals, and entities such as codified religions, nations, States, Empires?

Do the achievements of some such nations, States, Empires, of some ideas, ideals, and what has been termed ‘science’ and ‘technology’ balance out what suffering they may have caused?

For in my experience it is or it should be a question of balance; of accepting there are limits; of accepting responsibility; of accepting that the personal and such things as love, empathy, compassion, and honour are the essential aspects of that necessary balance, with

extremism of whatever type or form the result of the harshness of personal imbalance when love, empathy, compassion, and honour are ignored or rejected or never personally known because some -ism or -ology or some manufactured entity or hatred of some perceived enemy have priority in the life of an individual with our human culture of *pathei-mathos* also ignored or rejected or never personally known.

Have we as a species in the past experienced in some way and in some place a part of the necessary balance? Possibly, for a while. Do we have a part of such a balance now in any society in the world? Possibly, although some may disagree. Are we as a species learning from our human culture of *pathei-mathos* with its documentation by means of music, memoirs, poetry, and other arts, of human suffering, human love, tragedy, and loss?

**NT: Two-part question. Question one.** You have noted that certain forms of abstraction tend to be associated with the masculous and can take on a kind of violence toward muliebral virtues like empathy, compassion, and humility.<sup>40</sup> This can occur, for example, in the masculous “favouring of abstractions and the notion of an idealized duty over empathy and compassion and the muliebral virtues in general,”<sup>41</sup> which can lead to forms of extremism. However, this push against abstraction has resulted in a tendency by many of your readers to identify abstraction with an erroneous or even harmful way of thinking. That identification seems dangerously close to a kind of nominalism or rejection of all universals and abstract objects,<sup>42</sup> which itself may germinate a species of extremism.

I suspect part of this tension may have been influenced by Aristotle and his account of *physis* (φύσις) or nature, where, in contrast to Plato’s *Timaeus*, “nature is not an abstract, impersonal, ‘all-pervading demiurgic force’,”<sup>43</sup> but rather an “inner driving force we reference when saying of a natural being: ‘That is *its* nature.’”<sup>44</sup> I am also reminded of the medieval problem of universals,<sup>45</sup> which highlights a debate that spans the work of the Neo-Platonists, pagans such as Plotinus and Porphyry, and medieval Christians such as Augustine and Boethius.<sup>46</sup> With respect to your work, one could argue that the muliebral virtues at the heart of the philosophy of *pathei-mathos* require a grounding in some sense of abstraction, whether in the transition from individual *pathei-mathos* to the broader context of collective and sustainable millennial change, in the universal application of *pathei-mathos* to the human condition, or in the way individual experience is related to other forms of life. Part of the confusion regarding your use of the term “abstraction” may rest on your characterization of the difference between personal knowledge of an individual and reifying that individual according to some ideology or cause.<sup>47</sup> Given that many readers seem to miss the broader context of this distinction, would you mind clarifying what forms of abstraction you view as negative, detrimental, or harmful and what forms you view as productive or even necessary for the cultivation of the muliebral virtues you have described?

**Question two.** In an interview with you from 2014,<sup>48</sup> your work *Understanding and Rejecting Extremism: A Very Strange Peregrination* is cited with respect to what you identify as the inflexible and often excessive masculous character that goes with extremism.<sup>49</sup> In your view, are there non-extremist contexts where the masculous can find positive, non-violent applications? In what cases might a masculous character compliment “the muliebral virtues of empathy, sensitivity, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, compassion, and the desire to love and

be loved” rather than work against them?<sup>50</sup> Conversely, are there cases, however exceptional, where these muliebral virtues could become vices? Though such cases may be few and far between, your description of the difference between personal love and empathy comes to mind, where you noted that “the emotion gendered by personal love can also cause suffering both of the person who loves and in regard to the one loved, especially if there is not a mutual, loyal, equality of love.”<sup>51</sup> Do you think there is a danger in this personal asymmetry carrying over to the collective level, as in the case of certain religious ideologies? And much like the important wedding of the particular with the abstract described by Whitehead in the previous question, how might we wed the masculous and the muliebral without inciting these forms of harm?

**DM:** In relation to masculous and muliebral I understand them as descriptors of personal behaviour and attitudes and how it seems to me that the numinous and thus the honourable tend to be and have tended to be manifest in the world and in our lives. Created abstractions tend toward the supra-personal and tend to cause suffering sooner or later.

An operative expression here is ‘tend to be’. Do empathy, compassion, humility, and honour tend toward us not causing suffering? Do ideologies and codified religions tend to – over durations of causal time – cause suffering, harm, and schisms resulting from exegesis? Does what is often described as the masculous virtue of heroism tend toward suffering by making *a* or *the* hero an ideal to be admired and followed, or should it be more correctly described as a balance of both masculous and muliebral if it is understood in the personal sense as the actions of one honourable person?

For another operative expression in my attempts at explanation is ‘personal behaviour and attitudes’ which being variable and subject to change can perhaps only and sometimes point us toward a certain intuition that might be an uncovering of a possible answer to the question *quid est veritas*. That what is uncovered is only a personal, causally-dependant, experience and a knowing but always dies and yet can return to be rediscovered yet again by others.

Given my hubriatic past and the suffering I have personally caused by championing this or that ideology or this or that religion or this or that abstraction I am all too fallible, all too prone to making mistakes so perhaps I could be wrong regarding this and other matters.

**NT:** In addition to expiation and remorse, much of your work conveys an overtone of regret. In your recent writings, this can be sensed acutely in the opening sections of “A Vagabond in Exile from the Gods,” to cite one example. How have you come to terms with what you now view as mistakes of the past in terms of your legacy to the future and its influence on the world? Additionally, in contrast to the overtones of regret, the desire for forgiveness seems to be a recurrent undertone throughout your writing. Against the sullied public and the lies that your opponents continue to spread about you, will you find the courage to forgive yourself? In reconciling the pain of the past with its shadow of regret, what do you hope to see in the dawning of the future, and what enduring works do you hope to leave for future generations in the brave valence of tomorrow?

**DM:** In regard to regret for having caused suffering to others through both selfishness and adherence to various -isms or -ologies, the personal lamentation derived and derives from

acknowledging my suffering-causing mistakes and from what I hope is an understanding of our human physis and an understanding of the harshness of extremism. As for forgiveness, who or what can forgive those who have caused suffering? In many cultural traditions it was of course the person or persons who were directly harmed or their relatives. In Christian, Islamic and Judaic tradition it is God/Allah.

But the impersonal nature of many suffering-causing extremist deeds and of many criminal justice systems often means there are no living victims or relatives to directly offer forgiveness even should they desire to do so, which would probably be unlikely given the harshness, intractability, the fanatical hatred, of so many extremists.

While there are expiatory means in the Christian, Islamic and Judaic traditions, if one does not or no longer believes in God/Allah then there can be no forgiveness. Thus, for me as mentioned in some of my essays, my weltanschauung of *pathei-mathos*, such answers as these, my many autobiographical effusions, are my attempts at expiation.

NT: Before one can derive wisdom from meaningful suffering it seems that one must first constitute the world meaningfully. Deriving meaning from the world and constituting it in turn both rest on the way we interpret the world and the framework of interpretation we have at our disposal. I think many individuals today are unaware of the disparity between the framework of interpretation we had at our disposal in ages past and the framework of interpretation that distinctly characterizes modernity. In some respects, the Hellenic vitality of your philosophy risks becoming lost in the "transliteration" from the individual to modernity when interpreted without this frame of reference. In an attempt to sustain that vitality, I think the following summary by Thomas Howard regarding what he calls "The Old Myth and the New" frames this well:

There were some ages in Western history that have occasionally been called Dark. They were dark, it is said, because in them learning declined, and progress paused, and men labored under the pall of *belief*. A cause-effect relationship is frequently felt to exist between the pause and the belief. Men believed in things like the Last Judgment and fiery torment. They believed that demented people had devils in them, and that disease was a plague from heaven. They believed that they had souls, and that what they did in this life had some bearing on the way in which they would finally experience reality. They believed in portents and charms and talismans. And they believed that God was in heaven and Beelzebub in hell and that the Holy Ghost had impregnated the Virgin Mary and that the earth and sky were full of angelic and demonic conflict. Altogether, life was very weighty, and there was no telling what might lie behind things. The ages were, as I say, dark.

Then the light came. It was the light that has lighted us men into a new age. Charms, angels, devils, plagues, and parthenogenesis have fled from the glare into the crannies of memory. In their place have come coal mining and  $E = mc^2$  and plastic and group dynamics and napalm and urban renewal and rapid transit. Men were freed from the fear of the Last Judgment; it was felt to be more bracing to face Nothing than to face the Tribunal. They were freed from worry about getting their souls into God's heaven by

the discovery that they had no souls and that God had no heaven. They were freed from the terror of devils and plagues by the knowledge that the thing that was making them scream and foam was not an imp but only their own inability to cope, and that the thing that was clawing out their entrails was not divine wrath but only cancer. Altogether, life became much more livable since it was clear that in fact nothing lay behind things. The age was called enlightened.

The myth sovereign in the old age was that everything means everything. The myth sovereign in the new is that nothing *means* anything.<sup>52</sup>

With respect to Howard's description of "the myth sovereign in the old age" and "the myth sovereign in the new," where do you situate your own "paganus weltanschauung" and how do you reconcile it against the modern view that "nothing *means* anything"?

**DM:** I do not situate my weltanschauung anywhere in terms defined or believed or discussed by others, ancient or modern, because it is just my weltanschauung, born from various experiences and the loss of loved ones, and nurtured by working and living on a farm in England, by solitary walks along a sea-shore and in the hills and deciduous woods of English Shires.

**NT:** In another article, I have cited Pope Benedict XVI's comments regarding the topic of violent religious conversion. Recalling a dialogue between "the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam,"<sup>53</sup> the Pope recounts how:

The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. "God," he says, "is not pleased by blood – and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death..."<sup>54</sup>

Having long-since rejected Muslim extremism and having had a first-hand account of it for ten years as a radical Muslim, I think the Pope's framing of the aforesaid dialogue finds an acute expression in your current views on the issue. In "Understanding and Countering Muslim Extremism," you describe two aims that typically motivate Muslim extremism – a supra-personal one and a personal one – which you note are "inextricably entwined."<sup>55</sup> You additionally note that "one effective way to counter Muslim extremism is for Muslims themselves to, using Quran and Sunnah, counter the harsh interpretation of Islam by the extremists," thereby pointing to "the humanity that is at the heart of Islam; a humanity so evident in the millions of Muslims ... world-wide."<sup>56</sup> Speaking to that humanity – and more specifically to the humility you cite<sup>57</sup> – how do you now view the spreading of faith through

violence with respect to its incompatibility with the nature of God and the nature of the soul described by emperor Manuel II Paleologus? Additionally, if the supra-personal and personal aims that motivate this form of extremism are intertwined, how might we ward against them in their many variations within society and within our own lives?

**DM:** It seems to me that there are difficult and long-standing questions in relation to religions which wholly or in part rely on texts as the Christian, Islamic, Judaic and Buddhist traditions have done. Questions of exegesis and the different interpretations which often result.

Thus, even if as I wrote in the essay you refer to that one way – not the only way – in regard to events such as 9/11 and 7/7 is for Muslims themselves using Quran and Sunnah to counter the harsh interpretation of Islam by others, that may not prevent such harsh interpretations now or in the future given the reliance on texts with their inevitable exegesis.

In another essay I compared the Shia and the Sunna traditions noting that the Shia tradition of Taqlid seemed to me to preclude exegesis by those scholarly unqualified to do so. I suggested that this might explain why the Shia tradition has:

“no such thing as modern independent extremist Shia groups who indiscriminately target and kill the kuffar (‘infidels’) in Western lands or elsewhere, or who fly aeroplanes into buildings or who blow themselves up in order to kill ‘infidels’. For Shia mujtahidun have given rulings in respect of such things.”<sup>58</sup>

This should lead to difficult questions for not only groups such as ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah (commonly known as Islamic State) and their followers who regularly target and kill Shia Muslims but also for Western allies of Saudi Arabia who have for decades imposed sanctions on Iran and who support a conflict in Yemen in which Shia Muslims have been killed in their thousands and Shia children starved to death.

How many in the West even know what these difficult questions are? Not only in relation to Shia Muslims but in relation to exegesis of Christian texts such as The Gospels? To in some minor way draw attention to such questions I began a translation of and writing a commentary on The Gospel According To John and have so far for various personal reasons only managed to make public chapters one to five, available at <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/gospel-of-john-1-5.pdf>

**NT:** In your autobiography, *Myngath*, you mention an interest in chess in your youth. In fact, you mention being one of the only competitors to have drawn against a visiting Grandmaster in a simultaneous display at the Singapore Polytechnic as a young man.<sup>59</sup> As a chess player, I would be remiss not to ask: do you still have the recorded chess notation for that match? Additionally, do you still play chess? And did you find anything applicable or of value with respect to the lessons you learned in your study of the game and your subsequent study of martial arts?

**DM:** In regard to the Chess game in Singapore, I do not any longer have the ‘descriptive’ notation of the game, but the results of the tournament were briefly together with my surname

mentioned in a local newspaper – it may have been The Straits Times – and I hunched over a Chess board fleeting appeared in a local TV newsreel of the event.

I lost interest in Chess when, living in Blighty in 1968, I first met Colin Jordan and became a National-Socialist activist in his newly formed British Movement.

**NT:** In one of your early relationships as a young man, you mention that you and your female companion once spent hours listening to jazz at a small club, noting that “she was a Jazz aficionado and very knowledgeable about that genre.”<sup>60</sup> Do you recall what artists or songs you two enjoyed listening to at the time, and do you enjoy the genre? Additionally, are there other genres, artists, or songs of special significance for you that you would care to mention? You have noted that classical music has played an important role in your life, and I am curious to hear more about your musical influences.

**DM:** Being a young man in love with a lady who was Jazz aficionado I did for a while try to share her interest in and enthusiasm for such music but failed, given my interest in and love of classical music. Which interest began when as a young boy in a private – Whites-only – school in Africa our music teacher played our class a Long Playing record of music by JS Bach performed by Segovia. It was transformative.

**NT:** I doubt I am alone in feeling that your poetry reveals something deeply moving about the way you and your worldview have transformed over the course of your life. I find the poems in *One Exquisite Silence* particularly moving. Would you care to provide any additional background regarding the circumstances that led to the composition of any of these poems? I am especially interested in “Travelling,” which affects me intensely at this stage of my life.

**DM:** The poem *One Exquisite Silence* was composed not long after I met and fell in love with a lady who worked on a commercial (wholesale) plant nursery; while the *Travelling* poem was composed not long after I left Leeds (and my violent National-Socialist activism) in 1974 to wander the English countryside for a while as a vagabond, as was the poem *Summer Days Walking Roads*. The poem titled *Relict* was composed during a visit to a rather neglected cemetery when in 1976 I was travelling around and staying in various monasteries in the United Kingdom with a view to becoming a Catholic monk. The poem titled *Wine* was composed in Spain in the early 1970’s, before I moved to Leeds, during another period when I was wandering around wondering what to do with my life.

**NT:** Martin Heidegger revived one of the most important questions in the Western philosophical tradition: *what is the meaning of Being?* This question set the philosophical tradition in motion all the way back to the ancient Greeks. At one level, the question points to the fact that we generally operate through an unclarified pre-comprehension of what we mean by “exist,” or what we mean by “this is” versus “this is not,” where for the ancient Greeks Being was equated with ongoing or constant presence. At a deeper level, it points to an important interpretive dynamic regarding how we are to understand the type of being we are, the one who asks the question and for whom the question is an issue.

Much like Heidegger’s question, there are many theories regarding how to interpret the meaning of your life. Sadly, all of these have a tendency to reduce the ideas and ideals that

motivated your life’s narrative to deeds that you have long-since denounced and atoned for. Put another way, many are concerned with the details of your life without being equipped to take seriously the ideas that have shaped it. Given that your philosophy is not just a collection of ideas but a mode of living, this presents two problems. The first concerns the philosophy of *pathei-mathos*, where the way one interprets his or her experiences through the lens of that philosophy is called into question when one is not equipped to address or interpret the meaning of the philosophy itself. In that case, there is often an asymmetry between the vital experience needed to understand the philosophy and the framework needed to interpret those experiences, where the two eventually disconnect or fail to connect at all. The second problem concerns the attempt by others to interpret your life without first being equipped to interpret their own. We have seen this time and time again with respect to your opponents, in the media, and even among those who take inspiration from your life and work. I would thus like to conclude with one final question, returning us, as is so often the case, to where we began: *what is the meaning of David Myatt?*

**DM:** I have no answer to the question “What is the Meaning of Myatt?” because all I seem to be is one fallible mortal among so many billions past and present and one who will die soon having already outlived his three score and ten. Someone who has and perhaps vainly tried in some way in the past ten years or so, and in various poems, to record his feelings, his fallible understanding of himself and the world he has passed through and the events and the people he has, or so he believes, learned from.

In those past ten or so years my references are usually only the classical authors; or occasionally a poet such as TS Eliot or a composer such as JS Bach because for those years my world, my influences, have been the outdoor world of Nature, my *pathei-mathos*, the women I have loved and lost, with my only constant companions those classical authors, my memories, and such a poet and such a composer.

David Myatt

27.iv.22

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Myatt, “Some Questions for DWM (March 2014),” *David Myatt – Πάθει Μάθος*, May 2014, <https://www.davidmyatt.info/dwm-questions-may2014.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 141.

<sup>5</sup> <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/2010/05/02/rain-following-weeks-of-warmful-april-sun/>

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> Myatt, “Some Questions (March 2014).”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> David Myatt, "I. Pathei-Mathos as Authority and Way," in *The Numinous Way of Pathei-Mathos*, 5th ed. (CreateSpace, 2018), <https://www.davidmyatt.info/numinous-way-pathei-mathos.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Clifford Geertz, "The Pinch of Destiny: Religion as Experience, Meaning, Identity, Power," chap. 8 in *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 167. See William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902; New York: Routledge, 2002), 386. Citations refer to the Routledge edition.

<sup>13</sup> James, *Varieties*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Myatt, "Some Questions (March 2014)."

<sup>18</sup> David Myatt, "Some Questions for DWM, 2017," *David Myatt: Learning from Adversity; a Rejection of Extremism*, 2017, <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/dwm-questions-2017-v1b.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> See Myatt, "Some Questions, 2017": "an apprehension of the complete unity (a cosmic order, κόσμος, mundus) beyond the apparent parts of that unity, together with the perceivment that we mortals – albeit a mere and fallible part of the unity – have been gifted with our existence so that we may perceive and understand this unity, and, having so perceived, may ourselves seek to be whole, and thus become as balanced (perfectus), as harmonious, as the unity itself."

<sup>20</sup> Myatt, "Authority and Way."

<sup>21</sup> Richard Bett, "Pyrrho," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, updated October 23, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pyrrho/>.

<sup>22</sup> Pascal Massie, "Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End," in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, eds. Sean D. Kirkland and Eric Sanday (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 246.

<sup>23</sup> Emil Cioran, "A Bouquet of Heads," *The Hudson Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1962-1963): 492.

<sup>24</sup> Dirk Baltzly, "Stoicism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, updated April 10, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/>.

<sup>25</sup> Myatt, "Some Questions, 2017."

<sup>26</sup> Massie, "Ataraxia," 251.

<sup>27</sup> Cioran, "Bouquet," 495-96.

<sup>28</sup> Myatt, "Some Questions, 2017."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Mother Teresa, "My Own Soul Remains in Deep Darkness," in *Mother Teresa, Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Cioran, "Bouquet," 496.

<sup>32</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 153.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 153.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Pelican Mentor Books, 1948), 2-3.

<sup>35</sup> Whitehead, *Modern World*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Myatt, "Some Questions (March 2014)."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Nominalism in Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, updated April 1, 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nominalism-metaphysics/>.

<sup>43</sup> Marjolein Oele, "Aristotle on Physis: Analyzing the Inner Ambiguities and Transgression of Nature," in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, eds. Sean D. Kirkland and Eric Sanday (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 162.

<sup>44</sup> Oele, “Aristotle on Physis,” 162.

<sup>45</sup> Gyula Klima, “The Medieval Problem of Universals,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, updated February 27, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/universals-medieval/>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, David Myatt, “Understanding and Countering Muslim Extremism,” *David Myatt – Πάθει Μάθος*, 2015, <https://www.davidmyatt.info/muslim-extremism.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Myatt, “Some Questions (March 2014).”

<sup>49</sup> See David Myatt, “The Masculous Extremist,” in *Understanding and Rejecting Extremism: A Very Strange Peregrination* (CreateSpace, 2013), <https://www.davidmyatt.info/muslim-extremism.html>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Myatt, “Some Questions, 2017.”

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Howard, “The Old Myth and the New,” chap. 1 in *Chance or the Dance? A Critique of Modern Secularism* (1969; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections” (speech, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany, September 12, 2006). The speech can be accessed here: [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Myatt, “Countering Muslim Extremism.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/dwm-questions-2015.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> David Myatt, “Far East,” in *Myngath: Some Recollections of a Wyrdful and Extremist Life* (CreateSpace, 2013), <https://www.davidmyatt.info/david-myatt-myngath.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Myatt, “Toward First Love,” in *Myngath*.



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