**Earth Bible**

The Earth Bible is an international project, initiated in Adelaide, Australia, which attempts to read texts and traditions from the perspective of Earth, by employing a set of eco-justice principles. This five-volume series was published in England by Sheffield Academic Press and in the United States by Pilgrim Press. The central aims of the Earth Bible are to:

1. Develop ecojustice principles appropriate for an eco-justice hermeneutics (modes for interpretation) for understanding the Bible and for promoting justice and healing for Earth.
2. Publish these interpretations as contributions to current debates on ecology, eco-ethics and ecotheology.
3. Provide a responsible forum within which the suppressed voice of Earth and the Earth community can be heard.

Following the hermeneutics of the project, interpreters read the biblical text with the suspicion that it is probably anthropocentric rather than Earth-friendly, but they also allow the possibility of retrieving traditions in the text.

**Eco-justice Hermeneutics**

This approach assumes that the posture of the reader influences what is found in the interpretation process. In an eco-justice hermeneutic, the reader acknowledges that he/she is part of Earth and seeks to read from the perspective of Earth. This hermeneutics is the approach employed in the Earth Bible project (see under Earth Bible). As a guide to this reading process, a set of eco-justice principles have been developed in dialogue with ecologists. These principles are not overtly religious and do not refer to God explicitly, but provide a basis for dialogue with a range of disciplines and religions on the way humanity has interpreted Earth.

These principles are:

- **The principle of intrinsic worth**: The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.
- **The principle of interconnectedness**: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
- **The principle of voice**: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
- **The principle of purpose**: The universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
- **The principle of mutual custodianship**: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community.
- **The principle of resistance**: Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but also actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

When reading the text, the interpreter asks critical questions rising from these principles to ascertain whether there is justice for Earth in the orientation, ideology or focus of the text. Typical questions are: Is Earth viewed merely as a human resource or as a subject with intrinsic worth? Is Earth treated as a subject with a “voice” or as an object to be exploited?

Some of the biblical psalms, for example, acknowledge the voices of Earth and call on Earth and its creatures to celebrate (e.g., Ps. 148). Other Psalms (e.g., Ps. 8) reflect a hierarchical view of the cosmos in which humans are on a level close to God and “all things” are located “under their feet.” Employing a hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval, the reader may assume that both the text and the interpreting traditions are likely to be anthropocentric, giving priority of voice and value to humans. In such contexts, Earth is at the mercy of human exploitation both by the original writers and modern interpreters.

Another feature of eco-justice hermeneutics is a consciousness that in the Western tradition patterns of dualistic thought have tended to devalue much of the natural world. Within dualistic oppositions between heaven and Earth, humanity and nature, spirit and matter, the material and natural world has been considered inferior. The task in this approach is to ascertain whether this dualism is maintained in the text and expose how the tradition has assumed this dualism to devalue Earth and the Earth community. Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to retrieve the voice and value of Earth in the context of the environmental crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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See also: Eco-justice in Theology and Ethics.
Heavenism

Heavenism is a form of spirituality that tends to value all things associated with heaven to the detriment of Earth. This spiritual orientation is reflected in hymns such as Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. Compared with heaven, Earth is viewed as a vale of tears, a barren land, a place of exile, a domain ruled by the forces of darkness. Heaven is the abode of God, a place of purity, happiness and spiritual joy. Those who espouse this spiritual view of reality tend to be more concerned about getting to heaven than caring for Earth. Heaven is eternal and sacred; Earth is disposable and mere matter. It is not really important what happens to Earth because it is only a temporary abode for humans; heaven is home. Christian texts like Hebrews 11, which speak of a heavenly country (11:16), are used to interpret the rest of the scriptures and render care for a polluted Earth a waste of time. The Earth Bible project (see under Earth Bible) exposes the anthropo-centric and anti-Earth orientation of such texts. The project also identifies alternative traditions that highlight the sacredness and intrinsic value of Earth. A clear example is Isaiah 6:3 where the heavenly host declare, “the whole Earth is full of God’s glory.” Here God’s glory – firecloud of God’s presence – not only fills the temple but the whole planet. Heavenism is reflected in slogans such as “Forget the planet, save yourself,” and sees the environmental movement as a negative force that directs the believer away from his/her true goal: getting to heaven.

Norman Habel

which affirm the intrinsic worth of Earth or reflect the voice of the Earth community.

The studies in the project demonstrate that many parts of the Bible devalue Earth and the Earth community. When God sends punishment on a particular people, whether Israel, Egypt or another nation, the land, nature and living creatures often suffer unfairly. In Ezekiel, for example, the land is made desolate to somehow vindicate the name of God (Ezek. 6:14; 12:20 passim), not because the land has done anything to deserve such a fate. In Jeremiah, however, there are indications that the prophet hears the land mourning under the weight of these judgments (e.g., Jer. 12:4; 11).

Especially significant is the “mandate to dominate” found in Genesis 1:26–28, where humans are given the command to “rule over all livings things” and “to subdue Earth.” In the Earth Bible, the verbs “rule” and “subdue” (Gen. 1:28) are not softened but allowed to have their full weight. To “subdue” (likh’bosh) refers to forceful subjugation (as in Jer. 34:11; 2 Sam. 8:11; Josh. 18:1). To “rule” (lir’dot) refers to forceful control and conquest (as in Ps. 72:8–11). Because passages like this mandate have played a role in the conquest of nature in some countries, the Earth Bible project seeks to highlight the negative force of such texts in the current ecological crisis and balance them with alternative traditions such as Genesis 2:15. In this text, the first human is placed in the garden to “till/ serve” (la’avod) and to “keep” (lish’mor) it, not to “rule” and “subdue” it.

Between the years 2000 and 2002, five volumes of the Earth Bible were published. The five volumes are 1. Readings from the Perspective of Earth, 2. The Earth Story in Genesis, 3. The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions, 4. The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets, 5. The Earth Story in the New Testament. Norman Habel of Adelaide, Australia, is the chief editor of the Earth Bible, who is also preparing popular works based on these academic volumes. One of these is a volume of Earth liturgies entitled Seven Songs of Creation, also published by Pilgrim Press.

See also: Animals in African Legend and Ethiopian Scriptures; Anarcho-Primitivism and the Bible; Biblical Foundations for Christian Stewardship; Christianity(3) – New Testament; Creation Story in the Hebrew Bible; Creation’s Fate in the New Testament; Ecofeminism and Biblical Interpretation; Hebrew Bible; Jewish Intertestamental Literature.

Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. It endeavors to identify the critical challenges and choices facing humanity and to provide a moral framework for the development of the emerging global civilization. It is designed to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is at once an urgent call for major social and economic change and an expression of hope. The principles in the Earth Charter were developed in and through a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural, interfaith dialogue on common goals and shared values.

First proposed in Our Common Future (1987), the report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, the drafting of the Earth Charter was part of the unfinished business of the 1992 UN Rio Earth Summit. In 1994 Maurice Strong, the secretary general of the Earth Summit and chairman of the Earth Council, and Mikhail Gorbachev, the president of Green Cross International, launched a new Earth Charter initiative with
support from the Dutch government. An Earth Charter Secretariat was established at the Earth Council in Costa Rica, and in 1997 an Earth Charter Commission of eminent persons with representation from all regions of the world was formed to oversee the project.

The Commission proceeded to draft the Earth Charter as a people’s treaty, because there was little interest among governments in negotiating new and stronger commitments regarding the environment and sustainable development. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East participated in creating the Earth Charter. Forty-five Earth Charter national committees were formed. Earth Charter dialogues were held in all regions of the world and on the internet. The project involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in connection with the drafting of an international document.

The ideas and values in the Earth Charter reflect the influence of a rich diversity of intellectual sources and social movements. These include over fifty international law declarations and treaties, the new scientific worldview being shaped by discoveries in physics, cosmology, and ecology, the wisdom of the world’s religions and philosophical traditions, and over 200 non-governmental declarations and people’s treaties. The document reflects the concerns and aspirations expressed at the seven UN summit conferences held during the 1990s on human rights, population, children, women, social development, and the city as well as the environment. It also recognizes the importance of the spread of democracy for human development and environmental protection.

The Earth Charter is an especially significant product of the global ethics movement, which gained wide support in the 1990s. In an increasingly interdependent world, cooperative problem solving is a necessity, and effective collaboration among diverse cultures and peoples requires shared values. It has been the objective of the Earth Charter initiative not to impose the values of one group, culture, or tradition on all others, but rather to seek common ground while respecting and supporting cultural diversity. This meant, for example, that the Earth Charter could not employ theological language or the concept of animal rights, but the document does acknowledge the important role of religion in achieving sustainability and affirms that animals warrant moral consideration. The Earth Charter principles reflect a consensus on basic values that is taking form in the rapidly developing global civil society.

The vision of widely shared values in the Earth Charter does focus special attention on the environment. However, the document contains an inclusive and integrated ethical vision reflecting the realization that humanity’s environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and spiritual challenges are interrelated. It recognizes, for example, the

interconnections between the protection of ecosystems, the eradication of poverty, human rights, gender equality, economic justice, democracy, and a culture of peace. The result is a new holistic understanding of what constitutes a sustainable way of living and sustainable development.

At the heart of the Earth Charter is an ethic of respect and care for all life forms and the greater community of life, of which humanity is a part. The Earth Charter founds the principle of respect for all life on the recognition that all beings are interdependent and all life forms have value regardless of their worth to people. The sense of ethical responsibility begins with an attitude of respect for others and finds expression in active caring, which involves the prevention of harm and the promotion of well-being. A fundamental purpose of the Earth Charter is to encourage all peoples to identify with the whole Earth community as well as their local communities and to expand their moral concern and caring to include the present and future well-being of the entire human family and the larger living world.

The ethics of the Earth Charter are grounded in a vision of widely shared spiritual values. For example, the document affirms, “when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.” It asserts, “the spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.” The Earth Charter culminates with a vision of peace and the joyful celebration of life.

A final version of the Earth Charter was approved by the Earth Charter Commission in March 2000. A new phase in the Earth Charter initiative began with the official launching of the Earth Charter at the Peace Palace in The Hague the following June. Efforts are now underway to disseminate the Charter around the world, to promote its educational use in schools, universities, and faith communities, and to encourage its endorsement and implementation by civil society, business, government, and the United Nations General Assembly. Thousands of local, national, and international organizations, including hundreds of local governments, have endorsed the document and are using it as an educational tool and guide to a sustainable way of living.

Steven C. Rockefeller

Further Reading


Rockefeller, Steven C. “Global Interdependence, the Earth Charter, and Christian Faith.” In Dieter T. Hessel and
Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front

Radical Environmentalism comprises a cluster of environmental movements and ideologies that share an overall worldview that includes a perception of the sacredness of nature. The religious and ideological beliefs of these movements, and the criticisms to which they are typically subjected, are described in detail in Radical Environmentalism. Their basic orientation can be, however, briefly characterized: Radical environmental movements trace environmental degradation to anthropocentric and hierarchical Western philosophies and religions. They prescribe in response lifestyle simplification, political resistance to the destructive forces, and a spiritual “reconnection” with nature. These responses, they believe, depend on a “resacralization” of human attitudes and perceptions of the natural world.

By the early twenty-first century Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) had become the best known of the radical environmental groups in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, and they had established beachheads in scores of countries on every continent but Antarctica.

Earth First!

Earth First!, with its slogan “no compromise in defense of mother Earth,” was founded in 1980. It rapidly became known for its dramatic civil disobedience campaigns and the occasional use of sabotage in its efforts to thwart commercial incursions into biologically sensitive lands. In its first two decades it focused especially upon North America’s remaining old-growth forests, evocatively labeled “ancient” or “cathedral” forests to reinforce their special importance.

Dave Foreman, who left the Wilderness Society after he became disenchanted with the efforts of such mainstream environmental groups to arrest environmental decline, was the most charismatic leader among Earth First!’s co-founders (variously numbered at 4 or 5, depending on differing movement origin myths). His strategic purpose in founding the group was, firstly, to introduce and promote sabotage as well as civil disobedience as a means of environmental struggle, whenever possible increasing the costs and removing the profit from environmentally destructive practices – in other words, waging economic warfare against those destroying nature; secondly, to shame mainstream environmentalists into taking stronger stands by harshly criticizing them and exposing their compromising positions; thirdly, and ironically given the second tactic, he expected that by taking on the mantle of “environmental extremism,” a label often applied to mainstream groups by their adversaries, mainstream groups might appear more reasonable by comparison, thereby increasing their influence and effectiveness.

As importantly, Foreman wanted to attack anthropocentric attitudes, for he viewed the root of the problem as religious in essence. Drawing on historians such as Lynn White, Perry Miller and Roderick Nash, Foreman argued, Our problem is a spiritual crisis. The Puritans brought with them a theology that saw the wilderness of North America as a haunt of Satan, with savages as his disciples and wild animals as his demons – all of which had to be cleared, defeated, tamed, or killed (Harpers Forum 1990: 44).

So like most radical greens, Foreman blamed the advent of agriculture (following Paul Shepard and Jim Mason), and Christianity as well, for environmental decline. During Earth First!’s early years it was not difficult to find evidence of an anti-Christianity view, particularly since James Watt was the Secretary of the Interior. In 1976, before his appointment by President Ronald Reagan, Watt had founded the Mountain States Legal Foundation, which bills itself as a defender of individual liberty, property rights, and free enterprise. It is regarded by environmentalists as an anti-environmental group, one of the first and most important members of the so-called wise use movement. Watt was also an evangelical Christian who minimized environmental problems and was widely if inaccurately perceived (largely due to selectively quoted congressional testimony) to believe the imminent second coming of Christ obviated the need for environmental concern. Reagan, who had appointed him, told confidants that he also expected the imminent return of Christ.

Like most radical greens, Foreman saw promise in pagan religions for a biocentric ethics. Indeed, the most common perception animating the movement can be labeled “pagan,” if this is defined as spirituality involving one or more of two perceptions: (1) the Earth itself is alive and sacred, a perception that for many could properly be labeled pantheism (a word derived by conflating the Greek word pan meaning “all” and theos meaning “god,” signifying that “all is god”); and (2) that the world is filled with nonhuman intelligences – often thought to be capable of
communicating and communing with humans – who are worthy of reverence. Such perceptions, sometimes labeled “animism” (from the Latin for “soul”), involve a belief that various entities in nature have souls or spirits.

Early in the publication of the *Earth First!* journal, Foreman signaled his spiritual inclinations by publishing according to what has become known in contemporary Paganism as the *Pagan Calendar*. He was significantly influenced by Paul Shepard, Gary Snyder, and Starhawk, each of whom promoted earthen spiritualities. Even more influential upon Foreman was the subtle nature spirituality of the ecologist Aldo Leopold and the novelist Edward Abbey. After learning about Arne Naess and Deep Ecology shortly after founding Earth First!, Foreman and his comrades also immediately seized on and adopted deep ecology as Earth First!’s natural philosophy.

But it was Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire* (1968) that captured especially well the deep affective connections that Foreman had for nature, as it had for many other desert dwellers. In this book Abbey described mystical experiences in the desert that taught him humility and a proper spiritual perception, which for him meant biocentrism and a reverence for the land. Abbey’s novel *The Monkeywrench Gang* (1975) portrayed ecological saboteurs fighting back against an industrial civilization portrayed as totalitarian and relentlessly destructive. The book was not entirely fiction, because it was based on an ecological resistance movement that had begun in the 1950s and had been hinted at in *Desert Solitaire*. Indeed, Abbey’s friend Jack Loeffler would later indicate that Abbey and many of his friends had been experimenting with *The Anarchist Cookbook* during the campaign to save Black Mesa from Peabody Coal, and that some of these experiences, and related fantasies, were incorporated into the novel (author’s interview, July 1997). Moreover, through its characters, *The Monkeywrench Gang* effectively captured the various types of nature religion that animated those early green rebels, such as Doc Sarvis’s enthusiastic hope that “Pan shall rise again!” (1975: 44), and George Washington Hayduke’s occasional pondering of “the oceanic unity of things” and his rationale for desert monkeywrenching as a perception that the desert was “holy country” (1975: 227, 128).

Like Abbey and most of his rebel characters, and critics including Louis Mumford and Gary Snyder, Foreman’s social philosophy was anarchistic, although his was a kind of libertarian individualism common in the western United States, not the kind that envisioned the overthrow of the United States government. Yet the early *Earth First!* journal included language in its masthead about not accepting the authority of the state. Its pages expressed enthusiasm for anarchism, on the one hand, and pagan-ism, indigenous religions, and sometimes religions originating in Asia, especially Daoism and Buddhism, on the other. These expressed affinities contributed to the kind of subcultures that were drawn to the movement, which included communitarian anarchists and anarcho-primitivists, who really *did* wish to overthrow the state, as well as Pagans and some Wiccans, many from California and the Pacific Northwest, who brought a more overt and ritualized form of nature religion to the movement.

In general, the newcomers were more avowedly anticapitalist and likely to completely reject the legitimacy of nation-states than were Foreman and some of the environmentalists who had helped form Earth First!. In short, they did not believe the capitalist world system could be reformed. Meanwhile pacifists, anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons activists, many who had been inspired by the religious ethics of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, were also drawn to the movement because of its willingness to engage in civil disobedience in defense of life.

The diverse streams that flowed into the movement quickly led to tensions. A few activists including Howie Wolke, an Earth First! co-founder and one of Foreman’s closest friends, argued strongly but unsuccessfully that the pagan tone of the journal was counterproductive and should be halted. In 1982 an Earth First! editor objected to publishing articles describing tactics such as tree and road spiking (using metal or other sharp spikes in an effort to prevent tree felling by making it unprofitable, or to damage the tires of adversaries, sometimes in order to avert apprehension and incarceration). Despite his cogent argument that such tactics could lead to injuries, he was forced out by Foreman and his supporters, who considered the environmental crisis to be so grave that such risks were acceptable and necessary. Indeed, Foreman and many of his supporters, who sometimes musingly called themselves “rednecks for wildness,” asserted that if attacked during campaigns, they would not hesitate to use violence in self-defense, even lethal violence if necessary. Foreman wrote that while he admired the nonviolent approaches “advocated by Gandhi and Martin Luther King” he could not go along with them because, “unfortunately, I am still an animal . . . I cannot turn the other cheek” (1982: 4).

Two prominent Buddhists, Robert Aitken and Gary Snyder, criticized the martial and violent-sounding rhetoric of those initial years, but Foreman responded strongly in a way that many other Earth First!ers would later parrot:

> Any creature, no matter how seemingly meek, will fight back when threatened . . . Eastern [religious] ideas of stepping out of the violent cycle are presumptuous and anthropocentric (by setting human beings apart from the semi-violent natural world) . . . I am entirely pragmatic about violence/non-violence. We should use whichever we feel comfortable with and whichever is most appropriate to a particular situation . . . There are many paths one
can take to defend our Earth Mother. Including that of the warrior (Foreman 1982: 2).

By 1983 a “Cathedral Forest Action Group” had formed to defend Oregon’s forests and distance themselves from such martial tones, a group that generally thought that the revolution of consciousness that was needed would have to come from a loving rather than an angry and violent disposition. But another response was emerging at the same time, that of impatient Earth Firsters who thought that the time had come to escalate tactics. Some began to advocate arson, and such incidents began in the 1980s.

Others sought to develop a revolutionary strategy to overturn the nation-state, or at least, to be ready to take advantage of the inevitable devolution of industrial civilization, which they considered to be unsustainable. In 1988, for example, an anarchist faction began publishing *Live Wild or Die* to promote what they considered to be an even more radical approach. During the same period of the mid- to late 1980s, a former labor organizer turned environmentalist, Judi Bari, rose to some prominence, advocating “revolutionary ecology” in an effort to blend biocentrism and socialism in a pro-worker green ideology.

Bari became famous when a bomb exploded in her automobile in May 1990, permanently disabling her and causing lesser injuries to fellow Earth First! campaigner Darryl Cherney. Both were soon arrested, charged with knowingly possessing the bomb and labeled “eco-terrorists” by law-enforcement authorities. They were soon released for lack of evidence in a case that was never solved.

Both Bari and Cherney had been campaigning to protect California’s redwood forests and had strong, pagan spiritual sensibilities; Cherney even had become involved with the innovative, pagan CHURCH OF ALL WORLDS, itself inspired by Robert Heinlein’s science fiction novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). Bari and Cherney sued the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Police Department in Oakland, where the bombing occurred, asserting these authorities had violated their rights when they publicly accused them of knowingly transporting the bomb and of planning to use it in an act of eco-terrorism. Bari and Cherney won their lawsuit in 2002 and were awarded 4.4 million dollars in damages, five years after Bari’s death from cancer in 1997. She specified that her obituaries list her occupation as a “revolutionary” and urged her friends to remember what Wobbly martyr Joe Hill said just before he was executed in 1915: “Don’t mourn. Organize!”

A year before the bombing, in 1989, Foreman and four others were arrested and charged with a number of sabotage incidents after a multi-million dollar FBI operation. The attention of the authorities had been drawn to Earth First! as a result of their rhetoric and a growing amount of “ecotage” (a term meaning sabotage in defense of the environment), occurring in the Western United States. FBI agents infiltrated Earth First!, identified an active group of saboteurs, and encouraged it to use explosives, which its members refused to do. The cell decided to use torches to topple power-line towers carrying electricity from a nuclear power plant. The plan was hatched as a protest against nuclear power, which radical environmentalists oppose for the radioactive pollutants it produces, as well as for its role in nuclear weapons production and as an example of an irresponsible human appetite for energy. Authorities successfully portrayed the action as nuclear terrorism, even though stopping electricity transmission from a power plant poses no danger to its stability or safety.

After the arrests, of course, Foreman and his supporters were feeling especially vulnerable. The west coast leftists (including Judi Bari) and anarchists of Earth First! continued to press for a more radical movement. Between 1989 and 1990, a schism occurred, with Foreman and many of the earliest Earth Firsters disassociating themselves from the movement that they had launched.

One of the many reasons for the schism was that many Earth Firsters, including at least two who had been arrested and charged with Foreman, felt that he had disassociated himself from the movement for selfish motives, as part of a strategy to prevent a long prison sentence. Foreman, in an unusual plea agreement, pled guilty to a felony conspiracy charge in the power line incident, and the charge was reduced to a misdemeanor after a period of good behavior was certified by the court. He thus escaped serving time in prison. Two other activists with relatively minor roles received little jail time, but Peg Millett and Mark Davis, who had been directly involved in trying to topple the power line towers, served several years each in federal prison.

Both Millett and Davis were motivated by a deep earthen spirituality. Millett often sang songs expressing reverence for the Earth at Earth First! gatherings, and did so also during her sentencing hearing, to convey why she had taken such an action. Davis explained his vandalism of ski lifts in Arizona as an effort to thwart the expansion of a ski resort in Arizona’s San Francisco Mountains, because he agreed with the Hopi and Navajo tribes who believe “those mountains are sacred.” He concluded with regret that “what has occurred there, despite our feeble efforts, is a terrible spiritual mistake” (Letter to the author, summer 1992).

After the disposition of the case and writing from prison to the *Earth First!* journal, Davis asserted that his own, more honorable silence, had enabled Foreman and his attorneys to craft his creative plea agreement. Davis claimed that Foreman had knowingly given him $480 for the anti-nuclear action and that he “was fully aware of the anti-nuke plans. I know this because I told him myself . . . I could easily have cut a deal to [put him in prison] and save myself” (Davis 1993: 14).
The arrests, bombing, and the aftermath of both, intensified the tensions inherent in the diverse streams of American radicalism that had been drawn to Earth First!. By the late 1990s the contradictions that produced the schism that had begun the decade had led to the departure of the majority of Earth Firsters who did not consider themselves anarchists (or considered themselves more libertarian than communitarian/socialistic), along with some of the anarchists who considered their primary passion and moral commitment to be the protection of wilderness and biodiversity. Such activists did not leave environmental work, but created or joined other groups to continue it. Dave Foreman, for example, founded the Wildlands Project in 1992 and started a new magazine, *Wild Earth*. Both endeavors reflected a more mainstream political strategy and drew on conservation biology, as Foreman continued his association with many of the leading figures in this field. The strategy was to draw together scientists, grassroots biodiversity activists, private landholders, and environmental groups such as the Nature Conservancy to secure critical habitat while simultaneously lobbying North American governments to support research and policies congruent with managing ecosystems for long-term biodiversity preservation.

Another outcome from all the discord was that beginning in the late 1980s and through the mid-1990s, many of the movement’s most talented musicians and ritual innovators drifted away, including Dana Lyons, whose songs, including *Tree Music* (which has also been turned into a children’s book), would later find an audience within the wider environmental movement. With such figures went much of the wilderness ritualizing that had evolved within the movement, especially from the early 1980s to the middle of the 1990s. This ritualizing had included song and poetry fests, Wicca-influenced dances, and other processes designed to deepen connections with nonhuman nature, such as the Council of All Beings. At the annual “Round River Rendezvous” (named after a story by Aldo Leopold), sometimes elaborate pageants had been performed that expressed the typical radical environmental cosmogony of a fall from a foraging paradise, a sense of an apocalyptic present, and the hope for a world with all life forms that would again live in a sacred balance.

Most long-term participants recognized that the Earth First! of the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, which had involved a great deal of religious innovation, had been replaced by the end of the century with a much more urban and anarchistic ethos. The movement was increasingly fueled by disaffected youth from large cities more than by career environmental activists whose primary passion was the wilderness. Many long-term activists came to consider moribund the movement they had known earlier. Many of these felt nostalgic for what had been and regretted their own uncharitable behavior that led to its devolution. The upshot of this history is that by the early twenty-first century, it seemed less likely than it did a decade earlier that Earth First! would establish itself as a nature religion with its own evolving ritual life that would continue to inspire environmental action.

This does not mean that radical environmental activism had disappeared or lost social power. Its worldview continued to spread, and in the early 1990s, a new faction emerged, interjecting new energy, if not into the movement’s religious dimensions, into its strategic arsenal. This came with the invention of the Earth Liberation Front.

**The Earth Liberation Front**

Earth First! was established in the United Kingdom after a 1990 “roadshow” tour by activists from the United States. It grew and flourished there in the 1990s in the midst of sometimes furious direct action resistance to road-building projects, many of which enjoyed significant public support. Much of this campaign was conducted under the Earth First! umbrella, which had a number of creative expressions, including overtly pagan groups such as the DONGA TRIBE and DRAGON ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK.

In a way reminiscent of the factionalizing of the Earth First! movement in the United States, however, individuals who considered themselves to be the most radical if not revolutionary of these activists, felt that more aggressive tactics than nonviolent civil disobedience were necessary. According to an account published in the *Earth First! Journal* in the United States, activists frustrated with resistance within Earth First! to more aggressive tactics, formed the “Earth Liberation Front” in 1992 (ELF 1993). A communiqué from “Tara the Sea Elf” (ELF members refer to themselves as “elves”) claimed that by 1993 the elves had created twenty clandestine cells in England, and had used arson and other means to attack corporations in Europe and North America, including a number engaged in producing genetically modified organisms.

In the United States, many of the most radical of Earth First! and green anarchists quickly adopted the ELF acronym, seemingly emboldened by it. The name caught on rapidly, in part because it provided a rubric for the most radical of actions that was good public relations: elves are viewed positively in Western literature as playfully mischievous, not malicious. The moniker caught on also, in part, because the idea of elves in the woods cohered with the pagan spiritualities commonly found in radical environmental movements and among some of these activists.

Given the covert nature of the ELF, which makes interviewing such activists nearly impossible, care must be taken when discussing the religious motivations of its participants. Interviewing spokespeople is problematic, for it is unclear how close they and their views are to the Elves themselves. Two anarchists, Craig Rosebraugh and Leslie James Pickering, who said they had received anonymous
communiqués from ELF activists and were anointed (by themselves and the media) as official ELF spokespeople, claimed not to know any of the Elves personally. Moreover, they did not dwell on spiritual motivations in defending ELF actions. Instead, they seemed primarily interested in promoting their anarchist cause, connecting it closely with an understanding of ELF as an anti-capitalist movement. They “resigned” from their spokesperson’s roles in 2003, they averred, because they did not believe the ELF had a revolutionary strategy, nor did they believe that arson and other sabotage tactics should preclude harming human beings. For these reasons, they said, they were resigning in order to form a truly revolutionary organization. The desire to avoid further unwanted attention by law-enforcement authorities may have provided a more concrete rationale for the resignations.

Despite the difficulties involved in learning directly from ELF cell members, it is possible to surmise, given the ELF’s birth from the Earth First! movement which is often overtly pagan in its spirituality, that at least some of its activists would be similarly motivated. Tara the Sea Elf provides concrete reason to suspect a similar spirituality animating both Earth First! and the ELF. She asserted that the ELF

...perpetuates the legends of the “Little People,” which in most European countries have a history of causing trouble, being mischievously always heard, but never seen. These “mythical creatures” lived close to the earth in most legends (1996: 18).

Here elves function as fairies have for other radical environmental activists – they are appropriated as symbolic Earth warriors – conjuring images that resonate with the pagan spirituality of many such activists. One Earth First!er, for example, writing under the pseudonym “Buck Young,” argued that modern people cannot experience the world as enchanted because they have paved over and thus muted the Earth’s sacred voices. He wrote an innovative account of the emergence of radical environmental activism that hints at why “elves” proved to be an attractive trope:

Gnomes and elves, fauns and faeries, goblins and ogres, trolls and bogies . . . [must infiltrate our world to] effect change from the inside . . . [These nature-spirits are] running around in human bodies . . . working in co-ops . . . talking to themselves in the streets . . . spiking trees and blowing up tractors . . . starting revolutions . . . [and] making up religions (Young 1991: 8–9).

This statement reveals not only a pagan spirituality but also awareness that he and his compatriots are inventing religion. In an interview during an Earth First! Rendezvous (Vermont, August 1991) he explained, for example, that J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy novels, *The Lord of the Rings,* were important to his nature spirituality. In this he is not alone, for these novels were inspirational to a number of radicals. He is also not alone in recognizing that he and others are making up a new green religion, crafting it in innovative ways from historical sources, existing religions, and new sources wherever found, whenever useful.

Tara the Sea Elf would have no objection to spiritualities that help people to perceive the Earth’s sacred voices. She concluded her own primer on the ELF by asserting that radical environmental and indigenous groups like the militant American Indian Movement “reflect the philosophy of many First Nations [indigenous peoples] across the world, that you have to show your enemy how serious you are in defending what you regard as sacred” (1996: 18). Yet she insisted that Elves and their sympathizers emphasize nonviolence, with the proviso that it is improper to consider property damage violent: “As always, ELF calls for no injury to life, only to profit and property” (1996: 18).

By 2004, a little more than a decade after it was founded, the Elves had proven fertile and innovative, growing in number and expanding their targets to include luxury homes and apartments being built in areas considered ecologically sensitive, ski resorts expanding into habitats considered critical to endangered species, and sport utility vehicles, considered the most egregious examples of unbridled materialism and pollution-causing consumption. In the United States alone, damages had grown to well over 100 million dollars, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation had labeled the ELF its number-one domestic terrorism group. Yet neither Earth First! nor the ELF had caused serious injuries or deaths of their adversaries or bystanders, although their many critics understandably asserted that it was only a matter of time before they would do so, even if unintentionally. Meanwhile, other critics claimed it was only a matter of time before some of their members broke off into another faction that would intend, and succeed, in doing so.

**Conclusions**

Care must be taken not to overemphasize the influence of religion when analyzing social movements, for religion is a variable that combines with other factors in complicated ways, and its relative importance is often obscure. Nevertheless, Earth-centered religious perceptions and motivations do appear to be decisive for many if not most in radical environmentalism and Earth First!, and probably in the shadowy realm of the movement’s elvish underground.

If there is a radical environmental milieu in which these subcultures freely trade in religious and political ideologies that are at variance with the mainstreams of the cultures in which they are situated, it would make...
sense to assume that this process of exchange and cross-fertilization will continue. There does seem to be such a milieu, so this process is likely to continue, as will the debates and contested nature over what different people consider authentic expressions of radical environmental sensibility. Only time will tell the future evolution of radical environmentalism in general, and the Earth First! and ELF movements, but in the short term, it looks like the twenty-first century will see more of such earthen spirituality-inspired activism.

Despite the commitment not to cause injuries to adversaries or innocents that is professed by most of the activists who engage in sabotage or arson, they clearly risk causing harm. Some of the most radical among them, at least rhetorically, seem ready to abandon such scruples. Presumably they would if the revolutionary moment appeared to be nigh. This may be the most common criticism, and fear, of Earth First! and the ELF. There are other criticisms of the radical environmental worldview and ideology that are discussed in Radical Environmentalism, as well as typical rejoinders, which need not be repeated here.

What ought not to be lost in the social scientific analysis of these movements is the moral challenge posed by them. Whether one ends up agreeing with or condemning them, or doing a little of both, carefully considering the claims these activists make can spur reasoned moral debate. With their illegal, outrageous, and sometimes dangerous tactics, they urge us to evaluate whether our behaviors are threatening the fecundity and diversity of life on Earth. They demand that we consider whether our putatively democratic political systems provide what they claim to, namely a reasonable chance to promote and protect the values that we as citizens consider inviolable. And they pose the morally and spiritually radical question, whether nature is sacred in some way, and if so, what moral duties to the wider community of life inhere to such a perception, to such a faith.

Bron Taylor

Further Reading


See also: Abbey, Edward; Ananda Marg’s Tantric Neo-Humanism; Anarchism; Biocentric Religion – A Call for; Bioregionalism; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Black Mesa; Conservation Biology; Deep Ecology; Depth Ecology; Diggers and Levellers; Donga Tribe; Dragon Environmental Network; Eco-magic; Ecopsychology; Ecosophy T; Environmental Ethics; Faerie Faith in Scotland; Heidegger, Martin; Indigenous Environmental Network; Left Biocentrism; Magic, Animism, and the Shaman’s Craft; Middle Earth; Music of Resistance; Naess, Arne; Power Animals; Radical Environmentalism (and adjacent, Rodney Coronado and the Animal Liberation Front); Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Seed, John; Sexuality and Ecospirituality; Shepard, Paul; Snyder, Gary; Starhawk; Tree Music; Watson, Paul – and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society; White, Lynn – Thesis of.

**Earth Liberation Front** – See Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Radical Environmentalism.

**Earth Ministry**

Earth Ministry, located in Seattle, Washington is one of the more successful Christian eco-groups to emerge in the 1990s in the United States. Not only does it have several thousand subscribers to its newsletter, *Earth Letter*, but it has also built a successful outreach program in the Seattle area that has involved over a hundred congregations. The organization describes itself as a Christian, ecumenical, eco-justice organization whose work “engages individuals and congregations in knowing God more fully through deepening relationships with all of God’s creation” (Barnett, 2002: Appendices 61).

Founded in 1992 by James and Ruth Mulligan and Reverend Carla Berkadal, Earth Ministry grew out of a successful ecology and spirituality group at the St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle, where Reverend Berkadal was minister. They felt called to start a larger ecological ministry that went beyond the Cathedral (partly as a result of their shifting energies, and Reverend Berkadal leaving, the eco-group within the Cathedral dissipated and was revived by Ruth Mulligan ten years later). Its first years were devoted to convincing Christians that there was a deep ecological tradition within Christianity and that Christians were called to “earth ministry.”

Jim Mulligan, and eventually a staff of five, continued
to lead EM until his retirement in 2003. Several key staff have published relevant books: Michael Schut, edited Food and Faith (2002) and Simpler Living, Compassionate Life (2001), Tanya Marcovna Becker Barnett was editor and contributor to Earth Ministry’s Greening Congregations Handbook (2002) and Nancy Wright (who left the organization in late 2002), co-authored Ecological Healing (1993). These publications, as well as their website, extended their outreach beyond the Seattle area. In addition, the staff travel widely as speakers, and consult with those hoping to start an ecological ministry in their own church or in other venues (including prisons).

Two reasons for the organization’s successes have been its extensive guide to congregational organizing and the related Congregational Colleagues programs. The Greening Congregations Handbook provides relevant biblical texts, a wide range of excerpts from key authors, an extensive appendix listing resources by denomination, and detailed suggestions on how to get something started that emphasize examining the organizer’s community, faith tradition and bioregion for already-available resources. It then encourages congregational organizers to start small, focus on specific activities, balance action with reflection, and be strategic. This section is followed by an explanation of the various dimensions of congregations that can be “greened,” from the liturgy and worship, to mission and educational aspects, to transportation, landscaping, food, energy, water, consumption, recycling, composting and green building design. “Helping a congregation cultivate a creation-honoring vision,” as the Handbook puts it, is the central goal of the Congregational Colleague program.

The congregation of one of Earth Ministry’s most successful participants, Leroy Hedman, pastor of an independent Pentecostal congregation in a poor, racially and ethnically diverse urban neighborhood ringed by industry and hazardous waste sites, won the first Environmental Protection Agency Energy Star congregation award in 1999. The efforts of Pastor Hedman at the Georgetown Gospel Church demonstrate the multiple aspects of congregational life that can be transformed, even when the theological outlook of the congregation is not particularly ecological, for few would describe his parishioners as “tree-huggers.” The award recognized the comprehensive use of compact fluorescent bulbs and other energy-saving devices by the congregation. Additionally, every ounce of ground in the small, paved lot surrounding the church is planted with flowers, fruits, vegetables and herbs available to all. Hedman, energy miser and master gardener and compostor, teaches his congregation and community how to save money as well as grow a source of healthy food.

Another successful congregational group, set in the middle-class outskirts of Seattle, goes on frequent hikes, rides bikes to church, educates parishioners about endangered species and environmental issues, and converted the congregation to serving fair-trade, shade-grown coffee, which expresses its concern for the people and bird-life of the areas where coffee is produced.

Beyond Earth Ministry’s intensive grassroots and outreach efforts, the organization brings in speakers, organizes conferences and local events such as outings to help local groups to successfully restore salmon habitat, and enlists churches to support local immigrant community farmers through Community Supported Agriculture cooperatives.

Laurel Kearns

Further Reading
See also: Community Supported Agriculture; Composting; Target Earth.

Earth Mysteries

Unusual geophysical and environmental phenomena exercise a persistent fascination on the human imagination. Since its coinage in the early 1970s, the term earth mysteries has become an umbrella designation covering a variety of speculative studies and theories regarding the alleged powers of the Earth; mysterious energies that are thought to be found at particular sites on the Earth’s surface (especially recognized sacred sites); and the construction, positioning, and uses of ancient monuments and prehistoric landscapes. For the “alternative archeologists” and others who study Earth mysteries, the field constitutes a multidisciplinary and holistic endeavor to understand the past and the human relationship to the Earth, an endeavor that encompasses such wide-ranging pursuits as archeology, archeoastronomy, the study of folklore and mythology, geophysics, consciousness studies, geomancy, dowsing and other divinatory and clairvoyant techniques, sacred geometry and “gematria,” epigraphy, crystallography, pyramidology, speculation about lost continents, and the study of scientifically anomalous phenomena such as UFOs, crop circles, and so-called Earth lights. From the outside, the field often appears a hodgepodge, and most of the scientific establishment of archeologists and prehistorians characteristically dismisses it as empirically flawed and theoretically incoherent, pseudoscientific, atavistic, and irrational.
Nevertheless, “alternative archeology” and the study of Earth mysteries has helped to fuel a popular interest in the distant past and in preserving natural and cultural landscapes, and, in some measure, has helped to correct earlier views of prehistory, which had characterized the ancient world as a time of toil, superstition, and ignorance. In the view promoted by writers on Earth mysteries, the ancients were more attuned to the Earth than we are now, and the time has come to learn what we can from the evidence of the past.

Though research on the geophysical qualities and alignments of prehistoric sites had been undertaken sporadically since the mid-nineteenth century, the inaugural moment of the contemporary Earth mysteries movement, at least in its Anglo-American formulation, is often taken to be the summer day in 1921 when the English businessman Alfred Watkins (1855–1935) stood on a hilltop in Herefordshire and suddenly saw the English landscape spread out before him as if laid out in a network of invisible lines. In his 1925 book The Old Straight Track, Watkins presented the case for a network of completely straight roads used by traders in prehistoric England and marked by a variety of Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age, Roman, and medieval monuments, including standing stones and megalithic structures, barrow mounds, holy wells, old churches, castles, hilltop beacons, crosses and old crossroads, and significant place-names. To pursue his “linear vision,” Watkins founded the Old Straight Track Club, a group of ley aficionados, which flourished between the wars and inspired countless other “ley hunting” enthusiasts.

Also in the early decades of the twentieth century, German landscape researchers Wilhelm Teudt and Josef Heinsch popularized the notion that ancient Teutonic peoples possessed a centralized, protoscientific solar cult which built an extensive network of astronomical lines, so-called “Holy lines” (Heilige linien), the existence of which could still be found in the geographical layout of ancient sites. Supported by Heinrich Himmler, Teudt became the head of an association dedicated to promoting Germany’s ancestral heritage (Deutsche Ahnenerbe), and the search for “holy lines” and astrological orientations was encouraged as a pro-party act by the Nazis before and during World War II. For Teudt and his associates, the Teutoburger Wald district in Lower Saxony – with astronomical lines linking sacred places, all centered around the dramatic rock formation called Die Externsteine – was the sacred heartland of Germany.

After the war, German geomancy suffered from its connections with Nazism, but by the 1960s, similar ideas resurfaced in other parts of Europe and North America, as part of the general resurgence of interest in ancient civilizations and mysterious phenomena. The 1965 publication of Boston University astronomer Gerald Hawkins’s Stonehenge Decoded injected a modicum of scientific respectability to the burgeoning field. Equipped with the latest Harvard-Smithsonian IBM digital computer, Hawkins claimed to discover close correlations between the placement of the main stones at Stonehenge and the positions of the rising and setting midsummer and mid-winter sun, the moon, and other celestial bodies, and concluded that Stonehenge was an ancient astronomical observatory and “prehistoric computer.” Hawkins’ ideas gave rise to the new field of archeoastronomy (or astroarcheology) and spurred on other scientists and amateurs to seek similar correlations elsewhere. Among others, mechanical engineer Alexander Thom carried out extensive surveys of British stone circles and hypothesized the existence of a “megalithic science,” complete with a precise measuring unit called the “megalithic yard.” Though many of Hawkins’ and Thom’s findings have since been rejected by most scholars, there is a consensus today that some sorts of alignments with celestial events were important in the design and uses of many stone circles in certain parts of the world, even if these alignments were on the whole imprecise, non-systematic, and most likely secondary to ritual, political, and other concerns; and archeoastronomers have continued to research astronomical correlations at European stone circles, as well as Mayan temples, networks of straight lines at Nazca and Cuzco in the Bolivian Andes, and sites of the pre-Columbian Anasazi culture of the U.S. Southwest.

Buoyed by the growing popular interest in unexplained phenomena, however, ley hunting has undergone a dramatic revival in countercultural and New Age circles in recent decades. In 1965, a group of ley aficionados founded The Ley Hunter, a magazine that was to become the longest running publication (it is still publishing) devoted to Earth mysteries, the term that the magazine’s editors coined in the early 1970s. The journal attracted the rising stars of the British Earth mysteries community, including John Michell, Paul Devereux, Anthony Roberts, and Nigel Pennick. Michell’s 1969 book The View Over Atlantis helped to crystallize the movement, synthesizing an eclectic array of previously disparate fields into an alluring narrative of a glorious past in which a caste of astronomer-priests built and manipulated a “great scientific instrument” of stone construction that lay sprawled over the surface of the planet. With other proponents of “sacred geometry,” Michell proposed that there are correspondences between geometrical shapes, mathematical principles, natural energies and other geophysical properties, and cosmic harmonies; and that these principles were utilized in the design and construction of sacred monuments including the stone circles of the British Isles, the pyramids of Egypt, Greek and Hindu temples, medieval and Renaissance cathedrals and churches and, it seems, almost anywhere else he looked. By associating leys with Chinese “dragon-paths” or lung mei, Michell also made “geomancy” a central notion of the Earth mysteries.
Earth mysteries research, formations, psychic phenomena, and other curiosities. A reference to Earth lights, UFO sightings, mysterious crop circles is said to interpenetrate with non-ordinary, paraphysical realities, facilitating transpersonal experiences and communication with spiritual or non-physical beings. Mixed in with much of this literature on Earth energy is frequent reference to Earth lights, UFO sightings, mysterious crop formations, psychic phenomena, and other curiosities.

Sensing a need to establish scientific credibility for Earth mysteries research, Ley Hunter editor Paul Devereux in 1977 launched the Dragon Project, an interdisciplinary research effort to document and measure unusual energy phenomena, such as magnetic or radiation anomalies, ultrasonic emissions, and light phenomena, at stone circles in Britain. A shoestring-budget operation, the project lumbered along for several years in fits and starts, but by 1989, Devereux had admitted that its psychic archeological work (using dowsers and psychics for archeological purposes) had produced unclear results, and that energy dowsing had “not yet developed much beyond belief-system status.” The project had, however, produced suggestive, if inconclusive, evidence of magnetic, ultrasonic, and radiation oddities, giving rise to speculation that unusual phenomena reported at megalithic sites may be related to the natural radiation of the stone itself, usually granite. This hypothesis seemed to parallel the claims of a handful of North American neurophysiologists who have found correlations between geophysical features, such as underground uranium deposits (e.g., in the U.S. Southwest), seismic phenomena, or tectonic stress zones, and increased reporting of UFOs and other unusual psychological experiences. Neurophysiologist Michael Persinger hypothesizes that piezoelectric effects and other electromagnetic discharges associated with tectonic plate movements, specifically at geological fault zones, stimulate specific areas of the human neocortex, producing hallucinatory images which the brain interprets as encounters with UFOs, poltergeists, or even near-death experiences. Certain regions of the world, including the famed Bermuda Triangle, the so-called Wessex Triangle in Britain, the Sedona area in Arizona, and the island of Maui, have seemed to specialize in generating such phenomena, or at least in attracting people who specialize in perceiving them.

In line with this more pragmatic and scientific approach, Devereux decisively rejected the "energetic" school of ley line theorizing and proposed a third hypothesis to account for the leys. In this new view, straight-line tracks and landscape alignments, such as the extensive landscape lines found in the South American Andes, are collective mental constructs or “shamanic spirit paths,” representations of the trance-state travels of shamans, and as such represent the ability of the human mind to roam across space in altered and religious states of consciousness. Alongside a wealth of other data from around the world, Devereux supported his case citing the use of straight tracks as actual funerary roads for the carriage of the dead in some cultures; and despite its overgeneralized nature, the spirit path hypothesis has been taken up enthusiastically by other ley researchers.

Though Britain has been a hothouse of recent Earth mysteries theorizing, other parts of the world have produced their own variants. North American Earth mysteries research has been especially infused with cultural diffusionist speculation, including far-flung theories of ancient transatlantic migrations by Celts, Vikings, Phoenicians, and other seafarers. The doyen of these pursuits has been Harvard marine biologist Barry Fell, whose theories about Pre-Columbian voyagers were outlined in a series of popular books in the 1970s and early 1980s. Though dismissed by the scientific community, Fell’s books drew attention to various sites, such as Mystery Hill in New Hampshire (also known as the American Stonehenge) and other stone structures, whose suggestive features and apparent inscriptions have continued to exercise a fascination on the curious. Another subcategory of Earth mysteries researchers have sought to confirm is archeologist Marija Gimbutas’s hypothesis of an ancient goddess civilization, discovering imagery associated with “the Goddess” in landscape formations and folklore as far and wide as England (notably Silbury Hill) and Ireland, islands in the Mediterranean, and North and South America.
Yet another line of Earth mysteries research has been the hypothesis of a global energy grid. In the 1970s, Cambridge mathematician Michael Behrend began detecting alignments of ancient sites in geometric shapes (such as hexagons and decagons) spread on a vast scale across Britain. Other researchers have since projected such geometrical patterns over the entire Earth, portraying the planet as a crystalline structure made up of regular geometrical patterns based on Platonic solids, or as composed of vast circles, so-called Rings of Gaia, whose intersections mark energy points or “planetary chakras.” Some theorists have attempted to classify the different “power points” or “energy vortexes” into types. One common scheme, proffered by psychic Page Bryant, distinguishes between electrical vortexes, which include areas of high elevation and sacred mountains (such as mounts Shasta, Kilauea, or Denali/McKinley) and are said to be physically charging and stimulating; magnetic vortexes, which are lower lying and include wells and springs, lakes, and caves, and are said to be conducive to meditation, healing, past-life recall, and intuitive guidance; and electromagnetic vortexes or larger electromagnetic grids, which combine the two types of features over larger areas (e.g., Niagara Falls, Maui and Kauai in Hawai‘i, the Rocky Mountains). The volcanic Ring of Fire that stretches across the Pacific is, for Bryant, the axis for the Earth’s “kundalini” energy. (In Hindu and Buddhist spiritual and phy-sico-medical traditions, the chakras are thought to be energy centers that run along the body’s central axis, and along which flows the spiritual or “life energy” known as kundalini.)

Like other researchers of the paranormal, Earth mysteries researchers have not fared well against the scrutiny of scientists and skeptics. Though most archeologists know little of the world of “alternative archeology,” the few instances of scholarly scrutiny of Earth mysteries research have proved humbling to the field’s credibility. Ley hunters have been critiqued for their “telescoped” view of prehistory, which sees all prehistoric earthworks and all grass-covered mounds as roughly contemporaneous, and for flawed methodology, selective and inappropriate use of statistical evidence, dubious use of folklore and place-names, and the sheer incoherence of their various notions of Earth or telluric “energies.” Their site-evolution or site-continuity argument – according to which different cultural groups, separated from each other by many centuries, are said to have recognized the sanctity of a place, erecting a variety of structures, from stone circles to tumuli to churches, to mark it out – is rejected by most archeologists, as is the common claim that the British ley network was established back in the Neolithic, since, in fact, most purported ley lines require the use of later sites as well as ill-defined mark points (including moats, ponds, lanes, and even trees) to “confirm” their veracity as ley.

More generally, Earth mysteries research is faulted for over reliance on outdated ideas about prehistory, and for injudicious appropriation of scholarly theories – such as Gimbutas’s hypothesis of an ancient goddess civilization, James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, or the wild variety of “new physics” ideas about holographic universes and multidimensional realities – to prop up their own ideas, without recognizing the limitations of those theories or their tendentious status within their respective source disciplines. As archeological knowledge has accumulated, especially since the dawn of radiocarbon dating, the picture of the European Neolithic, for instance, has become altogether much more complex, characterized by a recognition of intense local regionalism and conflict, extensive environmental disruption, profound changes in cultural tradition over time, with different structures being built for different purposes at different periods of time – but also with a proliferation of ritual monuments, which served less as astronomical observatories than as large-scale visual and territorial markers. Analogous situations apply in other parts of the world. Earth mysteries researchers, in contrast, have tended to ignore archeologists’ growing knowledge of the cultural, functional, and chronological contexts of ancient sites, while doggedly pursuing their overarching hypothesis of a lost Golden Age.

Nevertheless, dialogue between fringe and orthodox (i.e., amateur and professional) prehistorians has taken place sporadically, at conferences and in occasional articles in popular archeological journals and alternative venues. Some of the ideas of earlier Earth mysteries research have, in fact, turned out to be more accurate than the science of the time had supposed: for instance, the idea, shared by Watkins and others, that the Neolithic landscape of Europe and the British Isles was widely cleared and settled, or the view that “continuity of development” was a key note to European history (this contrasts to early archeologists’ emphasis on invasions and migrations). Recent developments in symbolic, cognitive, interpretive, phenomenological, and post-processualist archeology, however, have pursued with great vigor the sorts of questions that should interest Earth mysteries aficionados. If the “Earth mysteries” field is to have a future other than mere wishful thinking, skillful collaboration between scholarly prehistorians and amateur enthusiasts – and, more practically, with environmental activists – would seem to be a prerequisite.

Adrian Ivakhiv

Further Reading


See also: Crop Circles; Delphic Oracle; Glastonbury; New Age; Sedona; Stone Circles; Stonehenge.

**EarthSpirit Community**

EarthSpirit is a national organization of neo-pagans located in western Massachusetts. The organization, which was founded in 1980 in the Boston area by its current directors, Andras Corban Arthen and Deirdre Pulgram Arthen, organizes festivals and open rituals, offers classes on neo-pagan topics, maintains a website, and publishes a newsletter for its members. The organization has a performance group, Mothertongue, which has produced several recordings of stories and songs with neo-pagan and nature themes. From 1988 to 1993 EarthSpirit published a popular glossy magazine, *FireHeart*, which included interviews with well-known neo-pagans and articles about magical practices, rituals, and topical issues within the neo-pagan community. Although most of the articles were written by EarthSpirit members, neo-pagans, who were not active members in ESC and environmental activist groups, such as Earth First!, were also invited to write articles for this journal, helping to make it an important source for information and debate within the neo-pagan community.

EarthSpirit is best known for its festival, Rites of Spring, which takes place yearly around Memorial Day weekend in western Massachusetts. The festival began in 1979 as a two-day gathering of neo-pagans in the Boston area, grew to an event that occurred over a long weekend, and ultimately to a week-long gathering that has drawn up to 700 people. The theme of the gathering changes each year but always focuses on the spiritual connection between participants and the Earth. EarthSpirit also organizes three smaller gatherings – Twilight Covening in the fall, Suntide in midsummer, and the Festival of Lights in mid-winter – as well as workshops throughout the year to train neo-pagans in aspects of magical or ritual practice or to facilitate discussions of topics such as the spiritual connection between people and the Earth as reflected in the folklore and practices of indigenous peoples. Public seasonal rituals held by EarthSpirit in both the Boston area and western Massachusetts often serve as a bridge for interested individuals to become neo-pagans. These rituals also provide an arena for local neo-pagans to meet one another and to make and renew friendships, magical partnerships, and sometimes form into working spiritual groups.

EarthSpirit’s large rituals are dramatic, involving the use of music, masks, props, and dance to enact some aspect of change that is occurring in nature and its meaning for participants. For instance, at Samhain rituals, which occur around October 31st, death and rebirth in nature is celebrated. Participants are encouraged to remember deceased friends and family members and to think about their own bad habits or relationships that they want to “die” to be replaced with healthier ones. EarthSpirit is gifted at using dance, chants, songs, and mazes to involve large groups of people in open rituals. For example, at one Rites of Spring a maze was created through which approximately 600 individuals walked at the conclusion of a ritual, transfiguring the amebic circles of participants into a butterfly, which reflected that year’s theme of transformation in nature and in individuals’ lives.

The organization is run by a dedicated group of individuals, many of whom, like Andras and Deirdre, have taken the last name Arthen, share a homestead in western Massachusetts, and are members of the Glainn Sidhr (Glenshire) Order of Witches. The organization and its leaders often serve as public spokespersons for neo-paganism and Earth-based spirituality. EarthSpirit was one of the three neo-pagan groups to represent their religion at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993 and in South Africa in 1999. The organization boasts over 4000 members, most of whom live in the New England area, although others reside throughout the United States and abroad. Membership within the organization requires individuals to pay a small fee in return for which they receive newsletters, mailings about upcoming events, and discounts at those events. Members vary in their commitment to the organization; some donate time to help organize its rituals and festivals, and to maintain the organization, while others attend only some events. All of EarthSpirit’s events are open to members and non-members alike.

Although those in the inner circle are members of the same spiritual and magical tradition, EarthSpirit aims to be a service organization for the larger neo-pagan community. At both the festivals and open circles organized...
by EarthSpirit the focus is on what they believe all neo-pagans share – a magical worldview and reverence for the Earth. Animals, streams, trees, the wind, and stones are all venerated as part of the sacred web of creation. Woven into the fabric of the rituals is a theme that humanity, which is viewed as part of the sacred web, needs to honor and protect nature. The group encourages its members to be environmentally responsible. Some outdoor rituals include the planting of trees or the removal of trash from public lands as a symbol of the participants’ respect and care for Mother Earth.

Helen A. Berger

Further Reading
See also: Circle Sanctuary; Pagan Festivals in North America; Paganism – Contemporary; Pagan Festivals – Contemporary; Reclaiming; Wicca.

Eco-Church

The Eco-Church Movement was initially developed by the North American Coalition for Christianity and Ecology (NACCE), a Minnesota-based organization founded in 1986 to foster greater ecological responsibility and care of creation among Christians. Since then, the concept of eco-church has extended beyond the context of the NACCE to non-affiliated grassroots groups that define themselves as eco-churches but not necessarily under the guidelines advanced by the NACCE. As conceived by the NACCE, eco-churches (the NACCE now calls them “Earthkeeping Circles”) were to be small groups of people who meet weekly to discuss relevant biblical passages and to study issues related to Christianity and ecology. Eco-churches would have freedom to experiment and tailor their own gatherings to the interests of the local group but would largely remain biblically based. Eco-churches could create their own rituals for celebrating Christian holy days, the natural seasons, or even Earth Day. NACCE’s guidelines for eco-churches identify body prayer, song and music, study and action, exploring the bioregion, cultivating Earth literacy, and observing holy days as suggested group activities. Although there were very few eco-churches actually affiliated with the NACCE as of 2003, the eco-church concept and name had been picked and interpreted in different ways by various independent lay-led groups. Catholic lay groups in particular, which have come to the eco-church idea through the writings of Father Albert Fritsch (and not necessarily through the NACCE) have given the eco-church concept their own interpretation and added a special emphasis on eco-justice concerns.

Although the NACCE advises groups to hold gatherings outdoors as much as possible, at other times eco-church groups meet in members’ homes instead of within institutional walls. Like the “House Church Movement” of the 1970s and the Liberation Theology Movement with its small Christian Based Communities (CBCs) in Central and Latin America, eco-churches are committed not just to study and worship but also to social and environmental action. Much as the House Church Movement did, the Eco-Church Movement today draws support and precedent from key passages in the New Testament (Acts 2:46, 12:12; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15) to authenticate the new growth of more egalitarian and experimental home-based liturgical groups. Much of the literature on eco-churches has a “Liberation Theology” feel to it and emphasizes the powerful potential of local grassroots action. For example, the March/April 2000 written message from NACCE President Rev. Finley Schaef said,

Why should we want to create house churches, or “Eco-church circles,” or “earthkeeping circles,” or cells? The answer is quite simple: the existing local churches, in my humble estimation, will never make the radical changes we envision. Local churches, if they can get beyond the mission of sociability and charity, do try to address individual salvation, but that’s the limit (Schaef 2000).

Eco-church proponents also argue that smaller, home-based groups are by nature more ecologically sustainable since they do not require the resources to build, maintain, and power large institutional buildings. Creating simpler, more flexible churches that model sustainability and commitment to creation is thus one of the movement’s goals. For traditional congregations that wish to become more eco-friendly, the NACCE provides eco-Church ministry teams a variety of resources and directs them to Father Albert Fritsch’s book Eco-Church: An Action Manual (1992), which offers step-by-step instructions on how congregations can conduct their own environmental resource audit. Rev. Schaef has welcomed and praised such institutional “greening” but with the caveat that “established churches need to do much more than tack on ecological issues to their existing agenda” (Schaef 2000). The development of eco-churches then, which has extended even to a study group inside a New York penitentiary, was ideally conceived of as a way to build a more immediate grassroots movement of ecologically sensitive Christians from the bottom up without waiting for slower-moving
church bureaucracies to implement changes. Much like House Churches, these “cell groups” are by nature decentralized and not necessarily affiliated with any environmental organization or congregation, making the scope of the movement more challenging to judge.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading
See also: African Earthkeeping Churches – Association of (Zimbabwe); Christianity (7c) – Liberation Theology; North American Conference (Coalition) on Christianity and Ecology [and the] North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology.

Ecofascism

Fascism is a totalitarian form of government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests and even their lives to the well-being and glory of the state. Acquiring mystical qualities usually reserved for divinities, the state and its leaders become the heroic manifestations of the people’s sacred blood. A new social hierarchy is required to overcome the debilitating, blood-destroying effects of mass civilization. Militarism, expansionism, nationalism, and racism usually follow from fascism’s social Darwinism, according to which dynamic societies can and must win the inevitable struggle for survival against weaker states.

Following this definition, we may define “ecofascism” as a totalitarian government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests to the well-being and glory of the “land,” understood as the splendid web of life, or the organic whole of nature, including peoples and their states. The land acquires mystical properties as the sacred source and absolute measure for all things. Polluting the land, either by toxins or by admitting the wrong kind of immigrants, not only threatens the state’s stability and security, but also affronts the sacred natural order itself. Even though the web of life supposedly admits of no hierarchies, ecofascism requires leaders who enforce “natural” principles against selfish (hence, unnatural) individuals and peoples. Militarism, expansionism, and possibly racism are required to defend the land – Fatherland, Mother Earth, Gaia – from those who disrespect the land, including both industrialized countries and overpopulated “developing” nations. Consistent with Darwinist principles, the ecofascist state will succeed in the struggle for survival, because such a state is more adaptive to (respectful of) the environment, now glorified as the sacred web of life.

No ecofascism government has yet existed, but important aspects of it can be discerned in German National Socialism, one of whose central slogans was Blut und Boden, “[pure] blood and [pure] land.” Some portray Nazism as a political religion, according to which the state must protect the racially pure blood that manifests and sustains the creative power of nature. Many Nazis believed that blood purity was crucial for Germany’s sacred mission of saving noble northern European races from degenerate ones, such as the Jews. The Nazis explicitly contrasted their “religion of nature” with the otherworldliness of Christianity, itself a product of the “unnatural” Jews. Since races were closely tied to the land in which they arose, German land had to be protected both from industrial pollution and from the injurious presence of half-breeds. Only pure blood Germans could draw creative energy from the land that originally gave rise to the Volk. Divinity was purely immanent within nature, respect for which was possible only for people with the blood of northern Europeans. Capitalism and communism, which not only reduced peoples to undifferentiated masses, but also destroyed the land with their industrial practices, were supposedly ideological offspring of the nature-despising, blood-polluting, semi-human Jews. These attitudes were not erased from Nazism, despite its post-1936 commitment to the total industrial mobilization required for acquiring Lebensraum to the East and for “liberating” northern European countries from the institutions imposed by modernity, such as democracy, socialism, and capitalism.

Nazism’s perverted neo-paganism must be sharply contrasted with contemporary neo-paganism, which typically affirms the achievements of modernity, while disagreeing with its total desacralization of nature. Nevertheless, the ecofascist aspect of National Socialism must be kept in mind by those environmentalists who call for worshipping nature and who also engage in a totalizing critique of modernity. In the future, the possibility of some kind of ecofascism could grow if environmental problems lead to international tensions (e.g., disputes over water rights or immigration) that national leaders use as an excuse to whip up nationalist and/or ethnic passions, build up military forces, suppress internal opposition, and enforce draconian laws compelling people to behave in ways consistent with the well-being and purity of “nature.”

Michael E. Zimmerman
Further Reading
See also: ATWA; Devi, Savitri; Environmental Ethics; Fascism; Radical Environmentalism.

Ecofeminism and Biblical Interpretation
For some time now ecofeminists have interpreted the Bible both critically and hopefully. Alert to the ways biblical religion has been implicated in the oppression of women and the domination of nature, ecofeminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Judith Plaskow and Ivone Gebara have used ecofeminist ethics as a basis for critical and selective reinterpretations of biblical material. For example, in Gaia and God (1992) Ruether reinterprets the biblical motif of “covenant” to encompass “the covenant of creation” in which “we are to be in right relation to our fellow beings” (1992: 228). Plaskow refers to biblical prophecy in the context of a Jewish ecofeminist vision of repair of the world (in Adams 1993). In Longing for Running Water (1999), Gebara describes an orientation toward life within the parables of Jesus. Through these new interpretations, the Bible becomes a source for developing an ecofeminist response to environmental devastation and to the interrelated oppressions of women, indigenous peoples and other subordinated groups.

Of particular interest to ecofeminists have been the biblical motifs of genesis and apocalypse. In a reversal of the Christian canon, Anne Primavesi’s From Apocalypse to Genesis (1991) moves from contemporary judgments on human actions destructive of nature to the possibility of an ecological re-reading of the creation stories of Genesis 1 to 3. Critical of the role of Christianity and Western society in the subordination of women and the domination of nature, Primavesi interprets the Spirit of God in creation as an image of the regenerative power of trees, oceans and human bodies. In “Nuclear Power and the Sacred,” Jane Caputi (Adams 1993), following the work of film critic Michael Wood, links the gendering of the atomic bomb as female with the biblically based myth of Adam and Eve. She traces a pattern in which nuclear weapons are given women’s names and associated with the sexual power of women. This pattern, portraying woman as seductive and destructive, emerges from a tradition that represents Eve as culpable for human evil. In Ruether’s “Women Healing Earth” (1996), Sun-Ai Lee-Park focuses on “the forbidden tree” of Genesis 2 and 3. There God offers the first humans all the bounty of the forest garden, except for the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When Lee-Park witnesses the logging of ancient rainforests in Sarawak, she recalls this divine prohibition. The Genesis story for her parallels the way in which ignoring environmental limits leads to destruction and loss.

Themes of genesis and apocalypse come together in Carolyn Merchant’s Earthcare (1995) and Catherine Keller’s Apocalypse Now and Then (1996). Both writers describe ways in which the myth of a lost Eden and the vision of a New World coalesce in the colonization of the Americas. Keller argues that an apocalyptic framework, rejected by Western modernity, continues to influence Western imagination and practice through what she calls a “cryptoapocalypse.” By offering an extended, ecological, feminist engagement with a single biblical book, namely the Book of Revelation, Keller’s Apocalypse represents a shift for ecofeminist biblical interpretation.

Within biblical studies, ecofeminist frameworks of interpretation are continuing to be developed. As Gebara indicates, in several Latin American countries women are re-reading biblical scriptures from the joint perspective of “the integrity of creation” and “respect for women.” In the first volume of the Earth Bible, Australian biblical scholar Elaine Wainwright has extended a feminist hermeneutic to develop an ecofeminist reading of the Gospel of Matthew. Focusing in particular on Matthew 11, which deals with the question of who Jesus is, Wainwright suggests that the deeds of Jesus reveal the presence of divine wisdom and the possibility of right relationship not only between humans but within the entire Earth community.

In the same volume Heather Eaton draws on feminist biblical criticism to suggest directions for an ecofeminist approach to biblical interpretation. Questioning conventional notions of the text as sacred and authoritative, Eaton writes: “From an ecofeminist perspective, the Bible can be accepted only as contingent and provisional” (in Habel 2000: 59). This implies an acceptance of the material reality of the Bible. Words on a scroll, page or screen are not possible without the plants from which paper or papyrus and ink are produced or the fossils and rocks from which the plastics of a CD-ROM and the parts of a computer are formed. Writers and readers of the text are also dependent on the Earth community for their sustenance. A recognition of the interdependence of readers and text within an Earth community is particularly pertinent for ecofeminist biblical interpretation.
Related ecofeminist concerns with embodiment surface in the Earth Bible's volume on biblical wisdom literature (Habel and Wurst 2001). Shirley Wurst's focus on eco-kinship develops aspects of interconnectedness and Earth kinship evident in the biblical personification of divine wisdom as a woman. Drawing on the practice of biblical scholar Claudia Camp, Wurst names this figure of kinship Woman Wisdom. For Laura Hobgood-Oster, Woman Wisdom offers a vision of the divine which contrasts with other less Earth-friendly images: "The divine being frolicking in creation suggests a very different image than a king sitting on a throne with Earth as 'his' footstool" (in Habel and Wurst 2001: 40). Woman Wisdom inhabits the realm of Earth; she invites humans to open themselves to a passionate knowing of Earth. In the same volume, Carole Fontaine focuses on the celebration of sexual desire in the Song of Songs. The lovers' desire to connect is reflected in the wider interconnectedness of the Earth community. Not only does the natural world provide space for the lovers' meeting and material for their metaphors, but also it itself is both lover and beloved.

As Eaton indicates, ecofeminist interpretations must be ethically responsible. The patriarchal and androcentric character of much biblical material remains a key concern. So, too, does the problem of the anthropocentrism of the text and its readers, which tends to make ecological concerns marginal to the work of biblical interpretation. Further, as post-colonial insights are integrated with ecofeminist ones, there is a critical focus on the ways in which the Bible has been used in the Eurowestern project of colonization. At the same time, eco-sensitive readings are emerging in the interplay between ecofeminist reader and biblical text. Considering the problematic aspects of the text, Hobgood-Oster writes: "Earth recontextualizes and subverts" (in Habel and Wurst 2001: 46). The challenge to ecofeminist interpreters of the Bible is to allow Earth to recontextualize and subvert our readings of the text.

Anne Elvey

Further Reading


See also: Christianity (7c) – Liberation Theology; Christianity (7d) – Feminist Theology; Earth Bible; Ecofeminism (various); Gebara, Ivone; Ruether, Rosemary Radford.

**Ecofeminism – Historic and International Evolution**

Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as myriad forms of feminist and environmental theories and activisms intersected. The term was introduced by Françoise d’Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) published in 1974. Some theorists, such as Ynestra King, name it as a third wave of feminism, while others place it in the general category of deep ecology. Ecofeminism acts in both and neither of these broad movements, simultaneously serving as an environmental critique of feminism and a feminist critique of environmentalism. Ecofeminist trajectories are varied; there is no one accepted or orthodox "eco-feminism." Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Starhawk, Sallie McFague, Luisah Teish, Sun Ai Lee-Park, Paula Gunn Allen, Monica Sjöö, Greta Gaard, Karen Warren and Andy Smith are among the voices speaking from ecofeminist positions.

Ecofeminism asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. These socially constructed oppressions formed out of the power dynamics of patriarchal systems. In one of the first ecofeminist books, *New Woman/New Earth*, Ruether, states:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society (1975: 204).

Ruether makes clear a central tenet of ecofeminism: Earth and the other-than-human experience the tyranny of patriarchy along with women. Classism, racism, sexism,
Ecofeminism is multi-faceted and multi-located, challenging structures rather than individuals. By confronting systems of patriarchy, ecofeminism broadens the scope of the cultural critique and incorporates seemingly disparate but, according to ecofeminism, radically connected elements. Combining feminist and deep ecological perspectives - in and of themselves extremely varied ways of thinking about reality - is a complex, transgressive process that is often in flux. Ecofeminist positions reflect varied political stances that may be, and usually are, transformed through time and place. In other words, the political activisms and alliances stemming from ecofeminism modify in relationship to the perceived justice issues being confronted in differing cultural and historical settings. Because of this constant morphing, ecofeminism simultaneously challenges patriarchies from different angles. This is one of the myriad strengths of the fluid and radically diverse positions assumed by ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism claims that patriarchal structures justify their dominance through categorical or dualistic hierarchies: heaven/Earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature, white/non-white. Established oppressive systems continue to manifest their abusive powers by reinforcing assumptions of these binaries, even making them sacred through religious and scientific constructs. Ecofeminism posits that as long as any of the dualisms exist as an integral component of societal structuring and justification, they will all continue to serve as starting points to justify patriarchy. Therefore all dualisms and binary oppositional forms must be dismantled otherwise humanity remains “divided against itself,” a phrase that Griffin uses to describe the ideological impact of dualism.

As a justice advocate for the entire web of life, ecofeminism resists dividing culture into these imbedded separate or dualistic arenas. In her introduction to Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature, editor Warren asserts: “What makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e., the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues. Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination to nature” (1997: 4).

Ecofeminism’s constructive worldview replaces hierarchical dualisms with radical diversity and relationship, modeled on both biodiversity and the feminist emphasis on the strength of difference.

Throughout the 1970s, few ecofeminists in academic settings designated themselves as such, though several engaged in similar theoretical endeavors linking feminist and environmental ideas. Early publications that analyze the woman/nature connection in light of the environmental crisis include Ruether’s New Woman/New Earth (1975), Mary Daly’s Gyn/Ecology (1978), Griffin’s Woman and Nature (1978) and Carolyn Merchant’s The Death of Nature (1980).

Some of the earliest articulations of ecofeminism analyzed the patriarchal underpinnings in religious and philosophical systems of the European and Mediterranean world. These cultural and geographical foci surfaced from the primarily European and Euro-American voices that constituted the initial ecofeminist conversations. Such scholars as Anne Primavesi, Carol Christ, Merchant, Daly, and Charlene Spretnak examined cultural and religious systems from such areas as ancient Mesopotamia and Greece, as well as religious systems such as Judaism and Christianity. They proposed that patriarchal cultural structures revolved around layers of symbol systems that justified domination. For example, they interpret the creation stories in the book of Genesis, foundational for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as demonizing both woman (Eve) and animal (the snake).

These and other early ecofeminists analyzed pre-patriarchal cultures in the Mediterranean and old European worlds as well. Feminist historian Gerda Lerner and archeomythologist Marija Gimbutas provided some of the groundwork for this analysis. Gimbutas’ theories of Old Europe are based in her complex and widely critiqued archeomythological reconstructions. Her theories suggest that life-valuing, sometimes matriarchal and rarely militaristic societies existed before Indo-Aryan invaders slowly destroyed these cultures. Lerner’s historical reconstructions focus on the shift from small Neolithic villages to city-based states with the accompanying rise of patriarchal cultural systems. Both theorists posit pre-patriarchal Mediterranean world religious cultures in which fertility goddesses and other nature symbolism figured prominently.

Gradually, patriarchal, militaristic sky gods replaced Earth goddesses and gods. Most of the ancient symbols of power were subverted and remythologized as evil or chaotic. The mother goddess, whose body often birthed or constituted the Earth, became the target of the powerful sky gods, as evidenced by such creation stories as the Babylonian Enuma Elish. The pattern of male deities killing female or animal deities in an effort to establish a patriarchal order and to control forces assumed to be chaotic repeats itself consistently. The snake, once a symbol of life, was trapped under the foot of the male deity and connected to evil. Hell was in the Earth, and Heaven was removed to the sky. Paradise lost its materiality and became a masculine, hierarchical projection.

Such theories raise many questions for scholars interested in the reconstruction of early human civilizations. For example, few archeologists accept Gimbutas’ theories and suggest that they are projections of patriarchal and goddess myths. Still, some ecofeminists reference these historical reconstructions as alternatives to the commonly accepted patriarchal constructions that project historical
progress. In other words, the idea of civilizations advancing from pre-agricultural to agricultural to industrial to post-industrial/technological might also be construed as a mythological projection. Applying feminist historical methodology, some academic ecofeminists reevaluate the patriarchal myth of progress, particularly its detrimental effects on the human–nature relationship. Carolyn Merchant articulates a version of this critique in *The Death of Nature*.

From the work of Griffin, Daly, Ruether, Merchant and others in the 1970s, grew a dramatic expansion of ecofeminism in academic circles during the 1980s and 1990s. Activist movements, sometimes connected with but generally outside of the academy, also increased in the 1980s. Several conferences focusing on ecofeminism were organized: “Women and Life on Earth: Eco-feminism in the Eighties” (1980), “Ecofeminist Perspectives: Culture, Nature, Theory” (1987), and a group at the National Women’s Studies Association (1989). These efforts, along with other attempts to create sustainable organizations such as the Feminist Peace Institute and WomanEarth, led to the publication of several foundational anthologies. *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, edited by Stephanie Leland and Leonie Caldecott (1983); *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, edited by Judith Plant (1989); and *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (1990). All three volumes were edited by Euro-American ecofeminists but the editors included authors from various cultures. Petra Kelly, in her foreword to *Healing the Wounds*, proclaims a “global ecological sisterhood” and calls on the women of the Chipko Movement (India), the Greenham Common (England), the Krim Region (former Soviet Union) and the Western Shoshone Indian Nation to “link arms” as global sisters (1989: ix). The practice of publishing anthologies with diverse voices rather than books representing just one voice exhibits the overall tendency among ecofeminists to value inclusivity rather than books representing just one voice exhibits the overall tendency among ecofeminists to value inclusivity and difference. Still these anthologies, while influential, were criticized for essentializing the woman/nature connection and for over-romanticizing or over-simplifying women in non-Western cultures.

 Vandana Shiva, a physicist and environmental researcher/activist in India, published *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (1988), which reflects the increasingly global nature of ecofeminism during the 1980s. Shiva connects the “death of the feminine principle” with “maldevelopment,” a term she uses to describe the introduction of Western, intensive agriculture to the “Third World.” In her essay “Development, Ecology and Women” Shiva articulates the relationship clearly:

> Maldevelopment militates against this equality in diversity, and superimposes the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as a uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures, and genders . . . Diversity, and unity and harmony in diversity, become epistemologically unattainable in the context of maldevelopment, which then becomes synonymous with women’s underdevelopment (increasing sexist domination), and nature’s depletion (deepening ecological crises) (Shiva in Plant 1989: 83).

Shiva also published, with Maria Mies, a German, Marxist sociologist, *Ecofeminism: Reconnecting a Divided World* (1993). In this book the authors connect the capitalist-patriarchal economic system with the oppression of women in both the northern and southern hemispheres. However Shiva, not unlike some other ecofeminists, has been criticized for essentializing women and nature in her work.

Another area of focus concerned the relationship of scientific worldviews to religion and culture. Ecofeminism suggests that the antagonism sometimes existing between religious and scientific worldviews has been detrimental, used by both approaches to advance their own hierarchical structures. The reductionist models of both Western theologies and many Western scientific ideologies project a material world that is not sacred, but mechanistic. This apparent disconnect between the material and the sacred, alleged by ecofeminists to be fostered by both religion and science, has been particularly detrimental when acted upon by European-American dominant cultures. The Christian ecofeminist theologian Sallie McFague, in her book *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (1993), summarizes the situation:

> Moreover, and most significant for an ecological theology, this picture projected disembodiment: disembodied knowing (the Cartesian mind/body dualism) and disembodied doing (internal human peace or forgiveness of sins became the principal action between God and the world) (1993: 29).

In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant links this hierarchical, mechanistic approach to nature to the oppression of women. She argues that, whereas organic thinking and interdependence shaped European life through the Middle Ages, the “fathers” of the scientific revolution determined to dominate nature. Merchant quotes Francis Bacon extensively. He proposes to “hound nature in her wanderings” in order to “drive her afterward to the same place again.” To disclose the “secrets of nature” Bacon suggests that “entering and penetrating into these holes and corners” of nature will lead to the uncovering of truth (in Merchant 1980: 168). During the same general time period, numerous European women (and men, though significantly fewer) were accused of witchcraft. The *Malleus Maleficarum or Hammer of Witches* (1486), a manual on
identifying and interrogating witches, instructed inquisitors to “penetrate” and torture witches in order to discover their secrets. Merchant argues that the feminine language used for “nature” and the parallel violent approaches of control assigned against unruly nature and unruly women are obvious.

Both Merchant and McFague emphasize the new (and also old), organic model of the cosmos developing in some areas of science and religion. The “common creation story” and the growing field of ecology, as well as some new cosmologies emerging from physics, provide fertile ground for ecofeminist entry into dialogue with the natural sciences.

The first volume of essays to focus on the topic of ecofeminism and spirituality was *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, edited by Carol Adams. Voices from various religious and ethnic perspectives were included; for example: Hindu (Lina Gupta), Jewish (Judith Plaskow), Buddhist (Stephanie Kaza), Native American (Andy Smith), Womanist (Delores Williams), Christian (McFague). The volume combined voices from activist positions as well as from academic ones, with many contributors speaking from both simultaneously. Byllye Avery of the National Black Women’s Health Project and Zoe Weil of ANIMAL-EARN, a division of the American Anti-vivisection Society, are two such contributors.

During the same three decades (1970–2000), ecofeminist activists engaged in myriad protests, boycotts and campaigns to bring attention to the interconnection of justice issues related to women and the environment as a whole. Feminism is politically activist at its core and feminist methodologies applied to scholarly work make political engagement requisite. Various scholars entered the activist arena via their intellectual contributions and various activists entered the academic arena via their commitment to justice-oriented endeavors. Many first generation ecofeminists encountered each other through antimilitarist and anti-nuclear protests during the height of the Cold War. In 1980 *A Handbook for Women on the Nuclear Mentality*, written by Susan Koen and Nina Swaim, used the word ecofeminism as a foundational concept for action. The Women’s Pentagon Actions (1980–1981) and the Greenham Women’s Peace Camp (established in 1981) are two examples of ecofeminist, antimilitarization and anti-nuclear organizations.

The influence of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975–1985), with its many gatherings and coalition-building opportunities, on the development of ecofeminism has not been adequately researched. Various international political conferences sponsored by the U.N. and international NGOs did impact ecofeminist activisms. For example, the U.N. Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 brought together ecofeminist leaders and provided them with further opportunities to connect with international colleagues. Other major international conferences that linked environmentalism and women’s issues were the “U.N.’s Environmental Programme’s (UNEP) Global Assembly on Women and the Environment” and the “World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet,” both held in Miami in 1991. While these international ecofeminist (though not named explicitly as such) gatherings connected academic voices with activist voices, there are some ecofeminists whose focus has been activist and justice-oriented who deliberately separate themselves from the academic arena in general, and in particular from the Euro-American academy.

The issue of racism within ecofeminist, and feminist, dialogues has also been prominent. Though paying significant attention to diversity, white ecofeminists have often essentialized racial difference. For example, in the academic anthologies listed above, Shiva’s voice figures prominently and seems to stand for all women who are not European or Euro-American. Few women of color have been able to remain in positions of leadership in activist or academic organizations for long periods of time. The political power of white women in these organizations undermines, often unintentionally, that of women of color. Even though such organizations as WomanEarth attempted to make racism an integral part of the ecofeminist conversation, racial tensions contributed to the eventual disbanding of numerous ecofeminist dialogue groups. Even the designations “white” and “of color” seem to maintain a binary within ecofeminism as it tries to subvert all such labels.

Another outcome of issues connected to racism is the critique of the label “ecofeminist” by various activists from indigenous peoples. For example, Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabeg), director of the Honor the Earth Fund and the White Earth Land Recovery Project, identifies herself as an activist for indigenous people rather than an ecofeminist activist. In an interview with Judith Plant (published in *Healing the Wounds*) Marie Wilson, member of the Gitksan-Wet’suwet’en Tribal Council (British Columbia) explains her perspective on this issue:

At the risk of sounding scornful or derogatory I have to say that the Indian attitude toward the natural world is different from the environmentalists. I have had the awful feeling that when we are finished dealing with the courts and our land claims, we will then have to battle the environmentalists and they will not understand why (Wilson in Plant 1989: 217).

Some of this tension grows from the appropriation of indigenous religious rituals by white people, including some ecofeminists. Andy Smith harshly criticizes such borrowing in her essay “For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life” (*Ecofeminism and the Sacred*).
Ecowomanists and African-American ecofeminists, express related concerns. They identify with racism as the first and most dominant oppression in their experience, while sexism is secondary. As Shamara Shantu Riley points out in Ecofeminism and the Sacred:

There are several differences between ecofeminism and Afrocentric ecowomanism. While Afrocentric ecowomanism also articulates the links between male supremacy and environmental degradation, it lays far more stress on other distinctive features, such as race and class, that leave an impression markedly different from ecofeminists’ theories (Riley in Adams 1993: 197).

With the growing recognition of the extensive environmental racism in the United States and on a global scale, ecowomanists and others determine that their political alliances need to shift from a feminist agenda to one more directly engaging issues of race and class. This complexifying of interconnected oppressions, a central tenet of ecofeminism, continues to arise within the varieties of ecofeminism itself.

Globalization of all aspects of environmentalism has begun to shift the momentum in ecofeminism as well. Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion (Ruether, ed. 1996) provides insight into Latin American, Asian and African ecofeminism. In the introduction Ruether notes that while ecofeminism is not a “movement” in these large geographical areas, the global dialogue inspired by connections between the oppression of women and nature needs to be recognized. The contributors are all local/global activists and their work speaks to the globalization of ecofeminisms. The Con-Spirando Collective in Chile collaborated with Ruether in developing the volume. Con-spirando, translated as “breathing with” or “spiritual conspiracy,” tries to “weave a network of women throughout Latin America who are interested in feminist theology, spirituality and ecofeminism” while also holding women’s rituals (1996: 51). This collective publishes a magazine by the same name and operates a women’s center in Santiago in addition to focusing specifically on ecofeminist activities and analyses. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, from the tribal community of the Igorots in the Philippines, reflects on the spiritual links between women and nature in Igorot culture. But the “introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice seeds (HYV) has disrupted women’s spiritual leadership roles (in Ruether 1996: 105). Finally, Sarah Mvududu, with the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Project in Zimbabwe, claims “gender is also fundamental in understanding human interaction with the environment and with respect to natural resources” (in Ruether 1996: 144). She explains this by analyzing Shona beliefs and woodland management. Spirit mediums, often women, are deeply involved with sustainable woodland development in Zimbabwe and their connection to sacred places where trees are protected is requisite for reforestation.

Ecofeminism has not been without critics, from ecofeminists themselves as well as from others. Some of the most ardent critics question the woman/nature link that is sometimes placed at the core of ecofeminism, as evidenced in the title of such essays as Sherry Ortner’s “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” (1974). Because of the strong woman–nature connection assumed and developed in some ecofeminist positions, various feminists distance themselves from ecofeminism and suggest that it is essentialist in nature. Essentialism claims that cross-culturally and cross-historically those of a particular race, gender or other category share the same traits. Many expressions of feminism and ecofeminism argue against all such essentialist constructions, while others expressions seem to maintain essentialism. Kate Nash, in her 1994 essay “The Feminist Production of Knowledge: Is Deconstruction a Practice for Women?” published in Feminist Review, clarifies the “tension” between the “deconstructive politics of feminism and the assertions, or constructions of unified identity that feminists are frequently called on to make on behalf of the category ‘women’ which gives the project its political specificity” (Nash 1994: 75–6).

Various attempts at typologizing feminisms and ecofeminisms have been made and are helpful for clarifying the diverse perspectives, though it should be noted that even these designations are understood differently by different ecofeminists. Cultural and radical forms tend to idealize the feminine (therefore being labeled as essentialist more often) whereas activist (and theoretical) ecofeminists usually see their position as an analysis of a particular historical and cultural phenomenon. Some activist ecofeminists do engage in shifting political alliances that employ essentialist arguments functionally, but disengage from these alliances and reform others as requisite for effectively subverting patriarchal structures. One of the most helpful treatments of this continuing, sometimes heated, interaction among diverse manifestations of ecofeminism is Noel Sturgeon’s work Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action (1997). In addition to these groupings within ecofeminism are ecowomanism, mentioned above, with a focus on race as the primary lens through which to view oppressions, and animal rights-oriented ecofeminism. There are also those who consider themselves spiritual ecofeminists, such as Starhawk, embracing the religious, Earth-goddess-based components of the position.

Deep ecology and ecofeminism also engage in ideological debates. Many ecofeminists count themselves as deep ecologists and many deep ecologists count themselves as ecofeminists, while others might designate themselves as one but not the other. The background to the
differences between some deep ecologists and some ecofeminists grew from the feminist critique of the androcentric (male-centered) tendency of deep ecology in its earliest, and often militaristic or violent expressions, such as those expounded upon in Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. This approach has been dubbed eco-macho. Specific philosophical discussions took place under the auspices of the journal *Environmental Ethics*. Karen Warren and Michael Zimmerman published essays in this journal in 1987, both of which made explicit connections between feminism and deep ecology. In 1989, Warwick Fox’s essay “The Deep Ecology–Ecofeminism Debate and Its Parallels” was published in the journal and followed by a response by Deborah Slicer in 1995 entitled “Is there an ecofeminism–deep ecology ‘debate’?” Though the intricacies of the discussion cannot be expanded here, recognition of this ongoing tension (i.e., whether or not male–female dualism is the primary lens through which to analyze and critique destructive power relations) is requisite. One interpretation of ecofeminism that shifts this analysis is Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Plumwood’s central relational model for abusive Western power structures is master–slave rather than male–female.

Another area of ecofeminism that needs to be addressed is the connection with animal rights activism, as noted previously. Adams has made explicit links between androcentric, patriarchal treatment of other-than-human animals, particularly focusing on the meat-producing industries of the United States, and the exploitation of women. Her study, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, provides the foundation for this field of inquiry. Greta Gaard’s anthology *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* includes several essays that analyze the mutual oppressions of women and nonhuman animals in patriarchal societies. A prominent activist presence in this field is the organization Feminists for Animal Rights, whose co-founder, Marti Kheel, is also recognized as a leading ecofeminist voice. However, these perspectives are countered by another prominent author, Mary Stange. She has referred to herself as an ecofeminist, though one who is critical of much that is usually assumed as central to ecofeminism. Her books, *Woman the Hunter* and *Gun Women*, posit that women are natural hunters, therefore in a predatory relationship with animals. Stange suggests that the linkages between woman and other animals sometimes made by ecofeminists could justify continued essentialism and, therefore, continued domination of both women and other animals. Thus she claims that the woman–animal connection should be reevaluated.

As ecofeminism continues to shift and grow, different positions will surely form and surface, while other positions and alliances will fade away or be replaced by more urgent connections. Diverse understandings regarding the nature of the web of relationships between various spiritual/religious traditions and ecofeminism could persist. Ecofeminism and deep ecology may continue wrangling. Issues of racism, population growth and the valuing of some humans over others, or of all humans over other-than-human animals, will stir the thoughts and actions of ecofeminists on a global scale. Charlene Spretnak provides one perspective that summarizes ecofeminist ideological positions effectively: “An ontology based on dynamic and admittedly partial knowledge as well as awe toward the complexity of embodied and embedded existence would contribute substantially to the profound social transformation that is needed” (in Warren 1997: 435).

And Wangari Maathai, while speaking at the World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1991, succinctly stated the activist positions of ecofeminism: “Things will not just happen. Women must do something” (in Gaard 1993: 3).

Laura Hobgood-Oster

Further Reading


See also: Adams, Carol; Christ, Carol; Christianity(7d) – Feminist Theology; Christianity(7g) – Womanism; Daly, Mary; Gimbutas, Marija; Hunting Spirituality and Animism; Kenya Greenbelt Movement (and adjacent Wangari Maathai on Reforesting Kenya); Ruether, Rosemary Radford; Shiva, Vandana; Women and Animals.

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**Eco-justice in Theology and Ethics**

As planet Earth becomes hotter, stormier, less biologically diverse, more crowded, unequal and violent, a growing number of scholars in theology and ethics as well as discerning leaders and members of churches on six continents are joining the eco-justice movement. It involves environmentally responsive Christians (along with adherents of other world religions) who seek the well-being of Earth and people through practices and policies that serve ecological wholeness and social justice together (ecology + justice).

**Stepping into an Ecumenical Stream**

When cultural historians look back at the last third of the twentieth century with renewed appreciation for religion’s ambiguous power, they may see that religious leaders, scholars, and organizations had to relearn from the ecologists that, in addition to the human species and culture, nature in all its biodiversity is real and valuable. But historians should also see that twentieth-century environmentalism often lacked passion for, or adequate principles of, social justice. So, it was left to working groups of ecumenical theologians and socially engaged laity – informed by the insights of environmental activists and social ecologists, as well as by the Hebrew Bible’s Sabbath sensibility and Covenant ethics – to emphasize that there will be little environmental health without social justice, and vice versa. Once the ecumenical movement came to this realization, its gatherings and leaders began to express an inclusive vision of eco-justice that seeks what is ecologically fitting and socially fair through democratic decision making for the common good.

The global ecumenical movement and its member churches began to address the environmental challenge in the mid-1970s, following the U.N. Stockholm Conference on Environment and Development (1972). In response, the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1975) emphasized the need to establish a “just, sustainable, and participatory society” (JPSS). In his address to that Assembly, Australian biologist Charles Birch explained:

> A prior requirement of any global society is that it be so organized that human life and other living creatures on which human life depends can be sustained indefinitely within the limits of the earth. A second requirement is that it be sustained at a quality that makes possible fulfillment of human life for all people. A society so organized to achieve both these ends we can call a sustainable global society in contrast to the present unsustainable global society. If the life of the world is to be sustained and renewed . . . it will have to be with a new sort of science and technology governed by a new sort of economics and politics.

After Nairobi, there was significant responsive activity in ecumenical circles. A 1979 WCC-sponsored Conference at MIT on “Faith, Science and the Future” pursued the subject in more detail, and the next WCC Assembly (Vancouver, 1983) focused on the theme: Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. Even with these prominent initiatives, it took at least another decade to gain wide ecumenical acceptance of a fulsome eco-justice ethic that features basic moral norms of: solidarity with other people and creatures; ecological sustainability in development, technology and production; sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing that requires floors and ceilings for equitable consumption; and socially just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good of all.

**Coordinated Environmental Engagement by U.S. Churches**

In the United States the ecumenical environmental response has involved five emphases:

**Cultivating quality Eco-theology and Ethics**

It started with essays by forerunner Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler, and developed through the National Council of Churches Work Group on “Faith-Man-Nature” formed in 1963–64 by biologist Philip Joranson. Prominent theologians such as Daniel Day Williams, H. Paul Santmire, John B. Cobb, and Rosemary Radford Ruether soon added contributions. Roderick Nash tracked this early period in *The Rights of Nature*. But Nash did not discern the beginnings of a theological bent toward eco-justice ethics and action (exemplified by a popular 1971 Friendship Press anthology entitled, *A New Ethic for a New Earth*). He also overlooked what the ecumenical denominations actually said and did in proximity to the
first Earth Day, and was unaware of extensive church engagement with hunger and energy policies from the mid-1970s forward.

Eco-theology and ethics languished in the 1980s, and then developed with vigor again in the 1990s. Now diverse voices representing both genders and a rainbow of people across the Christian spectrum are contributing, and thinking about well-rounded praxis, as can be seen in the growing body of writing on eco-theology and ethics. Yet, few theological schools give prominence to this important advance in theology and ethics; most seminary and religious studies programs only offer electives on this subject, with very few fieldwork opportunities. To refocus higher education in general and religious studies in particular to teach for the environment and to educate for sustainability is an unfinished, daunting agenda.

**Fostering sustainable food systems and lifestyles**

During the 1970s, progressive churches were prominently involved in struggles to protect the rights of farm workers. National boycotts of grapes and lettuce, spearheaded by the United Church of Christ, lent strong support to the United Farm Workers. Boycotts (selective buying) of other commodity producers because they violate labor rights have also occurred with less fanfare in recent years.

Meanwhile, the churches working together in the National Council of Churches became quite knowledgeable about U.S. government food and farm programs, as well as problems of international aid and trade, and the churches invested considerable energy in leadership development for hunger education/action through new denominational initiatives and the ecumenical effort named WHEAT – World Hunger Education/Action Together – (which I chaired). The hunger programs institutionalized by the churches in the late 1970s gave some attention and project funding to the environmental dimensions of sustainable food systems (e.g., how to decrease monoculture, pesticide use, export cropping, and grain-fed meat consumption, while using appropriate technology for food production in poor countries). Today we face deepening problems of inappropriate technology in export crops, controlled by corporations that patent and produce genetically modified organisms (GMOs) such as pesticide-resistant plants or “killer” seeds. So far, ecumenical critique of these ominous developments seems muted. The churches need to take seriously the assertion by Lester Brown (Founder of the World Watch Institute), “We need an environmental revolution of an order of magnitude that matches the agricultural and industrial revolutions, and at the same time transforms them.”

As the crisis of family farmers deepened in the 1980s and 1990s, church groups, influenced by Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, and Dean Freudenberger, began to focus on the need for sustainable agriculture, church- and community-based agriculture, and local food security. In the U.S., much of the solid analysis, education and advocacy has been led by creative clergy – often Lutherans – working with centers for land stewardship and rural life, especially in the upper Plains states. Roman Catholics have approached these concerns in a different style featuring regional pastoral letters (drafted in both of the following cases by John Hart of Carroll College, Montana). In 1984, Catholic bishops of 12 Midwestern states issued *Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland*. In February 2001, 12 Northwestern Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter on the *Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*. That international watershed is threatened not only by inappropriate dams and logging, but by water diversion for irrigated agriculture, and a regional population explosion of high consumers.

Speaking of consumption, the pioneering work of campus minister William E. Gibson and the Eco-Justice Project at Cornell University fostered quality education for lifestyle change as an emphasis of the church’s hunger programs. It focused on reduced consumption, voluntary conservation, appropriate diet and recreation, plus public engagement. In the 1990s, education for lifestyle integrity returned to prominence, thanks to the initiative of another regional ecumenical project called Earth Ministry, based in Seattle.

**Advocating responsible energy and climate change policies**

Before the first oil shock from OPEC, U.S. churches were not involved in energy policy debates, viewing them as too technical or merely political. But in 1974, the Division of Church and Society of the NCC formed a committee of inquiry, chaired by Margaret Mead and Rene Dubos, on the use of plutonium as a commercial nuclear fuel. When, in October 1975, the committee proposed a policy statement condemning such use of plutonium, the nuclear industry and utility executives attacked the NCC for being irresponsible. A resolution calling for a moratorium was substituted for the policy statement, and in the same action, the Council mandated a broad study on The Ethical Implications of Responsible Energy Production and Use. The study was directed by the late Chris Cowap, NCC Director of Economic Justice, who wrote her own concise, instructive overview of that highly conflicted study to conclude a book I edited on *Energy Ethics*. Her description of the emphases and outcome of the three-year study involving a panel of 120 knowledgeable persons indicates how intellectually demanding and politically sophisticated was this timely ecumenical endeavor.

The energy study impelled the ecumenical church to be powerfully present among competing interests with contradictory answers to the environmental challenge. The NCC energy policy study coincided with the grassroots movement to delegitimize nuclear power and to take a “soft energy path” (as promoted by Amory Lovins and his
Rocky Mountain Institute). It was followed by interchurch programs to foster local energy responsibility, by substantive denominational energy policy statements, and by interfaith efforts to demand corporate accountability to communities on the part of utilities with CO₂-emitting or nuclear power plants.

Local congregations, however, tended to limit their participation to lowering the thermostats on their heating systems, and a few to retrofitting their buildings for energy-efficiency. At the turn of the century, thanks to a creative project called Episcopal Power and Light, and federal government funding for an "energy star" program, more congregations began to take energy conservation seriously.

Now, three decades later, the U.S. has come back full circle to many of the same aspects of energy policy that the 1970s NCC study explored: fossil fuel dependence, reliance on dangerous nuclear and CO₂-emitting coal-fired generators, lack of public accountability by power companies, and lethargic federal support for renewable energy technologies, conservation incentives, mass transit or carbon taxes to reduce consumption.

Moreover, the world now faces an urgent need to halt global warming, regarding which the U.S. – with 4 percent of the world’s population, but responsible for 25 percent of the world’s heat-trapping gasses – is dragging its feet. Ecumenical work on climate change – the world’s most urgent moral issue – emerged through workshops in different parts of the world organized by Canadian churchman David Hallman as a way to focus on the links between economic injustice and environmental destruction. WCC workshops and its 1988 study paper on “Climate Change and the Quest for Sustainable Societies,” plus reinforcing reports and statements by member communions, presented scientific facts about climate change and theological-ethical reflections on socio-ecological justice. This was followed by a worldwide petition campaign involving the churches and other faith communities, which got the attention of government officials. It positioned an ecumenical team of church representatives to become active advocates at climate-change negotiations from Kyoto forward.

Ecumenical advocacy on this issue emphasizes the disproportionate impact of climate change on the poor and the responsibility of the most industrialized countries to demonstrate global responsibility and fairness to developing countries by making real cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, rather than just relying on "trading" emission credits. Toward this end, churches in the industrialized countries are engaged in advocacy work with public officials. Currently in the U.S., this is done through Interfaith Climate Change Campaigns – that have emerged in about half of the fifty states – coordinated by the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group working with state councils of churches.

Community organizing for environmental justice
The U.S. churches most distinctive involvement with the environmental movement has been to demand environmental justice. The UCC Commission on Racial Justice first prepared, published and circulated documentation about severe racial and class inequity in locating toxic dumps and incinerators. The churches also took the initiative to contact community organizations fighting toxic facilities, to bring some of their leaders together, and to find funding that enabled community organizations to challenge unjust waste management. Though the Citizens’ Clearing House on Hazardous Wastes (now the Center for Health, Environment and Justice) deserves more credit for starting this kind of organizing, the ecumenical churches helped to make environmental justice more possible for communities of color, rural areas, and Indian nations.

By late 1987, these initiatives were being coordinated through the NCC Eco-Justice Working Group (EJWG) formed the year before, with Chris Cowap as staff director, and myself as founding co-chair. Support of community organizing for environmental justice led the EJWG to subsidize participation by leaders of community groups in the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Washington, D.C., 1991), where they pushed the leaders of established environmental organizations to support basic principles of environmental justice, and to help “build a movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities. . . and to secure our political, economic, and cultural liberation.” Lutheran layman Jim Schwab pointed out in Deeper Shades of Green that this unique summit “drew more than 600 activists, combining the colors of the rainbow in one giant sharing and strategizing meeting that has literally and permanently changed the complexion of the U.S. environmental movement.” The environmental justice emphasis also strengthened collaboration between para-church groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at United Nations forums such as the Rio Earth Summit (1992), the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1993) and the Beijing Conference on Women (1995).

The environmental justice focus carried over into the work of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (involving Christians and Jews), which provided funding for the NCC to hold special meetings with leaders of the Black Churches and the Orthodox communions. But preoccupation with community organizing to combat toxics tended for a time to preempt other styles of engagement and to narrow eco-justice work to become a mere subset of economic justice advocacy.

Developing leadership for earth community ministry
At this point, the churches remembered that it is not enough to support grassroots groups of activists siding
with the powerless in ecologically degraded urban and rural communities. A mature agenda of environmental responsibility is also concerned with preserving biodiversity and protecting special places. To grapple with this broad agenda the churches must continuously develop leaders and nurture members, gain a voice in the media as well as the attention of public officials, and challenge indifferent or hostile institutions to care about the web of creation and human relations with otherkind. In other words, for there to be significant movement toward eco-justice that responds to the oppressed, there must be more pedagogy of the privileged and careful structuring of well-rounded environmental ministry.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the NCC Eco-Justice Working Group and the U.S. Catholic Conference, utilizing foundation funding obtained by the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, published educational resources and invested in leadership development to integrate creation-care into parish life – always with a strong social justice component. The NCC group has continued to gather its grassroots network annually to share the latest educational resources, strengthen community engagement and focus public policy advocacy efforts. Aware congregations and ecumenical groups can move most effectively in a similar direction, not by starting from scratch, but by utilizing the ecumenical movement’s resources for faith communities and building on its pioneering eco-justice initiatives.

Despite the emergence of ecumenical leadership for eco-justice, few Christian communions have actually institutionalized a ministry of care for creation. Many congregations and their leaders remain unaware of or indifferent to the eco-justice ethic. Church bodies and congregations still tend to affirm and practice social “stewardship” apart from ecological responsibility. Only a scattering of congregations care for the place where they are as much as they are for the people in their pews. They have yet to grasp the depth of the eco-justice crisis, or to see mission in terms of communiting and suffering with creation while building just and sustainable community. Except for some recycling and modest retrofitting of church buildings to conserve energy, congregations typically continue to conduct religious business as usual with little time for the most basic human vocation of earthkeeping (see Gen. 2:15).

Concluding Observations
The preceding story of ecumenical eco-justice journeying shows that leaders of the religious and environmental communities can positively influence each other in a reciprocal relation that needs to continue. On the one hand, environmentalists have pushed the ecumenical churches to rethink theology, ethics, and mission in light of the ideal of a sustainable society, to which the churches came slowly. While the ecumenical movement affirmed its social calling, in light of Jesus’ public ministry, to care for and seek distributive justice to other humans, the environmental movement was focusing world attention on the plight and rights of the rest of nature, challenging the narrowly human-centered preoccupations of modern culture. Environmentalists, in addition to clarifying global ecological problems, contributed important concepts such as carrying capacity and interconnectedness. They defined the norm of sustainability in terms of ecological integrity, which forbids human activities that diminish Earth’s bio-diversity or life-carrying capacity. The environmental movement also asserted that humans are called to feel respect and show care for all forms of life, not just other humans – an emphasis that broadens the meaning of “solidarity.”

Instructed by these ecological insights, as well as critical social analysis, ecumenical ethicists came to a holistic understanding of what eco-justice requires to meet the world’s dual crisis: degradation of the natural environment and oppression of poor people. So, on the other hand, ecumenical eco-justice sensibility about human–Earth relations has positively influenced the environmental movement. It has pushed environmental organizations to explore beliefs about what is sacred, and (moving beyond the insights of environmental philosophy and ecological science) to broaden their thinking about ecological sustainability to encompass principles of social and economic justice. That advance was demonstrated vividly in two events that bookended the 1990s: the October 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (discussed above), and the Earth Council’s completion and release in March 2000 of a peoples’ Earth Charter, a global ethics document that, without using the term “eco-justice”, states ethical principles expressive of solidarity, sustainability, sufficiency, and participation – in that order.

In retrospect, a posture that first emerged after the first Earth Day to mediate hostile competition between social justice and environmental action groups turns out to offer much more than “tradeoffs.” Eco-justice is a dynamic framework for theological study, ethical reflection, and practical action. The eco-justice movement, knowing that justice and sustainability increase together or not at all, melds concerns for the natural world and for human life in ways that foster both environmental wholeness and economic justice. Eco-justice vision and values reshape the way we approach ecology, justice and faith – stimulating broader expressions of environmentalism, challenging social activists to build sustainable community, and recycling religious doctrine, liturgy and social teachings to focus on the well-being of Earth community.

Dieter T. Hessel
Further Reading
See also: Christianity(8) – Ecumenical Movement International; Christianity(9) – Christianity’s Ecological Reformation; Christianity and Sustainable Communities; Cobb, John; Environmental Ethics; Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism.

Eco-Kabbalah

This term refers to a school of thought within Judaism first articulated near the turn of the twenty-first century that turns to the Jewish mystical tradition (Kabbalah) as a source of inspiration for a contemporary religiosity emphasizing the holiness of the natural world. It may be seen as a Jewish parallel to the “Creation Spirituality” (not to be confused with Creationism) tendency found in certain contemporary Christian thinkers.

The growing awareness of ecological crisis in these decades led to a reconsideration of the central role of faith in creation in pre-modern Jewish theologies. Most modern (nineteenth/twentieth-century) versions of Judaism downplayed the theme of creation, “conceding” speculation on the world’s origins as an area better pursued by scientists than by theologians. Outside of rather narrow ultra-Orthodox circles, few Jews cared to defend the biblical account of creation, even if extended to refer to seven “eras” rather than the literal “days.” This stood in sharp contrast to the classical theologies of the Middle Ages, both the philosophical thought of Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) and the mysticism of the Zohar (ca. 1290), in which faith in creation stood at the very heart of Judaism’s self-understanding. Nevertheless, the Genesis creation narrative retains a prominent place in the religious life of contemporary Jews as the source of the weekly Sabbath celebration, the defining ritual act of traditional Jewish piety. Celebration of the Sabbath is portrayed as an act of human participation in the divine rest that constitutes the fulfillment of creation. There thus remains a sense, mostly undefined, that faith in God as Creator is an essential part of Judaism, despite Jews’ willingness to accept the legitimacy of scientific cosmology and cosmogony.

Kabbalah, an esoteric Judaism dating at least to the twelfth century, offers an alternative version of creation, one that has been more attractive to some contemporary seekers. Some have even claimed parallels between Kabbalistic speculations and the language of contemporary science. The Kabbalists see creation as emerging out of God, an energy-flow that both embodies and hides the elusive divine presence within the ever-changing physical forms that constitute our world. God is the underlying source of all reality, the “deep well” or “quarry” out of which being is drawn, the “Ground of Being” (to readapt a phrase from Christian theologian Paul Tillich, itself echoing Jewish mystical usages) rather than a supreme Creator who stands outside the universe as created. The divine flow of energy constantly proceeds from Eyn Sof, the infinite and completely mysterious entity that contains all of being, transcending any distinction between past, present, and future. The creative energy of the cosmos, often depicted as a divine desire for self-expression, first emerges in a realm described as “Nothing” or perhaps “non-being.” From there it emerges into a primal point of reality, continuing to expand and grow through various stages (named sefirot or primal numbers, and constituting the essential subject of most Kabbalistic speculation) until it manifest as Shekhinah, or the “indwelling” divine presence (often depicted in feminine terms) immanent throughout the universe. God is thus seen as the mysterious core of being, the natural world serving as a “garb” within which the divine is hidden. God and world are primarily related as deep structure and surface manifestation, rather than the conventionally understood Creator and creation. (This is not to say that theistic formulations of God as Creator are entirely absent from Kabbalistic sources. The mystical tradition is imperfectly grafted onto a much older and highly developed tradition of personalist theism, which it seeks to absorb and transform, but never to deny.)

Such a theology implies that reverence for God and respect for nature are inseparable from one another. God is present throughout the natural world; indeed it is primarily through nature that God is experienced and comes to be known. It offers a version of Judaism that appreciates the work of botanist, zoologist, chemist, and physicist...
as each uncovering some part of the single truth that constitutes *raza dim'hem'necta*, the mystery of faith. Rather than feeling threatened by scientific understanding, as so much of religion has in recent history, this renewed Kabbalah positions itself as a poetic meta-science that both transcends and encompasses scientific achievement, much as *Eyn Sof* both transcends and embraces the universe that is the object of scientific observation.

This theology of creation is complemented by a revelation theology (always essential in Judaism) that understands God’s self-revelation as a constant process, symbolically encapsulated in Moses’ and Israel’s experience at Mount Sinai. The content of revelation is essentially nothing “new,” but a making manifest of that which has been true since creation: the realization that God underlies all of being and is thus to be discovered and encountered in every time and place. This revelation, however, serves as well to make a demand upon the faithful that they act and indeed shape the lives of both individual and community according to norms that reflect and respond to this great truth. In traditional language this shift is indicated by the move from God’s ten utterances of creation (“Let there be” in Genesis 1) to the ten commandments of Sinai, restating the original utterances in the imperative mode.

This theoretical framework is articulated in various ways in the writings of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Daniel Matt, Arthur Green, and others. Its historical roots can be seen in several of the great mystical theologies of Judaism in prior ages. Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), the Zohar, Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov (ca. 1700–1760), and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) have all had a role in shaping this contemporary understanding. Eco-Kabbalah also contains a series of implied attitudes and norms of behavior (here the writings of Arthur Waskow especially come to mind). It is an activist strain within the Jewish community as well as an intellectual/religious tendency in Jewish thought. The reappropriation of Kabbalistic language by postmodern Jewish seekers takes place in an age when vast numbers of Westerners are turning to the neglected wisdom traditions of humanity (Asian, Native American, etc.) in hope of guidance to transform behaviors that threaten the very existence of humanity and the planet we inhabit. The Eco-Kabbalist believes that such wisdom is to be found within mystical Judaism, needing only to be liberated from the anti-materialist bias that is so pervasive in the medieval Western tradition. Such classical biblical and Jewish forms as the sabbatical year (requiring that farmland be left fallow for one in every seven years), the Sukkot festival with its supplications for the rainy season, and the annual celebration of a New Year of Trees all invite adaptation to the needs of our time. The last of these, the Tu biSh’vat festival (occurring in January or February), has taken hold in large parts of the Jewish community as an occasion for ecological awareness. The formerly obscure Kabbalistic custom of a *seder* or symbolic banquet for that day has been adapted by several modern Jewish movements, each of which has published its own text for a celebration that highlights environmental education. These and other rituals throughout the year are reinterpreted as reminders of ecological awareness and opportunities for heightened sensitivity to environmental issues in the Jewish context.

Arthur Green

Further Reading
See also: Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Jewish Law and Animal Experimentation; Kabbalah and Eco-theology; Vegetarianism and Kabbalah.

Eco-kosher — See Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Waskow, Rabbi Arthur.

Ecological Anthropology

What is the place of humans in nature? What should it be?
The first question is pivotal for ecological anthropology, the second for environmental philosophy and ethics, and also for a more recent field, spiritual ecology. Probably both are very ancient and elemental questions of most thoughtful humans, the former since humans evolved into self-aware and rational beings, the latter since they became spiritual beings. Viable answers to such questions are indispensable for any ecologically sustainable green society. In most cultures, religion is usually decisive in answering such questions. Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions, ecological anthropology has usually ignored the relationships between religion and nature.

It was not until the pioneering field research of anthropologist Julian Steward (1902–1972) in the Great Basin and Plateau region of the United States, especially among the Shoshone, that the place of humans in nature was addressed through ecological observations on cultural behavior. The result was his 1938 *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Socio-political Groups*, wherein lie the roots of cultural ecology. Steward’s theory and method of cultural
ecology was elaborated in his 1955 Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution. He rejected the dominant theoretical position in American anthropology during the formative phase of his career – that usually cultural factors alone are sufficient to explain culture. Steward was not an environmental determinist, but sought to identify the aspects of a particular culture that are most influenced by its environment through field research focused on the natural resources on which the society is dependent for survival along with the technology used to extract and process them; the ways the society organizes work in order to accomplish this; and the ways these two factors delimit the culture core, those aspects of culture most closely related to ecology. Yet Steward did not address the relationship between religion and nature, either in theory or fieldwork.

Roy Rappaport (1926–1997) was the first ecological anthropologist to encompass religion in his theory and fieldwork. Rappaport and others transformed cultural ecology into ecological anthropology during the second half of the twentieth century. They biologized cultural ecology by applying concepts from biological ecology: population as the unit of study, the environment as ecosystem, and the ecological processes of energy flow, nutrient cycling, and adaptation. All of these were in turn related to carrying capacity and limiting factors; that is, the level at which a given population can be sustained in a particular habitat without irreversible natural resource depletion and environmental degradation; and the factors which regulate the population below that threshold. Rappaport applied these principles in a detailed case study of the Tsembaga Maring in his 1964 Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea.

Yet another innovation in ecological anthropology developed by Rappaport was his argument that ritual functions as a mechanism regulating the Tsembaga population below the carrying capacity of their habitat. Accordingly, in Rappaport’s empirical and theoretical work, the questions of what is and should be the place of humans in nature began to be addressed in more systematic and sophisticated ways than ever before. Rappaport worked through these and other ideas on the role of religion in human evolution and ecology in his subsequent more theoretical books, Ecology, Meaning and Ritual in 1979, and Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity in 1999.

A third major contributor to the advancement of ecological anthropology was Marvin Harris (1929–2001) through his development of cultural materialism as a research strategy. He laid the groundwork for cultural materialism in his monumental inventory, The Rise of Anthropological Theory in 1968. In 1979 Harris elaborated on this research strategy and refuted competing approaches in his Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture. Harris divided up the cultural system into three components. Infrastructure is the product of the interactions of the environment, population and technology. Structure refers to the local domestic economy and the wider political economy. Superstructure encompasses the ideational realm of the cultural system including religion, myth, and the arts.

Harris asserted that infrastructure was most basic and influential because it functioned as the ultimate adaptive mechanism for the very survival and maintenance of individuals and society. Therefore, he considered infrastructure to be the primary cause of most of the rest of the cultural system including religion. Accordingly, Harris assigned research priority to infrastructure instead of superstructure.

Harris demonstrated the power of cultural materialism with ingenious explanatory analyses of many cultural puzzles: among them, religious phenomena such as Aztec ritual human sacrifice as a source of sorely needed quality protein; the sacred cow of India as far more useful alive for farm-field plowing, fertilizer, and milk; and the Islamic and Jewish prohibitions on eating pork as the most effective way to cope with a problematic animal in their desert environments. Pigs are not well adapted to such an environment and they can transmit diseases and compete with humans for the same foods. His analyses appeared in a series of articles in the magazine Natural History as well as in his numerous books and other publications.

A fourth major figure is Eugene N. Anderson, especially his 1996 Ecologies of the Heart: Emotion, Belief, and the Environment. His basic argument is that the sustainable use and management of resources depends not only on economic cost-benefit calculations, but also on beliefs, emotions, rituals, and symbols. Traditional indigenous societies that invest heart and soul as well as body and mind in caring for their environment usually do so successfully. Resource strategies linked with religion that may appear superficially to be irrational to an ignorant outsider might actually be ecologically sound, grounded in intimate daily observations of nature over many years or generations. In contrast, so-called modern scientific, technocratic, and bureaucratic resource and environmental policies of centralized governments have failed more often than not. They usually lack not only meaningful experience on the ground locally, but appropriate religious motivations, guidelines, rituals, and the like. Anderson demonstrates these principles with data and insights from his fieldwork on forest management by Mayan farmers in southern Mexico as well as fisheries and other resource management by communities in the Pacific and Asia. In the process Anderson counters the simplistic reductionism of extremists from cultural materialism, evolutionary ecology, and postmodernism. Instead, he prescribes an intermediate path that combines reliable information, rational decision making, and positive emotion focused on reverential respect and care for nature.
rather than simply the obsessive pursuit of resources as commodities for merely material ends.

A fifth and final individual to single out here as an outstanding pioneer in the development of ecological anthropology is John Bennett in his 1976 *The Ecological Transition: Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation* and other publications. Bennett characterizes the ecological transition as the global movement from societies in relative and dynamic ecological equilibrium to an accelerating number in disequilibrium. Equilibrium societies are small, sustainable, and green cultures focused on subsistence, food sharing, and kinship. In general, most traditional indigenes lived in some degree of balance with their environment. However, other than discussing Rappaport’s work, Bennett did not address the possible relationships between religion and nature, even though he conducted fieldwork in the religious communes of Hutterites in Saskatchewan, Canada.

In contrast, disequilibrium societies are large-scale urban and industrial cultures. Their population as well as needs and desires have exceeded the carrying capacity of their habitats, and consequently they must import vast quantities of resources extracted worldwide from distant environments through extensive trade networks. Disequilibrium societies have an extraordinarily high impact on the natural environment from local to global levels as agents of ecocide, ethnocide, and genocide. Examples of disequilibrium societies are the nation-states of the European colonial systems during the last five centuries. In recent decades many disequilibrium societies have become increasingly obsessed with materialism, consumerism, and capitalism like a fanatical religion of greed.

The nearly 7000 distinct cultures existing in the world today fall along a continuum from equilibrium to disequilibrium, with the net trend shifting toward greater disequilibrium, and this spiraling beyond control. The logical conclusion of Bennett’s concept of the ecological transition is that global environmental catastrophe is imminent. Bennett’s basic idea has been independently envisioned and variously labeled and described by deep thinkers from a wide diversity of backgrounds and professions, an example of the convergence in environmental thought during recent decades. Some of these deep thinkers, although not ecological anthropologists, have been pioneers in spiritual ecology.

Of course, many others have contributed to ecological anthropology, but here it must suffice to summarize their work as three trends: a proliferation of exploratory approaches; a very substantial expansion in the spatial and temporal scale of the phenomena researched; and far greater concern for practical environmental problems and issues.

Several new approaches emerged mainly in the 1990s. Behavioral or evolutionary ecology, inspired mostly by neo-Darwinian, microeconomic, and game theories, concentrates on the costs and benefits of exploiting different resources. Historical ecology emphasizes how human societies change their natural environment and this in turn changes them. Political ecology focuses on power differentials regarding resource use and environmental problems like pollution in relation to colonialism, poverty, racism, and injustice. Postmodern environmental anthropology analyzes and challenges basic ideas as relativistic constructions, such as nature, wilderness, environment, ecosystem, environmentalism, conservation, sustainability, and development. Postmodern and other revisionists have also challenged dualistic thinking such as the dichotomies of culture/nature and natural/supernatural. In addition, during recent years more attention has been afforded to specific events, individual actors, and decision making in the processes of adapting at the behavioral level to environmental constraints, hazards, stresses, and perturbations as well as opportunities. Among all the approaches previously mentioned, only spiritual ecology directly explores the relationships between religion and nature.

A second recent and related development has been to consider local communities as linked to an ascending hierarchy of more inclusive systems – regional, national, international, and global. Thus, the spatial, geographic, and cultural scales have expanded, as has the temporal one, the latter with historical ecology. Furthermore, the spatial dimension is increasingly viewed from the perspective of political economy combined with social and economic justice, the pivotal concerns of political ecology. Of course, historically the geographic and political expansion of the so-called world religions like Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam impacted in varied ways and degrees on local cultures, religions, and environments, but this topic has yet to be pursued by ecological anthropologists.

The third major recent trend in ecological anthropology is now called environmental anthropology. It is more applied, largely stimulated by the growing gravity and urgency of ecological crises from the local to the global levels. Furthermore, beyond an activist concern with practical environmental problems and issues, environmental anthropology takes advantage of the latest technologies such as satellite images of land cover or vegetation changes to document and assess human environmental impacts from the regional to the global levels. However, it has largely ignored religion.

This trend toward the greater application of ecological anthropology to practical environmental matters is also stimulated by growing concern over the tragedy of tropical deforestation. That and related issues nourished a new frontier in science largely precipitated by biologist Edward O. Wilson in the 1990s, biodiversity studies and conservation. (The usual measure of biodiversity is the number of species in an area.) An increasing number of anthropologists and linguists have recognized what the
present author calls the diversity principle – the geographical coincidence of high biological diversity with high cultural and linguistic diversity (Posey 1999). Thus, whenever biological diversity is threatened and eroded, so is cultural and linguistic diversity, and vice versa. This applies as well to religion as an integral component of most cultural systems. A correlate of the diversity principle is that the loss of cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity also involves a loss of local ecological knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. In recent years there has been growing appreciation of traditional environmental knowledge – that indigenous and folk societies who interact in an intimate way on a daily basis with their habitat for subsistence have an enormous wealth of reliable empirical information about local soils, plants, animals, and their web of interrelationships in ecosystems. This knowledge has become a Western research focus, especially in ethnoecology, but only recently has it begun to be linked with spiritual ecology (Posey 1999).

Thanks to the contributions of Steward, Rappaport, Harris, Anderson, and Bennett, among others, ecological anthropology provides numerous heuristic models of sustainable green societies and also of maladaptive ones through its accumulating repertoire of case studies. Simultaneously, it provides a defense of indigenous and other societies while critiquing the external forces imposing change on them, such as colonialism and secular models of development from so-called Western civilization.

Today ecological anthropology is mature and thriving, as evidenced by the publication of a special journal called Human Ecology since 1972; the establishment of the Anthropology and Environment Section as a unit within the American Anthropological Association in 1996; its internet forum called Earth-l hosted by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Georgia; a second generation of textbooks; and special training and research programs and/or concentrations of ecological and/or environmental anthropologists at several universities including Arizona, California (Davis and Santa Barbara), Georgia, Hawai‘i, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts (Amherst), Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina (Chapel Hill), Rutgers, and Washington (Seattle). This regional diversification of academic interest contrasts sharply with the prior heavy concentration of ecological studies in anthropology at Columbia University during the 1950s–1970s. However, as yet little attention is afforded to spiritual ecology.

The greatest achievement of ecological anthropology may yet be the demonstration that many societies have created a benign place in nature or a viable niche, and thereby flourished for centuries or even millennia. An extremely important correlate is that the human species is not necessarily inherently anti-nature, environmentally destructive, maladaptive, or ecocidal. Indeed, historical ecology reveals that the more serious environmental problems are remarkably recent, largely a result of colonialism, industrialization, and “modernization.” For five centuries, and increasingly so in the last five decades, there has been an alarming and accelerating synergy of ecocide, ethnocide, and genocide throughout planet Earth. From the perspective of ecological anthropology, nevertheless, it is quite possible for humans to harmoniously coexist within the biosphere far into the future, if, among other things, they can learn and follow the knowledge and wisdom of many past generations that have achieved this so successfully. Religion must be an integral part of such adaptations though instilling viable environmental values, reverence for nature, and other means. The most formidable barrier to this is that, like a cancer, a most powerful expansionist, predatory, maladaptive, global, and secular political economy is gradually degrading and even destroying previously adaptive local cultural and environmental systems.

Humans interact with their natural environment in emotional and spiritual as well as intellectual ways (Anderson 1996). A growing number of deep thinkers are pointing to religion as the single most important consideration in dealing with and alleviating ecological crises, because, in general, religion is usually the primary source for the particular worldview, attitudes, and values determining how most people interact with their habitat. Undoubtedly, some very fundamental changes in the way humans relate to nature need to be made, if humanity and the biosphere are to survive and flourish. In this connection, a systematic in-depth assessment of the relationships between religions and environments as pioneered by Rappaport and others is of increasing practical importance. In the face of this global holocaust, spiritual ecology, which emerged largely in the 1990s, has a very special strategic role to play in promoting a healthy coevolution of humanity and the biosphere in the future.

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Further Reading


*See also:* American Indians as “First Ecologists”; Anthropologists; Domestication; Ecology and Religion; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Harris, Marvin; Hunting and the Origins of Religion; Rappaport, Roy A. (“Skip”); Religio-Ecological Perspective on Religion and Nature; Sky; Traditional Ecological Knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada; Wilson, Edward O.; Wonder toward Nature.

**Ecology and Religion**

An ecological approach to religion requires taking into account the environmental constraints within which organisms seek to survive, as well as the fact that being an organism entails being subject to internal constraints, constraints which are themselves the result of adaptive evolutionary strategies. In this regard, a properly understood ecological approach, instead of contradicting, encompasses the methods employed by biologists, ethnologists and cognitive scientists. From this unified perspective, religions can be understood as the attempts to come to terms with constraints of all kinds, a task that is accomplished by exploring through speculation and ritual the range of options open to the kind of organisms that humans happen to be. But because of the peculiar human capacity to use complex tools and symbols – including tools to make tools and symbols to refer to symbols – a peculiarity that necessarily entails establishing distance between oneself and the rest of reality, religions must also be understood as attempts to escape limitations of all kinds, an undertaking that involves the postulation of mystical or utopian realms. In either case, just as it happens with other natural processes, the symbolic systems, ritual practices or mystical speculations generated by human beings can metastasize, taking forms that instead of furthering survival go against it. In order to approach religion from an ecological angle, therefore, one needs to consider instances of adaptation as well as of maladaptation; indeed, given that adaptation is a process rather than a state, one must pay attention to the precariousness inherent in all social and ideological formations. At the same time, just as the reference to a precariousness that is “inherent” in social formations points in the direction of certain epistemological assumptions, we must assume that during certain long evolutionary segments – which for us human beings constitute reality *tout court* – certain constraints, which are also enablers, will be at work, underlying the “social constructions” that seem to have become the primary concern of social scientists.

In order to do justice to the role played by the ecosystem in the development of a religious system we must place societies along a continuum according to their size and complexity. At one end we find small-scale societies, whose symbolic-ritual systems seem to have emerged in order to insure the maintenance of an equilibrium between a human population and its ecosystem, while at the other we encounter vast social systems whose religions seem to play no ecological role whatsoever. As we shall see, however, even in small-scale societies it is difficult to discern the role played by religion in ensuring adaptation to an ecosystem, that difficulty being multiplied when one deals with large-scale, especially industrial, societies. The classical example of an ecological approach to the ritual system of a small-scale society is found in Roy Rappaport’s *Pigs for the Ancestors*, a study of the ritual system of the Tsembaga of New Guinea. In this book, Rappaport postulates that the Tsembaga ritual slaughter and consumption of pigs – the *kaiko* – functions as a regulatory mechanism that keeps within acceptable parameters the size of the herd of pigs, the intake of animal protein, and the amount of female labor needed to take care of them as well as of the gardens. The picture presented by Rappaport is one in which all the components of Tsembaga reality – ecological, nutritional, social, military, ideological – constitute a coherent totality. But Rappaport’s reconstruction has not gone unchallenged; for example, Lees has called attention to a passage of *Pigs for the Ancestors* in which Rappaport mentions how “men with few or no pigs responded to the talk of an approaching *kaiko* by attempting to acquire animals,” thus questioning the regulatory function of the slaughter of pigs (Rappaport 1984: 159; see Lees 2001). Similarly, Gillison has pointed out the contradiction between Rappaport’s report that “the Tsembaga have difficulty in increasing their herds” and his “assertion that Tsembaga herds spontaneously grow to unmanageable proportions” (Gillison 2001: 293). Whatever the results of the debates among New Guinea specialists, it can be said that *Pigs for the Ancestors* together with Rappaport’s related studies provide a model for understanding the role of ritual in the creation and maintenance not just of social solidarity, à la Durkheim, but in the maintenance of the conditions within which human organisms can survive. It must be added that, despite its flaws, Rappaport’s model has been used by a classical historian, Michael Jameson, to show the correlation between the Greek sacrificial calendar and the consumption of animal protein; Jameson having also shown the continuity of that correlation in Greece in recent times. The persistence of this connection shows that even in a modern society such as Greece one can still see the ritual calendar being involved, however minimally, in the regulation of meat.
consumption – a significant fact, given that virtually all the meat consumed in the ancient Greek world came from animals that had been ritually slaughtered.

Besides studying the Tsembaga and making important contributions to the theory of ritual and sacredness, Rappaport proposed a distinction that is useful for an ecological approach to all symbolic systems. He distinguished between “cognized” and “operational models,” the former referring to the systems of meaning created by human actors, whereas the latter refers to the organization of nature. Rappaport’s thesis is that there is a correlation between the level of discrepancy between the cognized and the operational models and the degree of endangerment of the individuals who generate the cognized models. An example of a situation in which there seems to be a consonance between cognized and operational models, that is, of the way in which a symbolic system is used to regulate the relation between a human population and its ecosystem, is provided by the Tukano of the Colombian northwest Amazon, studied by Reichel-Dolmatoff. The Tukano understand the cosmos as having been designed by Sun-Father, an anthropomorphic divinity who created only a limited number of animals and plants, which he placed in a restricted space. These limitations have led the Tukano to understand the world in a manner that resembles modern systems analysis – that is, as a system in which the balance between them and their ecosystem is kept in place through the regulation of the input and output of finite energy. This circulation of energy is represented in sexual terms, in such a way that repressed sexual energy is believed not to have been wasted but to have gone into the ecosystem. In practical terms, this results in periods of sexual continence which, in combination with herbal oral contraceptives, keep the population size under control. Dietary restrictions, continence, and taboos involving menstruation are enforced during periods of hunting, thus reinforcing the regulatory function of sexual abstinence. The role of the supernatural realm in the regulation of hunting is shown by the role of the “master of animals,” who jealously guards his flock, as well as by the shaman, who controls all the activities through which the population interacts with their ecosystem – hunting, fishing, gathering and harvesting.

Bali provides an example of a larger, more complex society, but one in which it is still possible to discern the interaction between religious practices and the maintenance of equilibrium between a population and its ecosystem. The ecological characteristics of the island require the construction and maintenance of a vast network of irrigation canals as well as a system to regulate the supply of water to the rice fields. Construction, maintenance and distribution of water to the rice fields are regulated by the “religion of water” (*tirtha agama*), a system constituted by a ritual calendar and by a number of hierarchically arranged water temples and shrines built at various points between the Crater lake and the places where water enters the fields. It must be pointed out that unlike the cases studied before, in which the entire population lived in a homogeneous territory, one finds in Bali an ecologically determined distinction between forms of social organization: egalitarian forms are found in the highlands where wet-rice cultivation is not possible, and where, therefore, there is not much of a surplus to be extracted by the lowland nobility; in the southern plains villages, on the other hand, one finds a hierarchical organization that approximates to the Indian system. This distinction, and the fact that force or the threat of force were used to extract surplus from the peasantry, refutes the irresponsible claims advanced by C. Geertz, for whom Bali was a “theater state,” where pomp validated power rather than the other way around.

Having found in Bali a ritual system which besides being intimately connected with the management of agriculture is also hierarchically arranged – both in terms of the hierarchy of water temples and of social hierarchy – we must now pay attention to the effects of stratification on the management of the ecosystem, a connection that is relevant insofar as both the management of the ecosystem and the division of society have generally required validation through non-falsifiables, that is, religious, means. Nowhere is the concern with hierarchy more visible than in India; and it is in India that a hierarchical system built ostensibly around the poles of ritual purity and impurity affects society and its ecosystem in a number of sometimes contradictory ways. In effect, the obsessive concern with the purity of one’s body and of one’s dwelling, but not of one’s surroundings, contributes to the degradation of the environment. To complicate the situation, the fear of ritual pollution confers a degraded status on garbage collectors, making it difficult to institute recycling practices. A concrete example of the connection between mythology and health risks is provided by the belief in the purifying nature of the Ganges, a belief that leads worshippers to disregard the effects of human waste on the river, as well as the contaminating effects of the water on themselves. Being interested above all in maintaining their livelihood, the *pandás*, the Banaras pilgrim priests, contribute to the problem by resisting efforts to reform the traditional cremation practices. No less important in terms of its ecological impact is the role played by religiously validated views of gender. In furthering the desire for male offspring, these views contribute both to the subordinate position of women and to population growth, growth which in turns exacerbates ecological problems. It is instructive to contrast this reality with the claims made by Western enthusiasts and by purveyors of Oriental wisdom concerning the holistic view of reality supposedly prevalent in Asian societies. In reality, neither in the canonical texts nor in those that belong to the Tantric or Shakta forms of South Asian religion does one find evidence.
of attempts to preserve nature. Similarly, contemporary
day practices do not lead one to assume that modern
Asian societies are better equipped than Western ones to
achieve ecological balance.

The interaction of ecological and ideological con-
straints can be seen at work in the practice of intensive
irrigation agriculture in the polities that emerged in
Southeast Asia partly under the influence of Indian sym-
bolic systems. For our purposes it will be sufficient to men-
tion the case of the hydraulic Khmer cities, whose collapse
appears to have been caused by the negative ecological
consequences of the building frenzy ordered by the
Angkor rulers, between the ninth and the eleventh
century. According to Groslier, the sedimentation in the
artificial lakes built between the ninth and the eleventh
century impacted negatively the soil, leading eventually
to the destruction of what had been the flourishing
agriculture of these hydraulic states. The Cambodian situa-
tion demonstrates the consequences of the discrepancy
between the operational models, constituted by the
ecological conditions of the Khmer territories, and the
cognized models, constituted by the Angkor rulers’ need to
 legitimize themselves through the use of pan-Southeast
Asian symbolic systems involving vast temple complexes.
In the end, the ideologically motivated need to create
ever larger reservoirs eventually outstripped what the land
was able to sustain, leading to the decay of the kingdom.
Ultimately, the Khmer situation seems to constitute the
ecological amplification of the economic consequences of
temple building encapsulated in the Burmese saying, “the
pagoda is finished and the country is ruined.”

Examples of this maladaptiveness can be found in
many places. Indeed, in his critique of ecological
approaches to religion, Walter Burkert has pointed out as a
counterexample the ecological collapse of Stone-Age
Malta about 2500 B.C.E., a collapse that may be linked to
the proliferation of large temples during the Tarxien
period – that is, to the fact that instead of using their
resources in a productive way, Stone-Age Maltese diverted
their energies into wasteful construction projects. Burkert
is right in referring to the Maltese case; nevertheless,
there is no necessary contradiction between ethological
approaches such as the one he proposes and ecological
ones, for one can still hold to an ecological/evolutionary
perspective, as long as one is aware that, as pointed out at
the beginning of this essay, adaptiveness is not a once-
and-for-all affair. One must recognize, rather, that in order
to be effective the practices through which a community
seeks to maintain an ecological equilibrium need to be fine
tuned; for if such practices become ends in themselves,
they will eventually lead to situations which imperil the
survival of the community in question. It is above all
changes in the size of the human population or in the
ecosystem that require changes in the mechanisms of
adaptation: in either case, the disappearance of the situ-
ation that gave rise to a given symbolic universe and to
their concomitant ritual practices renders such symbolic-
ritual clusters ineffective or, worse, counterproductive.
Often, the very success of religiously legitimized adaptive
strategies may lead to population increase, which in turn
leads to ecological degradation.

Related to population expansion and to the resulting
increase in social complexity is the coming into being of a
priesthood. The role of a self-perpetuating body of
religious specialists is generally negative in terms of the
maintenance of ecological equilibrium, as the members of
the priesthood tend to be concerned above all with their
self-perpetuation, whether this takes place as the result
of sexual reproduction or of recruitment. Being above all
ritual specialists, priests seek to protect the means that
validate their existence. In the case of Buddhism, for
example, the concept of merit (punya) led to the direct
economic support of the monks, understood as “merit
fields,” and to the construction of temples, an activity that
in some cases – Burma, for example – has been economi-
cally wasteful, while in others – China, Cambodia – has had
negative ecological consequences. In this regard, insofar
as the process can be reconstructed, the Maltese case con-
stitutes but an extreme example of what happens when the
means become the ends, or when “a people focus too much
energy on worshipping life rather than sustaining it” (Malone et al.: 1993: 110) – to use the words of a team of
archeologists engaged in studying prehistoric Malta.

We can also see the ecological dangers inherent in the
concern with priestly self-perpetuation in the case of the
Roman Church, an organization whose ritual specialists
are concerned with defending at all costs their status as the
necessary link between ordinary Christians and the super-
natural realm. Torn between an understanding of reality as
a god’s creation and a deep unease toward anything that
comes between the believers and their god, the Roman
Church is condemned to claim the right to manage sexual
reproduction and physicality in general, while at the same
time having to reject those aspects of sexuality that come
between human beings and their god. These contradictory
demands force high-ranking celibate ritual specialists –
popes, cardinals, and such – to stress the link between
sexuality and reproduction, while being adamantly
against sexual activities that are not aimed at reprodu-
cation, as well as, a fortiori, against homosexual behavior
(this last aspect more in theory than in practice, as clerical
recruitment may suffer now that the population pressures
that led men and women to enter religious orders have
disappeared in Europe).

The Roman Church’s concern with the regulation of life
can be seen in the speech the pope delivered to the Italian
parliament in November 2002, a speech in which, among
other things, Woytila spoke about a “birth crisis, demo-
graphic decline and ageing of the population”; he also
referred to the human, social and economic problems that
played by analogous practices in small-scale societies of the Christmas rituals of giving is not as evident as that as the size of the economic sphere, the regulatory function true that given the complexity of the social system as well receiving rather than around the human birth of a god. It is protestations not withstanding, is built around giving and in motion by the Christmas season, a period which, clerical work. In contemporary Western societies the process is set subject to a successful ritual calendar that contributes to mobilization of the process of demand, production and consumption will keep those retirees alive, coincides with the cognized model proposed by Woytila, a cognized model constituted by the Roman Church’s understanding of sexuality and reproduction. Insofar as the sermon to the Italian people contained within the speech to the Italian parliament constitutes a non-calendrical ritual attempt to regulate human fertility, we can see Roman Catholicism still seeking to function in a way that is not substantially different from the manner in which religions have functioned in the pre-industrial world – that is, as a ritual/ideological mechanism that regulates the relations between a population and its ecosystem. In this regard, therefore, one can say that some manifestations of contemporary religion can still be understood in evolutionary terms as having been generated in order to regulate birth, copulation and death. We must recognize, however, that even though this particular call to increase fertility seems to be reasonable, such reasonableness is the exception rather than the rule, as the reproductive policies – that is, the cognized models – that constitute the Roman Church are counterproductive outside Europe.

What is significant about this obsession regarding sexual activities and gender roles is its archaic character, which in certain ways resembles that of the Tukano. In effect, this sacramental conception of reality presupposes the existence of certain natural constants, the most important of which is the distinction between maleness and femaleness and, in more general terms, the distinction between male and female realms, the latter having been charged with the preservation, and indeed multiplication of life regardless of the costs. Despite the reasonableness of assuming the existence of natural constants, one must recognize that symbolic systems that keep small-scale societies viable are unlikely to serve the needs of large-scale societies; therefore, the deleterious effects of this sacramental conception of reality in terms of population increase, transmission of diseases and ultimately of ecological disaster cannot be overstated.

While bodies of clerical ritual specialists try to regulate, generally without success, the sexual behavior of the citizens of modern societies, those same citizens are still subject to a successful ritual calendar that contributes to the mobilization of the process of demand, production and work. In contemporary Western societies the process is set in motion by the Christmas season, a period which, clerical protestations notwithstanding, is built around giving and receiving rather than around the human birth of a god. It is true that given the complexity of the social system as well as the size of the economic sphere, the regulatory function of the Christmas rituals of giving is not as evident as that played by analogous practices in small-scale societies such as the Tsembaga or the Tukano. This is especially clear when one compares the frequency of meat consumption in tribal New Guinea or ancient Greece with that of modern Western societies. Whereas, as noted above, meat consumption among the former was regulated ritually, increased meat consumption during Christmas and Easter (and Thanksgiving in the United States and Canada) has a negligible effect in terms of the total intake of animal protein among the inhabitants of industrial societies. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake not to pay attention to the long-term environmental effects of ritually regulated social practices in large-scale industrial societies.

Besides considering the characteristics of a given territory, an ecological approach to religion must pay attention to weather patterns, especially to the effects of abrupt changes on people’s religious attitudes. With this in mind, we can consider from an ecological angle developments as distant from each other as a drought that affected Greece in the eighth century B.C.E. and the witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Regarding the first, we can follow Camp’s reasoning and recognize that the drought, famine, and epidemics that affected Athens in the late eighth century B.C.E. led to a renaissance in religious activity, prompted by the fears of inhabitants of the affected areas. (It must also be mentioned that an ecological explanation of Greek pederasty and of its surrounding mythology has been offered: according to Percy, Greek pederasty emerged in the seventh century as an attempt to control the population.)

Moving ahead more than two millennia, we can turn to the witch-craze, the madness that unfolded at the threshold of European modernity, pitting neighbor against neighbor. That religious and political elites were involved in fanning the fires is beyond doubt; that the anxieties produced by the Reformation and the Counter Reformation played a role seems beyond doubt as well; nevertheless, the evidence indicates that the accusations appear to have grown mainly from below, in many cases having been resisted by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Why the fear and the accusations then? The reasons for them are multiple, but there is one to which not enough attention has been paid, namely, that the accusations of witchcraft took place during the “little ice age,” that is, at a time when crops, always at the mercy of the weather, were especially vulnerable. The mix of scarcity and fear resulted in neighbors being accused of stealing or damaging crops through magical arts. Rather, then, than the generalized fear chronicled by historians such as Jean Delumeau, what we encounter in late medieval and early modern Europe seems to be a situation in which the uncertainty that characterizes pre-industrial societies – the image of the limited good – was exacerbated by a world that, as Lehmann and Behringer have shown, in climatic terms had been turned upside down.
Far more radical than changes in weather patterns are those brought about by sudden natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The effects on the European intelligentsia of the destruction of Lisbon in 1755 by an earthquake are well known, but despite the contribution of that catastrophe to the process of secularization one may be hesitant to consider this episode as having much to do with an ecological approach to religion. On the other hand, the effects of the explosion that destroyed the island of Krakatoa in 1883 must be mentioned, for it seems to be the case that as the result of believing the disaster had been caused by their gods, the inhabitants of Java converted to Islam, making Indonesia the largest Muslim country in the world – this development being parallel, albeit extreme, to the surge in devotional activity in late eighth-century B.C.E. Greece.

The role of labor, cognition and ideology in the adaptive process must be mentioned to conclude this survey. Labor functions as the mediator between groups and their ecosystems, for it is through labor that human beings confront their milieu, in a process that involves accommodation as well as transformation. As we have seen, in small-scale societies both the accommodation and the transformation involve, besides physical exertion, the generation of etiological myths, symbolic systems, and ritual practices through which the interaction between humans and the rest of nature are made intelligible. Lest one be tempted to romanticize the pre-industrial world, or to reduce it to the realm of pure meaning, it must be stressed that in hierarchical societies the myths, symbols and rituals represent attempts to validate social stratification, attempts that are always backed by the threat of force. In the stratified societies that emerged in the Fertile Crescent, for example, the rise of organized labor gave rise to a mythology involving a stratification of the pantheon. Whether subaltern groups, generally condemned to acknowledge the reality of brute force, submit also to the ideological constructs that seek to transfigure that brute force is open to question; it can be said in fact that the degree of activeness or inertness can serve as predictors of the presence or absence of a high god. He observed that “active raw materials may provide contingencies that are best dealt with by the skilled and, sometimes, necessarily swift action of individuals and/or the concerted action of highly motivated individuals . . . active raw materials support and encourage pragmatic and autonomous role definition” (Simpson 1979: 306). This led him to conclude that a high god “can be viewed not only as the symbolic arbiter and judge of the world’s events but also as the symbolic representation of the efficacious, pragmatic worker” (Simpson 1979: 307). He also approached the activeness/inertness continuum by focusing on the type of animal kept and the type of fauna hunted in a given society, concluding that there is a correlation between large and powerful animals and the belief in high gods. For our purposes it is not necessary to try to determine which of these positions is the correct one; it is sufficient to point out that by emphasizing the correlation between purposeful action and the belief in high gods, Underhill and Simpson, and to a lesser extent Swanson, explore the connections among ecology, work and conceptions of god.

As we can see from this controversy, the work required to survive within a set of ecological constraints gives rise to conceptions of agency and of rulership, human and divine; but as we also saw at the beginning of this essay, human peculiarities also give rise to the opposite: to the desire to give up one’s agency, to flee the power of
the ruler, to erase the distinction between oneself and the world.

Gustavo Benavides

Further Reading


Eco-magic

Eco-magic is the use of magical and spiritual techniques for the benefit or protection of the environment. Because practitioners believe that magic backed by practical action is more effective, eco-magic often supports conventional campaigning or is integrated with direct action.

Eco-magic is an evolving practice that blurs into a whole ideology of change. Starhawk, a witch and political activist, "offers the principles of magic not as a belief system ... but as an alternative descriptive system that can help develop a psychology of liberation" (1987: 20).

Because eco-magic is a strategy that a conventional opponent will find hard to counter, it has been perceived as a tool of the oppressed.

Any magical tradition or technique can be adapted to eco-magic and practitioners work with a wide variety of deities. Rituals can be public or private and involve groups or single individuals.

Western eco-magic does exhibit certain distinctive qualities, notably the use of elements of performance, especially drumming, dance and chanting.

Certain symbols and mythic elements recur. The goddess Gaia and the Green Man appear frequently, as does the Dragon, symbol of Earth energy. Spirals and runic talismans (e.g., the Dragon Tree Rune) are common.

Eco-magic often involves working with the "Genius Loci" of the place, the Devas or Faery Folk, who are understood as teachers and allies in the campaign.

Since the early 1980s, a more theorized eco-magic practice has emerged from Western Paganism. Starhawk, Reclaiming and the Dragon Environmental Network have been influential in defining this practice, which I call "Dragon/Reclaiming eco-magic" (DREM).

Although generally eco-magic may include cursing or similar "aggressive" magic, DREM is nonviolent, non-hierarchical, and strives toward holistic solutions. It is a magic that works toward building reciprocal relationships between the natural world and humanity. DREM excludes Western magical traditions that use nature spirits instrumentally. Practitioners allege that such traditions emerge from a cerebral "dominator" ideology of control that is incompatible with an eco-magic that works in tune with nature.

Mainstream environmentalists are generally dismissive of spiritual perspectives while many spiritual people consider political issues to be irrelevant. Eco-magic, like liberation theology, explicitly connects the political and the spiritual: "the personal is political is spiritual" (Harvey 1997).

Eco-magic blurs the distinction between political action and magical ritual: "When political action moves into the realm of symbols it becomes magical" (Starhawk 1982: 169).

The Three Mile Island Memorial Parade (1980) combined a march with a large-scale public ritual. By integrating elements of a conventional political demonstration with ritual and aspects of theatre, magic and politics can merge seamlessly.

Although magical practice is normally secret, eco-magic rituals are often public. This serves a psychological purpose, boosting the morale of campaigners and unnerving the opposition. Public ritual is unusual in Western magic but is common in the tribal cultures that influence many eco-activists.

Adrian Harris

Further Reading

Harris, Adrian. "Dragon Decade – A Personal Perspective on Eco-magic." Dragon Eco-Magic Journal (June 2001).
Economics

While research into economic relationships is a fairly recent development in the study of religion and nature, the fast-moving pace of global capitalism constantly poses new challenges and demands fresh reflection.

The pioneer of the relation of economics, religion, and nature has been E.F. Schumacher, an economist writing from a Buddhist perspective. One of the fundamental problems of modern economics, according to Schumacher, is that dominant economics leads to “economism,” a state where human values, work, and even the environment are all subordinated to the pursuit of material ends. As a result, certain dimensions of spiritual reality are neglected. Schumacher follows Mohandas K. Gandhi’s sense that only the realization of the permanent nature of the soul, apart from the body, will give us peace. At the same time, Schumacher believes, modern economics has itself assumed the metaphysical status of a religion and its main values of money and entrepreneurial profit have brushed aside other values, including respect for the natural environment. As a result, Buddhist economics (or economics inspired by any of the other great Eastern or Western traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) is seen to have the potential to reverse this trend. Valuing people as more important than goods and profits, espousing principles of simplicity (how to attain given ends with the minimum means) and nonviolence rather than a “bigger is better” lifestyle built on aggression toward nature and resulting in political aggression, provides the necessary antidotes to an economic system and its religion that will destroy both the Earth and humanity, according to Schumacher.

Bringing together insights from fields as different as economics, biology, history, philosophy, physics, and theology, self-described Christian theists Herman Daly (economist) and John Cobb (theologian) develop an alternative vision that seeks to go beyond standard models of capitalism and socialism. Their project is based on the vision of a community in which all aspects of reality are related in an emerging “biospheric consciousness.” The main problem with dominant economic paradigms, they argue, is a myopia that leads to the destruction of communities and the separation of humans and the natural world. The theoretical lack of values that promote community and nature has led to the practical destruction of community and nature. Anthropological dualism, the belief that humans occupy a higher stage than the rest of nature, and philosophical idealism, the assumption that ideas are more important than matter, are among the main culprits in this state of affairs. Once this myopia is cleared up and a biospheric consciousness is adopted, Cobb and Daly argue, the principles of the free market can be put to more constructive use. In this approach, the religious component plays a role in how the biospheric vision is conceived. Faith in God – a theocentric perspective – liberates us from the misdirected anthropocentrism of Western culture and economics. Faith in God also helps to interrelate concern for the value of individual beings and for the holistic interrelation of all beings since both exist only in relation to God.

Christian ethicist Larry Rasmussen has raised concerns about a mismatch between the globalizing human economy and the economy of nature. The challenge, he asserts, is to realize that any human economy is always part of the larger economy of nature since everything depends on the regenerative powers of nature. Rasmussen assumes that there is a certain “carrying capacity of nature” and that economic systems which disregard it end up destroying the Earth not because they are too materialistic but because they are too “docetic,” namely, not materialistic enough. There are parallels to a colonial logic where the true costs to the colonized are kept off the books. As a result, those who profit from such colonial relations broadly conceived remain unaware of the real cost of their lifestyles and may end up destroying their own basis of survival as well. One way to address this situation is to engage in a “reenchantment of the world” and to develop religious symbols that promote new values. According to Rasmussen, religious symbols can lead to a new appreciation for nature and the integrity of God’s creation of which human beings are a part.

Christian theologian Sallie McFague has also begun to extend her work in religion and ecology to include economic concerns. Her argument begins with the observation that first-world Christians are destroying nature not because they lack love for nature – an earlier theme of her work – but because of their consumerist lifestyles. The greatest ecological dangers have to do with the consumerist desires of the middle class, which are seen as necessary for sustained economic growth. This sort of consumerism can only be resisted through a new ecological-economic lens that sees the whole of reality as interrelated. McFague develops the theme of interrelation through a notion of God not as distant and related externally to the world, but as embodied in it and as its source and fulfillment.
In sum, one of the fundamental problems to be addressed in the study of religion and nature is what Schumacher and later Cobb have called “economism,” a system in which economic concerns have absolute priority over concerns for nature and – to a certain degree – over concerns for human beings as well. Under the conditions of globalizing capitalism, however, this insight needs to be taken to the next step. Anthropocentrism may no longer be the greatest challenge to nature, and even the more and more common critique of consumerism needs to be reevaluated at this point. Arguably, the economy has become hegemonic to such an extent that the majority of humanity matters less and less and consumerism has become a mode of existence that can no longer be contained by the individual will of the consumer. In this context we need to rethink what it means to propose religion as an antidote – as the place from where resistance can be formed and alternative lifestyles can be developed. Can religion itself be considered to be free from the pull of the global market economy?

Today, progress in reconfiguring the interrelations of economics, religion, and nature depends on a return to places similar to those where the initial insights of the pioneers of this question were forged: situations of great pressure. In this context the contribution of theological and religious reflection to the further development of economics and ecology is not primarily that of providing another set of ideas or a new state of mind but of finding glimpses into the reality of God where the pressures of the economic and ecological status quo become unbearable and are thus being questioned. Here, the different religions will be able to offer alternatives not primarily where they represent symbols of regulated religiosity (easily commodified by the commercial spin doctors’ efforts at reenchantment) but where they draw on the irrepressible energies emerging out of the undercurrent of their own traditions and strengths as they have developed and continue to take shape in the midst of the pressures of life as a whole.

Joerg Rieger

Further Reading
See also: Cobb, John; McFague, Sallie; Schumacher, Ernest Friedrich.

Eco-paganism
In an attempt to curb Britain’s worsening traffic congestion problems, the Conservative government of the 1990s commenced a massive program of road-building. In the process they unwittingly instigated a protest movement vehemently opposed to road and other construction schemes (such as the expansion of open-cast quarrying, and the building of new airport runways), and which centralized the use of nonviolent direct action to achieve its environmental and political aims. While protests against new roads had occurred since the 1970s, those at Twyford Down in Hampshire (1992) are regarded as igniting the direct action movement in Britain.

Protests followed across the country, culminating in the Newbury Bypass campaign (which, with many hundreds of protesters, achieved considerable media coverage) and the A30 campaign at Fairmile in Devon (where Daniel “Swampy” Hooper achieved notoriety by spending seven days locked underground in a tunnel). Protesters combined “the protest camp” from the British anti-nuclear protests of the 1980s, with the direct action tactics of American Earth First!, to barricade themselves in camps along the proposed route, using treehouses, tunnels and other locking-on points, or to disrupt construction by “digger diving” and occasionally by eco-sabotage. As camps had to be evicted before construction could continue, protesters hoped, if not to halt construction completely, then to render future projects economically unviable.

While by no means all protesters had pagan or other religious sympathies, eco-paganism is used as a loose term for spiritualities within the British protest movement; it includes two broad groups. Firstly it refers to the practices of initiated members of existing pagan faiths who involve themselves in direct action. Perhaps the best example is the Dragon Environmental Network (Dragon). Dragon was established by progressive Wiccans who, motivated by the belief that “all the Earth is sacred,” sought to combine ritual/magical practice with direct action in what they termed “eco-magic.” Borrowing ideas of “Earth,” or “dragon,” energies from Earth mysteries, they used ritual to “raise the dragon” so as to protect and empower both a piece of threatened land, and those attempting to defend it. Thus during a mass trespass on the newly constructed M3 at Twyford Down, Dragon members used frenetic drumming to raise this dragon energy. In a similar fashion they created a sigil or “bindrune,” the “Dragon Tree Rune.”
which they “charged” using drumming at public rituals (often held in rave clubs); the rune was worn by protesters for protection, and daubed upon trees and construction machinery to intimidate workers. Practitioners attribute the saving of Oxleas Wood in London to the efficacy of eco-magic. There is some evidence of similar, but locally nuanced, practices occurring in Europe. Lindquist (1997) describes how heathen neo-shamans invoked “ice giants” from Norse mythology using seidr trance, so as to prevent residential construction outside Stockholm. Whatever its cause, the resulting freeze prevented work just long enough for the local government to be persuaded to abandon its plans.

Eco-paganism secondly refers to the “detraditionalized,” elective and affectual spiritualities of protesters living more permanently at protest camps. Loose and resisting tight categorization, these syncretic spiritualities incorporate belief and practice from Buddhism, Shamanism, the New Age, Theosophy, 60s psychedelia, the Rainbow movement, and British folklore, while retaining a core pagan doxa. Thus the standard eight pagan festivals are marked (in addition to full moons and other celestial phenomena), and many practitioners honor a god (“the Horned God,” or “the Green Man”) and a goddess (usually “Gaia” the Earth Mother). However ritual structures, if they occur at all, are rudimentary, and the emphasis is very much upon celebration. Such occasions are often marked by entheogenic consumption, especially of cannabis and indigenous British Psilocybin mushrooms. Such celebrations are a product of the movement’s origins in (free) festival, and so-called “new-age traveler” culture. Traveling, the romanticized gypsy life, and a new tribalism are important aspects of this eco-pagan identity. Protesters at Twyford Down named themselves “the Donga tribe,” and set off on the “freedom trail.” Traveling on foot or by bicycle (later with horse and cart, goats and chickens) between prehistoric sites, they regarded themselves not only as spiritual and ecological exemplars, but as the indigenous pagan nomads of Britain.

Eco-pagans of both groups stress the importance of a bodily engagement with environmental problems, and with the natural world more generally. Adrian Harris (1996) argues for a “somatic ecology,” a move away from intellectual to bodily “knowing,” while others stress the need to build a relationship with the spirit(s) of a place, the genius loci, by spending time outdoors. Camp dwelling eco-pagans often feel intense emotional bonds with the tree in which they live, or the land they are defending, and often regard their lifestyle as exemplary when compared to that of urban society, pagan or otherwise.

Eco-paganism exhibits a fascination with fairies and the mythology of the otherworld, an aspect that takes two forms. Firstly, identification with fairies can be purely symbolic. The reiterated belief that practitioners are the downtrodden “little people,” helps them to make sense of the inevitability of eviction, and hence defeat. Further, by identifying with fairies, practitioners are aligning themselves with “nature,” and with nature’s “higher” morality, a move that helps justify the legal infractions of protesting. Thus the damaging of machinery is called “pixieing,” a move that downplays the implications of what is effectively sabotage. Secondly, though, some practitioners maintain a literal belief in fairies as spirits of, or spirits dwelling within, a pristine nature untrammeled by human agency. Occasional phenomenological encounters with fairies, entheogenically inspired or otherwise, fuel the belief that “nature” supports protesters’ actions. Eco-pagans believe that encounters with fairies are a reward for their ecological self-sacrifice and that they are being granted privileged access to nature’s hidden realms.

The road protests galvanized eco-paganism, allowing it to become embedded through the establishment of camps; the construction of new roads ironically provided spaces in which eco-paganism could flourish. Having effectively succeeded in its aims the movement removed its raison d’être, and has remained in a dormant phase. However a new wave of protests has begun, focusing on issues of climate change and globalization, and so eco-paganism can be expected to emerge as a significant religious movement once again.

Andy Letcher

Further Reading
See also: Donga Tribe; Dragon Environmental Network; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Paganism – Contemporary; Radical Environmentalism.

Ecopsychology

Ecopsychology is a diverse field committed to placing human psychology into an ecological context. Perhaps
the main idea behind ecopsychology is that the human mind does not stand wholly apart from the natural world but is deeply rooted in and tangled up with it; the human psyche is a phenomenon of nature, an aspect of the larger psyche of nature. By ignoring the natural world, modern psychology both misconceives the human mind and helps to maintain the Western/industrial world’s destructive state of estrangement from its Earth home. Ecopsychology seeks to reverse this situation. By expanding the focus of psychology to include the relationship between humans and nature, it aims to develop a truer picture of human psychology and to draw attention to the psychological dimension of the ecological crisis.

One of the strong claims made by ecopsychology is that psychological well-being ultimately involves establishing mature, reciprocal relationships with the natural world, seeing it not as a mere resource pool for human use but as the larger community of life of which humans are mere members. As a general failure to develop such relationships, the ecological crisis can be viewed as a psychological and spiritual crisis. Many ecopsychologists trace the degradation of the planet to the consumeristic, ego-driven, Earth-alienated mode of consciousness that governs modern society’s exploitative interactions with the natural environment. Ecopsychology thus maintains that the pursuit of human sanity and spiritual fulfillment, on the one hand, and environmental recovery, on the other, are closely related tasks.

Ecopsychology is usually described as an “emerging” field, having only recently been named as such. This does not mean that the subject matter of ecopsychology is entirely new. Numerous references to the human–nature relationship have been made in a wide variety of sources since at least the time of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Moreover, the lifeways of indigenous peoples are generally viewed by ecopsychologists as already being “ecopsychological.” However, if ecopsychology is regarded as an ecological revisioning of modern psychology and as a response to a particularly modern state of disconnection from nature, then it is indeed a historically unique undertaking. The first major work to criticize modern psychology for its anthropocentrism, and to propose a psychology that specifically focuses on the natural world, did not appear until 1960. In his book *The Nonhuman Environment: In Normal Development and in Schizophrenia*, psychoanalyst Harold F. Sears observed that the psychological theorists of his day regarded the nonhuman environment as irrelevant to human personality development, as if humans existed completely alone in the universe. He posited instead that a sense of relatedness to nonhuman reality, even if largely unconscious, is one of the most significant facts of human life, which humans ignore at their peril. Sears’ work came and went with little comment from his professional peers. The years that followed did, however, witness a number of developments that can be seen as evidence of an evolving ecopsychological sensibility.

In 1963 Robert Greenway introduced the term *psychocology*, using it to describe his search for a language capable of conceptually merging mind and nature, as well as to describe his subsequent work on the psychology of wilderness experience. In the 1960s and 1970s Gregory Bateson carried out his cybernetic studies into the “ecology of mind,” locating the human mind within a greater ecosystemic mind or Mind. In the late 1960s Paul Shepard suggested that the central problem of human ecology is the relationship between mind and nature. Shepard’s anthropologically informed work culminated in his 1982 book *Nature and Madness*, in which he argued that normal psychological development requires that children be thoroughly bonded to the natural world and that adolescents be initiated into the sacredness, mysteriousness, and poetry of earthly life. According to Shepard, Western society’s irrational destruction of the Earth can be directly linked to an increasing disruption of this normal process of psychogenesis. By the mid-1980s, the deep ecology movement had gained a significant following. This movement advocates deepening one’s sense of connection to the Earth, in the process of which one becomes “ecologically conscious” or “ecologically mature,” or realizes an “ecological self.” The psychospiritual quality of much deep ecology discourse and practice makes it an obvious precursor to ecopsychology, and some regard the two movements as essentially the same. The 1980s also saw the introduction by Joanna Macy and others of “despair and empowerment” work. One of the main principles of this work is that personal distress over the state of the planet is not just a symptom of individual neurosis but is better understood as a healthy expression of “pain for the world,” the pain one feels as a result of being connected to the ecological whole. By consciously experiencing this pain one is led to a kind of spiritual awakening in which one realizes one’s interdependence with all life. Macy was also involved, along with John Seed, in developing the “Council of All Beings” ritual, a deep ecology practice in which participants shed their human boundaries to identify with and experience the suffering of other life forms. Another noteworthy development was that of transpersonal psychology, the psychological study of spiritual experience or nondual states of consciousness. Transpersonal psychology forms a basis for ecopsychology because one of the goals of ecopsychology is to overcome the dualistic mode of thought and experience that supports the illusion of separation between the human ego and the natural world. Indeed, much ecopsychological and deep ecological activity focuses on those ego-dissolving, free-flowing, or mystical experiences in the natural world that defy easy conceptualization. Hence Warwick Fox’s 1990 proposal that the name deep ecology be replaced with transpersonal ecology, the latter term indicating a
Ecopsychology

The marriage between transpersonal psychology and the ecocentric ecology movement. These and many other developments – including the appearance of environmental psychology, environmental education, and ecofeminism – prepared the way for an explicit ecopsychology movement to finally surface in the early 1990s.

The first major work directly to explore the idea of ecopsychology was cultural historian Theodore Roszak’s 1993 book The Voice of the Earth. At the center of Roszak’s “exploration of ecopsychology” was an attempt to revise an animistic worldview by drawing on the latest ideas in scientific cosmology. Around the time this book was published, the term ecopsychology entered into relatively wide (if not trendy) usage. A number of ecopsychology workshops were held, and in 1995 an anthology of ecopsychology writings was published. Ecopsychology was also finding its way into a handful of college and university departments, primarily in the United States, though also in Canada, Britain, Europe, and Australia. A small ecopsychology literature now exists, including a 1996 college text by Deborah Du Nann Winter, Ecological Psychology: Healing the Split Between Planet and Self. To date, however, the stress in ecopsychology has arguably been less on its theory and more on its practice.

The practice of ecopsychology currently includes or extends into – though is not limited to – the following areas: ecologically oriented psychotherapy (especially within Gestalt, body-centered, Jungian, and transpersonal frameworks); psychospiritual work in support of eco-activism; wilderness rituals/eco-therapy, including vision quests and deep ecological councils; numerous forms of contemplative practice; neo-paganism; large-scale Earth rituals; shamanic counseling; Earth poetics and story telling; experiential programs for reconnecting with nature; perceptual ecology/sensory awakening practices; gardening; environmental education; bioregionalism; building sustainable communities; ecological design; ecological restoration; organic farming; and environmental and social justice (including community land rights) activism.

As a still-emerging field, ecopsychology faces a number of challenges and criticisms. These can perhaps be grouped into two areas. The first general challenge is to build a comprehensive and intellectually coherent body of ecopsychological thought. Critics such as Joseph Reser charge that ecopsychology is not really a psychology because it has produced little in the way of recognizable academic research findings; it is more of a popular movement than a disciplined profession. Others say that as a synthesis of psychology and ecology, ecopsychology opens up a subject matter that is so all-encompassing as to defy workable definition. Part of the difficulty for ecopsychology is that modern academic psychology assumes a divide between inner/human reality and outer/natural reality, and uses objectivistic methods that deny nature its own voice. Many ecopsychologists are accordingly leery of turning their field into a conventional psychological discipline, believing that this would betray their very subject matter. Ecopsychology is often distinguished from the more mainstream field of environmental psychology for just this reason. It nonetheless remains for ecopsychology to clarify in what sense it may be thought of as a psychology and to build its own distinct body of well-defined theory.

The second general criticism of ecopsychology is that it is politically weak. Ecopsychology has been faulted (as summarized in Andy Fisher’s Radical Ecopsychology) for having a Eurocentric bias, for neglecting the significance of social and economic forces, and for being too narrowly therapeutic in practice. These criticisms have not gone entirely unmet, as there are efforts within ecopsychology to develop a multicultural approach, to consider how the corporate sphere distorts consciousness toward consumptive behavior, and actively to engage in social change work. The challenge, however, is to create an ecopsychology that when considered as a whole has sufficient political weight to be included among the important social and ecological movements of these times.

For all that ecopsychology may be theoretically and politically underdeveloped, the very idea of it has great intuitive appeal for many people. It speaks to their experience of earthly dislocation and their yearning for a greater sense of communion or kinship with the natural world. If it can adequately address the challenges facing it, ecopsychology may therefore play an important role in bringing about an urgently needed reconciliation between modern humanity and the rest of the natural world.

Further Reading
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See also: Council of All Beings; Deep Ecology; Esalen Institute; Jung, Karl; Macy, Joanna; Naropa Institute; Radical Environmentalism; Restoration Ecology and Ritual; Seed, John; Shepard, Paul; Transpersonal Psychology; Wilderness Rites of Passage.

**Ecosophy T**

The term “Ecosophy T” is the name of a total view, or better, general view from part of which I derive (in the sense being of derived from a set of premises) what I call the eight points of deep ecology. This is only a small part of Ecosophy T which has not been and probably will not be adequately described or articulated by me. As a philosopher, I have of course not been outstandingly original, but have accepted and partly modified philosophical theories on a vast variety of subjects. What I am trying to do is to articulate fairly adequately a representative part of the views I entertain.

During many years as a student and a professor I specialized in the theory of knowledge. Within a great variety of clusters of problems, I developed a view which may loosely be characterized as skepticism. My book with the title *Skepticism* has been characterized as an endeavor to make the term a plus-term, a term for a kind of view many people would accept. Since the book was published I have slightly modified the relevant view covered by the term “skepticism.” Ecosophy T may better be characterized as (radical) “pluralism.” But Ecosophy T may be said to contain the fairly radical view expressible by the short sentence: “Humans are fallible whatever they assert.”

How is deep ecology with its eight points derived from Ecosophy T? Cosmology has an important place in Ecosophy T. The answer to “Where am I, what am I, what do I want?” starts with cosmology – the insight that I am in a largely meaningless, largely lifeless, ghastly, utterly immense world. Any island of any kind of life breaks the uniformity in a touching, heart-rending way. Through hundreds of millions of years of development, living beings have broken the uniformity of death and unconsciousness. How could we but embrace life with enthusiasm? How far away are our potential friends and neighbors from our planet? What do we do to protect life in this strange, marvelous place where we live? Have we been mature protectors of the biological diversity and the teeming of life? How does it come about that we now try to stop the extinction of species and behave in a way that is good for the teeming of life? What senselessness has made us capable of radically diminishing this teeming of animals which are not a danger to us? Especially not when we limit our interference with the ecosystems and stop extending the areas of the planet which are clearly dominated by human activities?

In short, the derivation of a deep ecology outlook from Ecosophy T is not complicated. But it should be stressed that a total view like Ecosophy T is vastly broader in outlook than the teachings of deep ecology.

An important part of Ecosophy T is my semantics, also called my “empirical semantics.” Whether in daily life or in professional verbal communication, a sentence may be interpreted differently. Let T0 be a sentence that presumably is intended to express an assertion. It may be interpreted in at least two ways – one makes it synonymous with a sentence T1, the other with T2, these being considered to mean something different (at least) in the communication C. A primitive example: Mr P and Mr Q agreed to meet at 9 o’clock.

P: I meant (of course) 9 in the evening.
Q: I meant (of course) 9 in the morning.

There is an ambiguity. The more precise sentences, “We meet at 9 in the morning” and “We meet at 9 in the evening,” I call “precizations” of the two more ambiguous sentences.

Let “Humans are fallible whatever they assert” be considered a T0 uttered by a (second) person P, a point of departure formulation. We may immediately ask P whether T0 is to be considered a human assertion, and if so, whether what is said is meant to be interpreted as a human assertion and therefore as fallible. It is likely that P will answer that he is not fallible when uttering T0. Compare the sentence sometimes said to have been uttered by Socrates that he knows nothing. In general, I use the signs “T1” and “T2” for two conflicting interpretations of T0. But the sentences T1 and T2 may be considered open to two interpretations. We then have 4 precisions which I express by T11, T12, T21 and T22.

The empirical semantics I make use of in Ecosophy T I apply to my own sentences in Ecosophy T. That is, conceive it as likely that the sentences of Ecosophy T are open to various interpretations. Some differences in interpretation may be uninteresting and negligible; others ought to be “clarified,” that is, explicitly formulated. I may then tell which precization furnishes a more precise expression of what it is intended to assert.

Ecological views may be part of a “total view,” a general philosophy of life and the world (universe). The latter I call an “ecosophy.” By a “philosophy,” here I don’t mean a professional philosophy; I include personal comprehensive general views of non-philosophers, of people who tend to reflect a lot and who do form, however amateurishly, a total view including priorities of value in life.

My own total view I call “Ecosophy T.” The letter “T” is an arbitrary letter which suggests that there may be other ecosophies, A, B, C, . . . I just wish to indicate an openness...
toward ecosophies that I personally find are not in harmony with my own opinions.

One of the central points of Ecosophy T may be formulated as follows: Humans are in many ways wonderful creatures living on the surface of a wonderful planet and have required hundreds of millions of years to form. The brain, which ordinarily is thought of as an organ of intelligence, is an organ capable of surveying and assessing immense varieties of relations, an organ that eventually will make humans not a destructive, but a constructive factor on the planet. The change may occur relatively soon, perhaps within, say, a few hundred years. Wars will not only seem ethically objectionable, but somehow childish. It might of course be asked how I can be sure about this.

A more moderate number of humans on this planet will eventually make it possible for people to continue to live where they would like to live. This would make it possible to live in acknowledged “wonderful” places where you today need to have a lot of money in order to buy a tiny plot of land. Mentioning population reduction, people naturally ask “how?”, suspecting coercion. I admit that my belief in a reduction is of a rather abstract kind. I do not see an easy way of how it could happen. It has to be an ethically perfectly satisfactory way. For instance, a way that encourages couples to produce only two children on average. Of the various social changes I envision, I shall here mention only one: there will be customs making it easier for people to have closer relations to the children of friends. From time to time we might house or be host to children other than our own, reducing the difference between “having” and “not having” children in the ordinary sense.

The two-children average is a system that rapidly reduces population, especially if the number of teenagers having babies is reduced, or if the general average of the age of mothers increases.

Reduced population is of course an important factor in decreasing the ecological crisis. This applies especially when there is a reduction in the materially richest countries. An ordinary family in such a country may cause more ecological damage than ten families in countries with a lower material standard of living.

Some might say that if people lived in accordance with the motto “rich life, simple means” then we need no reduction of the population. But Ecosophy T does not assume such a revolutionary change of lifestyle. Furthermore, it seems that in countries with economic poverty and less ecological damage, the aspiration is generally to live in an ecological way not very dissimilar to the way to live today in the rich countries. In short, Ecosophy T envisages considerable reduction of population, but does not predict how long a time it will take, how many centuries.

If I have to characterize Ecosophy T with one word, I will choose “this-worldly-ness,” Diessetigkeit in German, something similar to what Plato rejects with his world of ideas. There is an emphasis on realism – in a wide sense. It implies (for me) the admittance that we live in a universe (described by modern cosmology) which seems to be devoid of every sort of meaning, any sort of purposefulness. And it should be added that what we get to know of it – and to know a lot – is an endless sequence of explosions. Through our great telescopes we actually see such explosions. The explosions provide light rays traveling at the speed of light for millions of years and which hit the lens of the telescope. Humans today can see, realistically see, happenings which occurred millions of years ago. The gigantic character of the explosion is grasped if we make note that a colleague of an astronomer looking through a telescope near the neighborhood where the first astronomer is looking sees another fraction of the explosion. This means that every single locality in gigantic space is filled with effects of the catastrophic explosion. Enough about the main ingredient in cosmos: electromagnetic waves of great energy.

But there are infinitely small areas of the kind we inhabit: planets with life, some of them possibly with life forms with human or even transhuman capacities. We have potential friends out there, but at distances so great that you would be “lucky” if you got an answer to a letter sent at the speed of light one hundred thousand years after your death.

In short, Ecosophy T contains a short description of modern cosmology and some rather confusing or disconcerting conclusions about where we are when we take this question in its cosmological sense. Is Ecosophy T in this sense taken seriously? Because of the important conclusions of modern science that the basic chemistry of the universe seems to be the same everywhere – with carbon and its potential for various complex combinations with other elements – this is a strong reason why Ecosophy T is highly optimistic about potential friends “out there.” We should not feel alone; we may feel that we are parts of a kind of living world and universe. Since I was a small child, very big numbers and distances have fascinated me, and it is only natural that contemplation of cosmological questions is important to me. We are genuine parts of something immense, and strange parts because we talk and think about it.

After so much about so distant concerns, I shall diminish my horizons and talk about humans, my “fellow humans.” Whatever the differences between us, I have a strong feeling that in all essentials we are similar.

It was in Vienna in 1934–1935 when I was in my early twenties that I sensed that I had left behind me the characterization of being “stupid.” Being critical of others, I seemed to have more complex criteria than most people. But even being in some cases very critical, I got a firm feeling that I could understand others as fellow human beings. A climber friend of mine was a Hitler fan, but I
joined him on a climb. When I started eating some pieces of bread, I offered him some, saying “Would you have some of this? But it was prepared by a Jewish girl I know.” He hesitated, but took some of the bread. I do not think he hesitated for ideological reasons. Gentle, young Nazis did not react against individual Jews. They were seemingly capable of seeing individuals as fellow humans. But certainly I was somewhat extreme in my fellow human ideology. And this radicalness was part of my personal philosophy. Among the consequences was the view that the death penalty was unwarranted.

“Socialism” today in the West is a positive word among extremely few people, and the idea of radical change in general appeals to few. But in the very long run there will be, I firmly believe, radical change in radically different ways from what is now expected, if at all.

Socialism had profound consequences in 1945, when the German occupation of Norway ended. A great percentage of Norwegians considered communism to be a greater and deeper danger for Norway than the National Socialism of Hitler and neofascism. Several thousand Norwegians believed that it was their duty to join the Germans fighting the Soviets on the Eastern Front in Russia. To the Norwegian Government, however, the Soviets were allies in the fight against Hitler, and Norwegians fighting against the Soviet Union were, according to the established terminology, committing high treason.

All this is important if we are to understand the situation when the “Eastern Front Fighters,” that is, those who survived, came home to Norway. They were put in prison as traitors. This was ethically absurd in my opinion, and because I had fought in the resistance movement, I could talk and act without danger in favor of the so-called traitors. I saw them as fellow humans and worked to get them out of prison. It was amusing and very important for me to call up the director of a prison to say that I needed a couple of prisoners in my seminar on “moral indignation and after wars.” The resistance movement fighters who survived the war and who were members of the seminar were flabbergasted when I entered the auditorium with well-known “traitors,” people on the very wrong side of the war. But already in the next session (the following week), tempers were neutral and this was a victory for an important conception of being fellow humans. Members were interested in two basic questions: “How did you develop into a fighter on the front x?”, where x could mean the highly prestigious front and/or the highly detested front. The seminar was important and strengthened the feeling that we were all fellow humans, all having too much in common to make certain, very common value judgments.

This leads to the consideration of causal chains. Freedom of will and freedom of decision in a sense imply strict causality. One of the most frightful and devastating experiences we can have is to do something seemingly “uncaused,” “unexplainable,” not merely impulsive. We cannot but wish to be links in causal chains as long as we, ourselves, are part of the chains. We wish that our “will is free” in the sense of making our own decisions freely, not by being forced or pushed.

In recent years I have introduced a verb “to emerge.” When certain things, maybe tiny things, happen, they occur because of something. There must absolutely be something, some constellation of factors, just making those things happen at the moment. Today I think that, sometimes, something just emerges. I believe in “emergings” in such a sense. Of course I’m not thinking of major, complex events, but of tiny details. “But they must come from something!” Why must they? Because even tiny details may have great importance. Answer: such details, perhaps, may never emerge.

Acceptance of emergence is one thing, but to give a convincing example is very difficult. Even conceiving how one could pick out and describe the emerging “thing” is difficult to establish. But does it justify the gigantic generalization about tiny happenings: “Absolutely nothing comes from nothing”?

The complex debate on the relation between testability and meaning of hypotheses is relevant here. Is the hypothesis of an emergence testable? Scarcely or surely not testable. But for those who do not subscribe to a completely general requirement of such a kind, the assertion “emergence may happen” may still have cognitive meaning. After all, it is a gigantic, and in a way, fantastic assertion that emergence never happens and never will happen. Fantastic only in the sense of its scope.

Enough about events that may absolutely never have occurred.

Concluding, I would simply maintain that Ecosophy T contains a thesis that there may occur emergences. Even within your own thinking, for instance, within your thinking about emergences.

How does this feel? Momentary, like some slight forms of liberation. Nothing much to write about? I am not certain about that.

The last but not the least important aspect of Ecosophy T is the attitude and practice of education. It is more or less generally accepted that four-year-old boys and girls who did not have siblings enjoy enormous self-respect, a feeling that they are something important, and require an acknowledged status as such. What I find especially remarkable is their spontaneous “deep” questions. What is the world? How great is it? Has the world ever been like it is? You say that grandmother is dead. What does that mean? Simply being away? Are we all going to disappear? Or nothing?

Whether four-year-olds vary in different cultures I do not know. But I suspect that their precocious questions may be similar. The question I would like to get answered may be thus formulated: Why do their lively interests in
the above-mentioned questions seem to be reduced rather than stimulated in ensuing, years, especially in the first school years, when adults, in principle, should furnish excellent conditions for a deepening and an articulation of those questions; even conditions for learning about tentative answers to them?

If we say that God created nature, what we usually mean by the word “nature” is an extremely small part of what the contemporary science of cosmology teaches us. When a young religious group half a century ago asserted, “We have sinned against God’s creation” they referred to a sin against an extremely small part of cosmos – the tiny Earth. Today, there are frightful questions we must answer. Are we able to see God’s hand in the hundred-thousand million galaxies, each with, on average, a hundred-thousand million stars? Yes, we may say, why not? Ecosophy T does not exclude mentioning the constant gigantic explosions going on, perhaps killing living beings on a vaster scale than our imagination can fathom.

The enormity and seemingly brutal and meaningless character of the cosmos as described by science makes it important to ask whether we might limit God’s direct creation to what is suggested in the Bible, and in many other basic religious documents. Nothing was known about the cosmos at the time these old texts were written. It must be religiously acceptable to ignore cosmology and thereby acknowledge that creation concerns the world inside a gigantic cosmos that was already there.

An ecosophy is a “general view” which should not keep silent about the above questions.

Arne Naess

Further Reading [supplied by editors]


See also: Biophilia; Conservation Biology; Council of All Beings; Deep Ecology; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Environmental Ethics; Frilulf Siv; Mountaineering; Naess, Arne; Radical Environmentalism.

ECOtherapy (by Hans Andeweg & Rijk Bols)

Hans Andeweg, M.Sc. is a Dutch biologist who has worked as a researcher in the field of bioorganic agriculture, gardening and forestry, and as a teacher and international organizational consultant. With his wife Rijk Bols, in 2001 he founded the Center for ECOtherapy in Waltrop, Germany, to teach a way of healing the spiritual energies of natural systems in which the healer, the system and the caretaker/manager are equally involved. Based on the viewpoint that nature has a soul and that we can communicate with it, ECOtherapy helps to restore and maintain a harmonious balance of vital energies underlying health and vitality. Andeweg and Bols believe ECOtherapy can be effectively applied anywhere where the balance between living organisms and their environment has been disturbed.

Andeweg and Bols draw on their long experience at the Institute of Resonance Therapy (IRT) in Germany where they worked with remote healing of pollution-stricken forests in Central and Eastern Europe. However, whereas the IRT relies more on the effects of radionic equipment, Andeweg and Bols maintain that the conscious involvement of the caretakers, their inner intuitive development in working with nature, and their connection with the higher spiritual world is essential for the ecosystem’s long-term vitality. This links ECOtherapy with the ideas of Pogačnik and other present-day, spiritual-ecological movements.

In his book In Resonance with Nature (1999) Andeweg explains his worldview, which underlies the practice of ECOtherapy. He combines a wide range of phenomena such as life-force energy (ch’i), form resonance (based on Rupert Sheldrake’s morphogenetic fields), and orgon (from Wilhelm Reich), with the biometry of André Bovis, the work of Rudolf Steiner, blending these and the worldviews of Hawaiian, Dutch and other spiritual thinkers into a unified, holistic model. The model is applicable to anything that fits the description of an organism, organization, or system, be they animals, people, plants, gardens, houses, businesses, farms or landscapes. It includes measurable parameters by which a diagnosis can be made and replicated, and progress can be monitored over time.

On the basis of this model he builds the principles and practices of ECOtherapy. A typical ECOtherapeutic project lasts several months at least and consists of a diagnostic component and a “treatment” component. In the former, the healer intuitively diagnoses the energetic values of the system – Earth radiation, Bovis values, (Reichian) “orgon” etc. – with the aid of a pendulum or dowsing rod; this is done before treatment and repeated at regular intervals during the second phase. The resulting qualitative and quantitative observations reveal the energetic “state” of the system concerned, including spots where energies are disbalanced. The “treatment” itself is aimed at restoring
the balance and is therefore called a “balancing.” It involves the application of various well-known remedies for human healing (Reiki, homeopathy, music, etc.) adapted to the system’s specific needs. The “balancing” can be performed not only on the spot but also — and more efficiently so — at a distance (“remote balancing”). Instead of having to go around large areas (e.g., forest), the treatment is applied on a map, photograph or other representative item of that forest which resonates with the physical system through its morphogenetic field. In this way the healer can repeat the “balancing” protocol more frequently, work over larger areas and more projects simultaneously, and reduce costs. When the “balancing” is applied correctly, disruptive vibrations are relieved and terrestrial and cosmic energy flows are renewed. Application to organizations may generate new solutions to old problems.

ECOtherapy can be learnt by anyone willing to make the effort. Andeweg’s Center offers short courses and workshops, as well as a four-year certificate training course in ECOtherapy.

Cathrien de Pater

See also: Ecopsychology; Steiner Rudolf – and Anthroposophy; Transpersonal Psychology.

Ecotopia

Ecotopia, a novel written by Ernest Callenbach in 1975, is a fictional depiction of the ideas espoused in E.F. Schumacher’s Small is Beautiful, The Whole Earth Catalog, and Callenbach’s nonfiction. It presents a vision of an alternative, future society, located in the Northwestern United States, which is based on a sustainable economy, de-urbanization, political decentralization, alternative energy sources, feminism and a nature-oriented spirituality: “a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms” (47).

Subtitled The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston, it describes a skeptical reporter’s descriptions of, and eventual conversion to Ecotopian values and practices, during the early twenty-first century, twenty years after independence. Weston is an advocate of “ever-continuing progress . . . a rising Gross National Product” and materialistic lifestyles (4). He is disturbed by what he considers a primitive society “led by those damn women” (2).

In Ecotopia sexism has been outlawed, white-collar crime is vigorously prosecuted, workers are owners, and cities have been reduced to self-sustaining communities of no more than 50,000 people, with no suburbs. Automobiles have been replaced by electric buses, taxis, and magnetically propelled high-speed trains, and chemical fertilizers with processed sewage and compost. Television is interactive, and videoconferencing reduces travel. Houses are integrated systems with passive solar power and heat pumps. The extended family has replaced the nuclear family, and sexuality is freer and more playful.

Religion and spirituality are not institutionalized in Ecotopia, but a nature-centered Weltanschauung permeates every aspect of everyday life. People have “a secure sense of themselves as animals,” domestic animals are raised semi-wild, and wild game is valued for its physical and spiritual properties (32). The Protestant work ethic has been abandoned because, humans were meant to take their modest place in a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms, disturbing that web as little as possible. This would mean sacrifice of present consumption, but it would ensure future survival — which became almost a religious objective, perhaps akin to earlier doctrines of “salvation.” People were happy not to the extent that they dominated their fellow creatures on earth, but to the extent that they lived in balance with them (47–8, emphasis mine).

Like the New Age movement that emerged in the 1970s, Ecotopian spirituality promises a New World, a new way of life, and is also highly syncretic, implying aspects of Buddhism and Taoism, while explicitly blending pagan and Native American philosophies. Weston is surprised to hear a young man hail “Brother Tree!” (63). His first Ecotopian sexual encounter takes place in the forest “in some kind of shrine . . . this incredible woman is a goddamn druid or something – a tree worshipper!” (58). As Weston is slowly converted he notes, “Their little shrines are not merely pious nature-appreciation,” but are part of a more complex unity (90).

The strongest influence, though, is from Ecotopia’s earlier inhabitants.

Some Ecotopian articles . . . are directly Indian in inspiration. But what matters most is to live in balance with the nature, “walk lightly on the land,” treat the Earth as a mother . . . Who would use an Earth-mover on his own mother? (32)

Consequently,

the Ecotopians do not feel “separate” from their technology. They evidently feel a little as the Indians must have felt: that the horse and the teepee and the bow and arrow all sprang, like the human being, from the womb of nature, organically (51).

Ecotopians also take a tribal approach to the arts, in which “there is almost no distinction between amateurs and professionals” (145).
There are also elements of Christianity, primarily in the ritual warfare that has replaced competitive sports and actual warfare. When a participant is seriously injured, the combat ends and he is placed on a “stretcher made of red cloth with a white cross on it. His body was arranged in a startlingly crucifix-like way, with straps on wrists and ankles” (79). When Weston inquires about the cross he is told,

Ecotopia came into existence with a Judeo-Christian heritage ... We make the best of it. You will find many expressions of it in our culture still ... There’s also a little ceremony for when a wounded man comes back from the hospital. You might guess what it’s called: the raising. He stands up and walks (81–2).

Christlike, the combatant has made a sacrifice, but one consistent with the Ecotopian ethos. He has arisen not for the sake of heavenly salvation, but for that of humanity’s continuing survival in the natural world.

As the novel approaches its conclusion, Weston still has his doubts about Ecotopia and is preparing to return to the United States with his reports. He is abducted to a hot spring for several days, and after initial resistance he experiences ego loss and psychic transformation.

I lost all sense of horizon, of place – all sense of anything except the steady gurgling of the water coming to me from deep inside the warm earth. I have no idea how long I remained in that state, but suddenly I heard my own voice saying “I am going to stay in Ecotopia!” (179)

Ironically, he has been “saved” and he tells his editor that his assignment in Ecotopia “led me home” (181).

Callenbach later penned Ecotopia Emerging (1981) to describe how the new society was created. In it, the Survivalist Party, dedicated to the biological welfare of all species, slowly gains power in local and state legislatures on the West Coast while infiltrating the National Guard and intelligence agencies. The unpopular reopening of a dangerous nuclear plant near Eureka, a nuclear disaster near Seattle, and the involvement of the governor of California in a massive water scandal precipitate an Ecotopian uprising. Paralyzed by covert wars in Brazil and Saudi Arabia, facing revolt in other areas of the country, and fearing that stolen weapons-grade uranium had been used by Ecotopians to mine New York and Washington D.C., the United States government can do little to prevent secession.

The Survivalist agenda is encapsulated in a Ten Commandments-like “No More!” list:

No extinction of other species.
No nuclear weapons or nuclear plants.
No manufacturing of carcinogenic or mutagenic substances.
No adulterants in food.
No discrimination by reason of sex, race, age, religion, or ethnic origin.
No private cars.
No advertiser-controlled or broadcast television.
No limited-liability corporations.
No absentee ownership or control – one employee, one vote.
No growth in population (35–6).

(It should be noted that while the original Ten Commandments focus on individual behavior, the Ecotopian version applies to corporations and society as a whole. In 1990 Callenbach promulgated a more individually oriented “Earth’s Ten Commandments.”)

The Ecotopian blend of Native American and pagan cosmology inspires people to consider themselves intrinsic parts of nature and act accordingly. “If you have holy traditions, you will not have to fight over everything every day; people will know what needs to be done” (74). Appropriate behavior is also a catalyst for personal transformation: “She didn’t exactly worship trees . . . But she felt, more and more, that trees partook of some mysterious Earth spirit in which she too shared . . . others would notice a quiet radiance from her. ‘Here comes the tree witch!’ ” (117)

Christianity is also part of the emerging Ecotopian ethos. “There were even Survivalists who spoke with the fervor of evangelists. Their meetings even acquired a name: Vision Bringing, from the ancient idea that where there is no vision, the people perish” (128). Their deep ecology version of Original Sin is the introduction of agriculture, with crop plants as the Tree of Knowledge. Eventually, “they turned the Garden into a Factory” (129). Although the Survivalists do not believe a return to The Garden is possible, they preach conservation and restoration as part of a conscious human participation in a “circle of being” (130). The Garden remains, in the words of President Vera Allwen, “a standard, a measure of our actions now, a holy ground on which to stand. Amen” (131).

The biblical parable of the rich man and the poor man is similarly transformed.

Now the moral of this story is that the rich man, even though he was trying to be good to the Earth, actually did a great deal of damage to it. The poor man, who was too busy trying to survive to pay much attention to ecology, caused far less damage . . . Blessed especially are the thrifty and resourceful . . . Blessed are the producers of their own necessities . . . And I say unto you, verily it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than

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for a rich man to enter into a world of ecological sanity (147–8).

Simple living and self-sufficiency are considered not only ecologically and economically necessary to survive, but sacred. The Ecotopians use Christian rhetoric in a wry manner when they spray pesticide on the Raussen Chemical Company’s lawn party “‘2,4,5-T is perfectly safe.’ – Raussen. ‘Ye shall reap as ye sowed.’ – God” (213).

Utopian and evangelical modes are synthesized in the end: “We speak for life, not death. We speak for joy, not anxiety. We speak for voluntarily joining together to create a new one, not for military tyranny to preserve an old one” (319). The Ecotopians consider their vision to be a beacon to enlighten others and guide their way.

*Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias* (1994) is a fascinating collection of science fiction and fantasy stories inspired by *Ecotopia*. Contributors include Kim Stanley Robinson, Ursula Le Guin, Robert Silverberg, and Pat Murphy. Callenbach’s story, “Chocco,” might be subtitled “Ecotopia Prevails.” A group of Ecotopians had migrated to an ancient Indian pueblo shortly before the Earth’s human population was nearly exterminated by global warming, drought, disease, and radiation. Nearly a thousand years in the future they live a simple but culturally and spiritually rich lifestyle, using only environmentally benign technologies. Two young men vie for the position of Memory Keeper by recounting the collapse of the short-lived “machine people” civilization and the lessons learned from it. This seems to be a worst-case scenario wherein even though most of humanity continued down the path of extinction, a small group managed to adapt and survive.

Originally published in English, *Ecotopia* has been translated into ten other languages and has sold nearly a million copies. It has been criticized for romanticizing Indians, and more recently for sexual profligacy, which seems anachronistic in the age of AIDS. The overall reaction, however, has been positive. Many of the environmental and technological processes such as mass recycling, organic gardening, solar power, electronic publishing, and teleconferencing have become part of everyday life. It has inspired many individuals to simplify their lifestyles and become environmental activists, ecofeminists, and/or deep ecologists. Some of the principles and tactics used by radical environmental organizations such as “EarthFirst!” and animal rights groups are based upon those depicted in *Ecotopia* and another visionary novel published the same year, Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. The platform of the Survivalist Party is reflected in those of the American and German Green parties. *Ecotopia* continues to offer both an inspiring vision and some practical ideas about how to create a sustainable, positive future.

*Further Reading*


See also: Abbey, Edward; Bioregionalism; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Callenbach, Ernest; Ecotopian Reflections; Ecotopia – The European Experience; Radical Environmentalism; Science Fiction; Schumacher, Ernest Friedrich; Snyder, Gary.

[Ecotopian Reflections](#)

From an Ecotopian perspective, the Moloch of our age is industrial consumerist capitalism. To it are being sacrificed the energies and joys of billion-strong generations of people – human cash cows – not to mention uncountable trillions of other living beings. What Marx called the “cash nexus” and moderns call “the market” is everywhere triumphant – a corrosive force so powerful that it dissolves social bonds and subjects all natural phenomena to economic “rationality.” Everything and everybody has a price. The emotional valences that have held together communities, companies, governments, churches, even families, attenuate.

The market’s priestly class, economists, endlessly glorify the dominance of the market over all other considerations. In truly religious terms they may be heretics, but their doctrines are supported by all corporate media, by the leashed-dog representatives in our money-humbled legislatures, and of course by our oil-industry-bred leaders and their corporate cronies. It is an era blatantly corrupt.
These are, as Buddhists would say, evil times – a new Dark Age. We stumble headlong toward unimaginable ecological catastrophes: probably not sudden ones (although to genetically nimble microbes, six billion human bodies constitute a tempting new nutrient pool) but a long dimming down of the beautiful productivity of the planet’s living systems – with especially painful consequences for the majority of the human species, who depend on them directly. Citizens of the “Northern” advanced countries currently enjoy a hectic prosperity. Our better-off classes are submerged in a consumer glut fueled by ruthless exploitation of the Earth’s resources and a massive transfer of wealth from the “South” – exacerbated by globalization and its one-sided “free trade.”

But our long-term fate, like that of the Earth’s billions of poor, is to live through mostly irreversible ecological decline: desertification and impoverishment of soils, extinction of species, shortages of fresh water, atmospheric and ocean warming with its biological disruptions and spread of diseases, atomization of human societies, desperate migration fluxes, wars.

In such a dismal situation, can we find consolation and guidance in a new kind of faith? The puzzle and the challenge of our era lie in this: can relentlessly anthropocentric institutions like religion and capitalism be transformed into sustainability-enhancing new forms, so that some kind of stable civilization can be preserved? The answer is almost certainly No. Yet it is worth trying to envision positive alternatives – some kind of ideological/theological jujitsu. Can our tendency to imagine we are the center of the universe, which condemns us to disaster, be converted to an eccentric regard for all our fellow travelers on Spaceship Earth which is at the same time self-serving and ecology-preserving?

Ecotopians like myself like to think it is possible. We know that most religions are resourcefully syncretic: they draw not only from earlier religions but from new ideas of their time. Several growing nodes in contemporary religious thought and practice seem promising.

One is the old Christian idea of stewardship. “Dominion” ought not to mean unlimited exploitation, in the full-bore capitalist mode that Lynn White thought Christianity authorized, relentlessly externalizing ecological and social costs from humans and our corporations outward, but responsible administration. To modify Stewart Brand’s famous declaration in Co-Evolution Quarterly that “We are as gods, and might as well get good at it,” we should come to believe that “We are sensible managers, with an eye toward long-term survival of all Earth’s creatures,” (no reference available) and had better get good at that. We have tried enough of it to know that it is not easy. We think we are planning “smart growth” and still sprawl our suburbs over precious wild or agricultural lands.

Sometimes our devoted marsh or prairie restoration efforts go awry. We are unable or unwilling to forgo war, now unimaginably destructive to the environment as well as human beings. Sometimes we inadvertently introduce fatal diseases into precious ecosystems. We fail to notice the long-term effects of our massive (and highly subsidized) global transportation system. We know that the sheer burden of human numbers is one of the major pressures toward environmental destruction, yet we are unable to stem the tides of reproduction and migration. Nonetheless, “stewardship” remains a useful ideal. Most people, when they are goaded to think about it – and this should be an overriding goal of a worthwhile modern religion – agree that God or Allah or the Great Spirit did not create the world so that our species could despoil it. We are not here merely to work, buy, and die.

Second, religions make it possible to codify righteousness. Sometimes they pervert it – into religious wars, for example. Sometimes they commercialize it – with high-living hierarchies or TV preachers, indulgences, unaccounted-for “contributions.” But we all need help to achieve some coherence in making choices about what is right. There is, of course, a wide range in how different faiths manage this, as well as in theological doctrines. The “sky god” religions of the West traditionally vest righteousness somewhere up above, in a super-patriarch who wreaks vengeance on lawless or defiant people, authorizes the oppression of women, and lays down the rules – obviously not a model with enormously productive implications for an ecological sensitive and responsible, not to mention democratic, civilization.

Eastern (or ancient Greek) religions are more polymorphous, with many gods and goddesses, including some up to no good and dubious as models.

The primordial goddess religions focused on productivity (human, agricultural, and animal), sometimes sought to amplify it through sacrifice, and did not support warlike or hierarchical leaders; we do not really know what their rules were. The only successful “modern” religion, Mormonism, combines a theology as bizarre as Catholicism’s with rules that enforce socially supportive practices almost equivalent to a welfare state’s. Modern Westerners (suspicious of other peoples’ mysticism and unaware of their own) tend to think of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism as little more than glorified and codified common sense, but in these religions’ sense of humanity as an integral part of a universal order we find much that is not only amenable to ecological wisdom but eerily parallel to ecological science, and practices of meditation, austerity, and right livelihood that are ecologically beneficial.

Thus it seems to me not inconceivable that as we continue on our trail of ecological tears during the twenty-first century we will build a new kind of religious synthesis out of the “good parts” of all these religious traditions. It will be a formidable task, because it goes up against the dynamic of global capitalism, with its endless
resources for propaganda endeavoring to convince us that all is well, or even if it isn’t well, that there is no alternative. I do not myself possess faith in any ordinary religious sense, but I do have faith that in the long run – fifty years, a hundred years – people will see through the propaganda, pay attention to the real emotional and social needs that no consumerist balm can salve, and develop beliefs appropriate to our actual ecological station. What theological shape this evolution will take, I cannot really guess.

“Pagan”-Christian-Islamic-Buddhist? It is easier to imagine, as I tried to do in Ecotopia and Ecotopia Emerging, some of the practices that might be involved. It is worth remembering that, on the level of everyday life, the elaborate Talmudic laws were a response not only to theological notions but to the concrete living conditions of a desert people. The laws dealt with hygiene and thoughtful ritualized relations with animals, as well as a proper posture toward God. It is surely possible that we can develop a modern, ecologically sophisticated set of equally specific rules for sustainable living in a global, industrialized society. For instance, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, author of Down-to-Earth Judaism, is a leading thinker in the “ecokosher” movement. At his website Waskow asks, “Is it ecokosher to destroy great forests, to ignore insulating our houses, synagogues and nursing homes, to become addicted to automobiles?” As Waskow has emphasized in many writings, these are moral and religious questions, inseparable from ecological ones.

In the perspective of endless-choice consumerism, attempts at codification may tend to seem silly, just as the ancient injunctions not to eat pork or shellfish may once have sounded. “Eat lower on the food chain” is not going to win prizes for memorable commercials – but it happens to be excellent counsel ecologically and nutritionally, and my prediction is that by the end of the century it will be considered old-hat and unexceptionable advice. Two decades ago, after all, anybody who urged neighbors to recycle was considered a crank. Now almost everybody feels it is a civic duty, and does it. In the long run, doing things right pays off, people notice, and their ideas change. Only two decades ago, any American business or social gathering was smoke-filled; now smokers huddle furtively outside offices – and lung cancer rates are dropping. Sky-god religions do not pay enough attention to such mundane things, but our future depends on them.

Third, a new religion will restore heart to our emotional lives. I do not mean merely that getting the cash nexus off our backs (like the pods in Invasion of the Body Snatchers) will feel good. Acknowledging and celebrating our actual place in the universe can be inspiring and humbling and comforting. It has always puzzled me that some people who conclude that God is Dead say it makes them feel lonely. Here they are, in the midst of a stupifying wealth of miraculously interdependent living beings – so various, lovely, mysterious, and often friendly. They partake in their cells of an ancient heritage of other living beings, going back billions of years. They are gifted with the capacity for glorious joys and pleasures. They have minds capable of incredible feats of thinking, feeling, understanding. They have the emotional potential to form deep and lasting bonds with friends, lovers, spouses, pets, favorite plants, and far beyond. As members of a particularly resourceful species, they have the opportunity to play a key role in the healthy unfolding of the universe. Our new religion must help us to grasp and value this astonishing and very unlonely status. It needs to incorporate the mysterious and wonderful findings of ecological science.

It needs to relate them to a righteous way of living. And if it does these things, since there is probably an ecology of religions too, it should prove adaptive and survive.

Ernest Callenbach

See also: Callenbach, Ernest; Ecotopia; Ecotopia – The European Experience.

Ecotopia is an annual, two-week-long event in Europe that began in 1988 and is held in various European venues. Organized annually by European Youth For(est) Action, based in the Netherlands, Ecotopia seeks to create an active environmentally friendly community. Its purpose is to teach people how to live a sustainable, eco-friendly and low-energy lifestyle by demonstrating how to do so. There is a strong disillusionment with the current material and selfish world, with its reliance on technology and science to solve problems. At Ecotopia, people are given space and encouraged to explore other solutions through political, environmental, and spiritual knowledge and methods.

In 2001, Ecotopia was held in Bulgaria and the year before in Finland. In August 2002, Ecotopia was held in County Clare in Ireland. This was the first time Ecotopia had come to Ireland and it was hosted by Gluaiseacht, an all-Ireland environmental and social justice activist movement with which I participate. The site chosen was Bealkelly Wood, a native woodland forest, on the shores of Lough Derg, in Co. Clare.

All Ecotopias strive to create an environmentally sustainable and participatory community. In preparing our site we tried to create a gathering place that would use renewable energy sources and leave little impact on the local environment. We built temporary structures such as tepees and geodesic domes to house our kitchen and meeting areas. Water was provided to the kitchen and toilet areas from a natural spring on site. We built compost
toilets, which are dry, use no chemicals, and convert all waste into usable compost.

We also established a vegan kitchen. Cooking was done on wood-fired braziers, where the wood was collected from the forest using sustainable woodland management methods taught to participants by the site owner, and three meals were provided each day. An organic vegetable garden provided many of the vegetable needs for the community.

Ecotopians gather in Morning Circle after breakfast to plan the activities of the day ahead, to volunteer for chores that are necessary for the community, and to discuss any difficulties that people are having. Decisions are made by consensus. Morning Circle begins with a short game to awake and energize people, followed by an introductory round where everyone states their name and their country of origin. The list of workshops is announced and facilitators make short descriptions. Then discussion follows, centering on issues arising from the previous day or any difficulties people are experiencing. This inclusive atmosphere created a sense of ownership and involvement in Ecotopia, giving all participants the experience of living in a community with attendant rights and responsibilities, contrary to the greed and individualism of modern Western society.

The days at Ecotopia are filled with activities including many workshops on topics ranging from environmental awareness and alternative medicines, to making your own compost and ecological building. Workshops ranged over a broad spectrum of political, environmental and religious or spiritual issues. Political issues included: cultural diversity, peace activism, conflict resolution, the feminist critique of industrialism, UN peace-keeping activities, the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Environmental topics included seed saving, climate change, eco-villages and green burials. Religious topics explored Celtic spirituality, the Falon Gong movement, the Holy Wells project, and Tibetan religious rites. There were also practical workshops on alternative healing, making tinctures, reflexology, and daily Qi Gong and yoga sessions.

One of my favorites was a smudging ceremony. This American Indian cleansing ritual was taught to an Irish woman when she lived in Canada, protecting their tribal lands from deforestation by logging companies. It was a very special ceremony, where we cleansed ourselves using sage and reciting poetry.

Workshops were held on Ireland’s unique legal history, Brehon law, where the history of Brehon law and its principles were explained. Ireland, known as the Land of Saints and Scholars, has a strong history of scholarship in the many monasteries established here. These scholars had access to large libraries of Latin texts and Bibles. From these sources, they fused their teachings into Ireland’s unique law, known as the Brehon Laws. For example, in relation to theft, they modified Exodus 22:1–4 to include economically important animals such as horses and pigs (O’Corráin 1989: 13).

Everyone who attends Ecotopia is asked to travel there by sustainable energy-saving ways. To facilitate this, a bike tour is organized annually. Participants spend four weeks traveling cross-country to arrive at the Ecotopia site. This year’s tour began in Dover in the South of England, traveled across Wales and the Irish Sea, and on to Ecotopia. Along the way, the tour group participated in Critical Mass actions, where cyclists block city streets to slow down traffic and highlight the need for sustainable transport methods.

As Ecotopians we hope that by practicing inclusive politics, by learning more about spirituality and our connectedness with the Earth, and by learning how to reduce the impact our lifestyles have on the planet, we will demonstrate a path toward an environmentally sustainable and socially just world.

Mags Liddy

Further Reading
See also: Callenbach, Ernest; Ecotopia; Ecotopian Reflections.

Eden and other Gardens

Gardens of “Eden” (Hebrew, “delight”) have represented the womb of human creation and culture, the expectation of happiness and desire for endless joy on Earth, and nostalgia for a safe harbor, a place of protection against humankind’s fear of nature. Across time, earthly gardens of milk and honey have been re-visioned and imagined by prophets, saints, mystics and philosophers, and by painters, from Islamic miniaturists to Europeans like Hieronymous Bosch, Albrecht Durer or Jan Breugel the Elder. Peaceable kingdoms, where all sentient beings lie down together have been repeatedly depicted by artists such as Henri Rousseau or Edward Hicks.

Poets from Hesiod to Edmund Spenser and John Milton have written with yearning of a golden age when the Earth itself was paradise. Explorers, cartographers and conquerors have sought the original biblical garden in the Middle East, as well as utopias and paradises relocated on Pacific isles or in the Americas. Kings, landscapers and dreamers have replicated them in parks and elaborate gardens.

Many ancient cultures placed the first humans in a primordial paradise. After a long epic struggle during
which the roiling cosmos divides and separates to shape Earth, the Sumerian myth of Enkidu (ca. 2000 B.C.E.) rewards its hero with a peacable kingdom, free of disease and distress. But until Enkidu can obtain water, life in the garden cannot advance. When he finally secures fresh water from the sun god Utu, civilization is allowed to develop. Civilization itself has been considered a paradise, its cities victories over of the anarchic forces of nature.

The Tower of Babylon reached from Earth toward the cosmos to touch the gods. The great Chaladean king Nebuchadrezzar II (ca. 605–562 B.C.E.) built this tall tribute to the divine, based on an earlier ziggurat form, in colorfully glazed brick terraces that coiled toward the heavens. The terraces were fed by the Euphrates and planted with trees and every flower and herb then known to gardeners. Like the spires of a cathedral, the Hanging Gardens resembled an upside-down root, piercing the firmament, or a lightning rod, a medium pulling the divine earthward. At the top stood the shrine of the fertility god in the midst of a cedar grove, personifying all-important vegetal forces.

In 1976, artist Alan Saret created Ghosthouse, a ziggurat in Artpark in Lewiston, New York. Like the ancient tower, Ghosthouse “was intended,” art critic Lucy Lippard writes in Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory (1983: 205), “as an ethereal emblem of a life ‘where,’ [Saret says] ‘technology bows to the spirit of the natural world from which it derives its materials and inspiration.’”

The poet Hesiod (eighth century B.C.E.) and the philosopher Plato (ca. 428–347 B.C.E.), among other ancient Greeks – including Homer (eighth century B.C.E.) and Pindar (518–438 B.C.E.) – envisioned lands where nature’s generosity was unbounded, overflowing with sweet waters and glorious fragrances, where suffering was absent and humankind lived in harmony with other animals. In his didactic poem, Works and Days, Hesiod imagines a golden age of “merry feasting beyond the reach of evils.” Human beings “dwelt in ease and peace” on lands rich with flocks “and loved by the blessed gods” (vv. 111–21).

Nevertheless, on Hesiod’s island “untouched by sorrow,” humans are not immortal (vv. 170–5). There is death, but it is soft and soporific, free of pain, merely as if one were overcome by soothing sleep.

Plato, in The Statesman, recalls “fruits in plenty from trees and other plants, furnished by the Earth without help from agriculture” (272A). The Roman poet Ovid (ca. 43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.), in Metamorphoses, also pictures a primordial history in which “the Earth herself without compulsion, untouched by hoe or plowshare, gave all things needful.” Humans were “content with food that came without seeking” (1.90–112).

Archaic Greeks did not build pleasure gardens as such. They set their temples and theatres in natural landscape, amid fantastic vistas, surrounded by myrtle, lilies, honeysuckle and ivy. This was Arcadia, the wild playground of gods, where they acted out their dramas with each other and with mortals. Elysium, the Land of the Dead, was situated below the Earth, where shades dwelled in absolute contentment amid luxuriant vegetation.

The unity between humankind and nature in these Elysian Fields, Happy Isles, and diverse golden ages comes of nature controlled, manageable on a human scale. In Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic, A.B. Giamatti notes three sorts of earthly paradises: gardens (more or less governable manifestations of nature), pastoral settings (which nourish romantic love), and “wilderness” that fully accommodates human well-being, created for and about humans (1966: 34–48). Regardless of the theme, each vision of paradise offers freedom, bliss, and effortless, constant communication with the divine. Its beauty dominates the rest of the world; there are no storms, and despite a constant flow of water, no rain. Winter is nonexistent, as is overheating heat in summer, and even the roses have no thorns.

For pre-Christian Celts, “civilized” pleasure gardens belonged to the sidhe, or faerie clans, whose homes were elaborate, luxurious affairs complete with jeweled orchards: Tir na n’Og, the lands of Eternal Youth or Ever-Summer; the Fortunate Isles; and later, in Christian Arthurian legend, Avalon and the Blessed Isles. These might be entered by various means, including magical music or the seduction of a mortal by a faerie. They could be encountered by stumbling on a stone or into a cave, bush or well, or they might be reached after death. Ancient Celts embraced both agricultural and nomadic existences, both offering in poetry and song high praise to wild lands. They enthusiastically embraced their animal natures, not necessarily amicably with other creatures rendered toothless and trustworthily, but able themselves to transform into ferocious, untamed beasts.

The 1953 Revised Standard Version of the Bible (Gen. 2:8–15) describes a garden filled with bounty and replete with “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food,” as well as a tree of life and another of knowledge of good and evil. Human dominion over nature is immediately stated (Gen. 1:26), then reiterated when the first man, Adam (Hebrew, “Earth”), is given the task of naming each and every beast and plant (Gen. 2:19, 20). In Eden, there are no “brute beasts.” Elsewhere, in origin myths worldwide, animals are responsible for spiritual awakening and frequently for our creation. They are often siblings to humans. A mark of holiness from ancient Greece to St. Francis of Assisi was the ability to charm the animals. Here again we find the relentless human longing to civilize the wild, a romanticized relationship with animals, whereby they are reduced to pets. However, some theologians consider this charming of beasts a metaphor for taming our own undomesticated natures and feral behavior.
Ironically, it was that injurious behavior toward nature which exacerbated our craving for an earthly paradise.

The biblical Garden of Eden is a place of extreme fertility and perpetual springtime. Four rivers border the garden, for water is the key element to all earthly paradise, as indeed it is to all life. In desert lands, water is a precious commodity and thus the ultimate source of exhilaration. That Adam is placed in the garden "to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15) indicates humankind’s obligation to stewardship – a point made by some environmentalists, although others dismiss the notion as patronizing – and also makes agriculture, the cultivation of plants, implicit. Having observed the territorialism and destruction inherent in human survival, not to speak of agriculture, the fifth-century Gaulish poet Claudius Marius Victor posited in Alectoria that Adam and Eve simply had no need for food, but lived "like angels" on air and ripe fruits that dropped from the trees.

(Others, of course, have looked at Eden as a foraging paradise, and the Fall as the historic point where agriculture begins.)

In Eden, too, there is gold, bdellium and onyx (Gen. 1:12), the first traces that this place of relentless goodness, isolated from the rest of God’s violent creation, carries within it resources precious to human trade and material wealth. Thus, inevitable corruption – with dissension and war – is built into the scene, notwithstanding temptation at the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the Fall.

In a Ngombe origin myth of Africa, human beings are also first situated in a garden, which they must till, having been ejected from the idle realm of the gods for complaining and talking too much. The mortals’ very appearance on Earth introduces or motivates ambivalence and other qualities that come of being human. Unlike the Judeo-Christian Fall, wherein the Earth and human life upon it, having come to know evil, are punished with hardship, toil and toxicity of every kind, the Ngombe tale accepts from the beginning that malevolence in the scramble to survive is simply part of our legacy. The Earth is nevertheless beautiful and fecund, and wild nature innocent of malice.

Eden reappears throughout the Old Testament. In Isaiah (51:3), God will turn Zion’s desert into a garden like that of Eden. Ezekiel’s prophecy recollects the garden, but adds “carmelian, chrysolite, and moonstone, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald...” (Ezek. 28:12–14). The image conjures a stage-setting, glittering gems whose shadow is acquisitiveness, for rocks are attractive and useful to humans only when polished – “civilized” – from their rough state. Here, in Ezekiel’s Eden, revisited with its lawns of jewels, is garden design, whose architectural features are further explored in the New Testament, in a new, cordoned, messianic Jerusalem, a city resembling a garden, shining “like jasper, clear as crystal,” its walls adorned with emeralds, topazes and myriad other precious stones (Rev. 21:11–22).

In nearly every major religious drama, gardens appear to describe abundance, fertility, renewal and rebirth: “Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden” (Jn. 19:41).

Although we use the word to illustrate a place of limitless perfection, whether here or in the Otherworld, “paradise” comes from the Persian, pairidaeza, meaning simply “park” or an orchard surrounded by a wall. Paradise is the hortus conclusus, the enclosed or cloister garden. In Islam’s holy book, the Qur’an, the Fall in the earthly Garden of Eden is covered quickly in a few brief verses (Surahs I, VII, XX); both humans are equally culpable and at each reference they are readily forgiven so long as they follow God’s guidance and do “not go astray/ neither shall they be unprosperous” (Surah XX).

The Qur’an makes nine additional mentions of the Garden of Eden (Surahs IX, XIII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXXV, XXXVII, LXI, XCIII), all describing it as the garden in jannah, heaven, the reward for a life spent in righteousness, where rivers flow and water is abundant. Pools in ancient Persia and Egypt were oases, earthly equivalents to paradise, and so became the garden’s focal point. Egyptian garden ponds were channels used for irrigation as well as pleasure and refreshment. Rather than house-with-garden, wealthy Egyptians had gardens with houses in them. Kiosks or pavilions were built around the pool, the central feature of Persian gardens, where indoor and outdoor spaces were so artfully merged, that the division between them was nearly invisible. The pool is always the heart of the so-called “Islamic” garden.

In the Qur’an and various Hadith traditions (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), Muslims are enjoined to appreciate without exception all God’s creation and to grow gardens on Earth.

The paradisical garden is outside time and space. Medieval European monastic gardens were dedicated frequently to the Virgin Mary, planted as her paradise on Earth. Their intention was to direct the soul to God. Renaissance attempts to restore or replicate Eden were meant on the other hand to exalt their owners. These artificial paradises, spanning hundreds of acres, were triumphs of technology over nature, built with grottoes, labyrinths and mazes, filled with statuary and carefully planted “forests.” Some even featured animals, the dangerous ones “peaceably” displayed in cages, while the less threatening, like deer, were free to wander, and be hunted.

In 1533, the first botanical garden was established at Venice, followed throughout the sixteenth century by gardens in Padua, Pisa, Paris and Leipzig, in the hope of recovering or at least mimicking the lost paradise. These places – with artfully placed fountains – became repositories for collections of the rarest plants found in all the “lands of discovery,” imagined to have been in Eden itself. As we have destroyed species, botanic gardens – and
zoos – while no longer serving as manifestations of our melancholy for the garden of delight, have become useful in some kinds of preservation of plants and animals that we have rendered extinct or nearly so.

Around the world there are fabulous “gardens of revelation,” as John Beardsley calls them in his book, Gardens of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists. From Simon Rodia’s famous Watts Tower in Los Angeles to “Carhenge” in Nebraska to Nek Chand Saini’s rock garden of carved and mosaic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Chadigarh, India, to Reverend Howard Finster’s “Paradise Garden” and his “Plant Farm Museum” in Alabama and Georgia to “La Freneuse” created by Robert Tatin in France to extensive “Grottoes of the Holy Book” built by Roman Catholic priest Paul Mathias Dobberstein in Iowa and lay brother Joel Zoetl in Alabama, and many more, these folk-art landscapes are personal investigations of Edenic gardens, devotional and nostalgic acts of art making and construction in tribute to creation, in search of the divine (by the very act of making them).

Numerous contemporary artists, beginning in the 1970s, have created art on and sensitive to a site in nature, which, Lippard writes,

seems to have been a reaction against disengaged art objects that can be moved from place to place, but rarely “belong” to any place . . . much “ecological art” reflects a . . . need to “return.” At the same time, our social restlessness demands a sense of movement. This gives rise to impermanence as a sculptural strategy well-suited to natural environments, allowing many different objects to enjoy a brief but relatively unobtrusive public existence (1983: 197).

“Belonging” seems to be a key to the wistful yearning for earthly paradise. The garden is a sanctuary of nature against nature’s terrifying power. Yet for eons, prophets have withdrawn “to the voice that cries in the wilderness,” as in Isaiah. Among the many wild men, saints, and hermits of Ireland, the twelfth-century recluse Suibne recited, “. . .Though you think sweet / your students’ gentle talk in yonder church / sweeter, I think, the splendid talking of yonder church / sweeter, I think, the splendid talking of yonder church / sweeter. . . .”

Revelation and revolution begin in the true wilderness: countless heroes of mythology, numberless ascetics wandering homeless, Jesus in the desert, Muhammad in a cave on Mount Hira. The rebel flees into wilderness – into the divine, to god beyond the gods – and returns to civilization to claim righteousness and justice.

Jennifer Heath

Further Reading


See also: Creation Myths of the Ancient World; Creation Story in the Hebrew Bible; Creation’s Fate in the New Testament; Eden’s Ecology; Fall, The; Gardening and Nature Spirituality; Gardens in Islam; Japanese Gardens; Mesopotamia; Ovid’s Metamorphoses; Restoring Eden; Wilderness Religion.

Eden’s Ecology

Images of paradise reveal our muddled feelings about our place in nature: our guilty pride, our snug discomfort. By imagining a time or place of perfect harmony between humans and nature, they indict the discord we feel here and now.

The nineteenth-century American farming village, the medieval city, the desert pueblo, the allegedly woman-centered culture of Neolithic Europe, the hunter-gatherer band, the free-love revels of pygmy chimps – each of these has been seized upon as a lost paradise, as the point after which our lineage took a wrong turn.

Is it possible to get beyond this parlor game of “Pick Your Eden” – to make sense both of the near-universality of the paradise myth and of its maddening tendency to recede into an ever-mistier past? Let us begin by setting the myth of an earthly paradise against the broadest possible backdrop: not just humankind’s history, but that of life on Earth.

We humans tend to think of ourselves, pridefully or guiltily, as unique in our remaking of the globe. But we have not remade it single-handedly: we have had the help
of annual grasses, quadrupeds, perennial grasses (notably grains), and a host of other organisms. What is more, our various alliances are merely the latest of many examples, over the course of Earth’s history, of conglomerates of species that conquered the Earth – from the various bacteria that united to form the eukaryotic cell to the axis of fur, feathers, flowers, and proboscides that created the Cenozoic. Seen from this point of view, our own victories seem a shade less grand and a few degrees less shameful.

That is not to say they are harmless. For instance, by allying ourselves with annual grasses – which thrive in disturbed soil, and put their energy into seeds rather than roots – we have thrown into reverse a process of soil formation that had been going on, in fits and starts, for nearly half a billion years.

As the edge of a new wave of human-led change moves across the Earth, it first “improves” and then ruins each place it passes through. To make sense of these changes, we make up stories and assign names: Eden, Arcadia, the Golden Age. Though we may not use these names every day, the stories are always buzzing in the idle corners of our minds.

As our subject here is Eden, we must now move from Earth history to a narrower focus: the myths and ecologies of the Ancient Near East. In that time and place, two ways of looking at the world arose that are with us yet. For one, the heart of the world is wilderness. For the other, the world revolves around the city, the work of human hands.

The two great worldviews I am speaking of belonged to two kinds of civilization: those of the hilly uplands and those of the great river valleys. The first kind is best represented by the Canaanites, the second by the Mesopotamians.

The peoples of the hills, narrow valleys, and narrow coastal plains made their living from small-scale mixed husbandry. This was a refined descendent of the earliest farming known, which had developed in those same hills. The peoples of the great river valleys were more ambitious. They practiced large-scale, irrigated agriculture that was not so different, in essence, from what large corporations do throughout the world today.

Tied to these different ways of living on the land were different economies, different social structures, different political forms – and different world-poles.

The world-pole is the axis on which the world turns. It is the heart of the world, the source of all life. Nearly every people has a world-pole, but they do not all agree on its shape. For the Canaanites, the world-pole was the Mountain: the wild place sacred to the gods, the font of life-giving water. For the Mesopotamians, it was the Tower: the ziggurat that rose in the midst of the city.

Both sides were right, of course. Both wilderness and civilization are sources of life, of wealth, of weal. The question is whether one looks to the proximate source or the ultimate source. Looking to the proximate source is useful in many ways, but in the long run it is dangerous. Convinced that our well-being springs from our own cleverness in reshaping the world around us, we are tempted to reshape more and more of it, extending the reach of the Tower into every corner of the world. And that is biting off more than we can chew. An apposite instance is the irrigation that both nourished successive Mesopotamian civilizations and, through salinization of the soil, contributed to their downfall; but history is studded with hundreds of others.

For the myth of the Mountain is rooted in ecological fact. Mannmade landscapes survive only at the sufferance of the wilderness around them, or the wilderness that remains in them. The flow of energy, water, nutrients, and genetic information; the maintenance of temperature and the mix of atmospheric gases within narrow limits; the fertility of the soil: all these are achieved by wild nature in ways we do not fully understand. As we do not know how the job is done, we cannot do it ourselves. Even if we could, we would end up spending most of our waking hours working for something that we used to get for free.

In other words, humans and their allies are able to conquer the world, but they are not able to run it all by themselves. If the waves of human advance go too far, or too fast, or run too deep, they may finally bring about their own undoing.

Where does the story of Eden fit in this framework?

The more we know about the Israelites, the clearer it is that they were Canaanite hill farmers who practiced a sophisticated and fairly sustainable mixed husbandry of grains, vines, livestock, and trees yielding fruit, nuts, and oil. They were neither desert nomads mistrustful of nature, nor proud hydraulic despots lording it over nature. They were good farmers living frugally on the margins and using the best stewardship they knew. They were not so different, perhaps, from other peasants of the Mediterranean basin, past and present.

Being Canaanites, the children of Israel might be expected to have some notion of a World Mountain. So they did. It took several forms, but foremost among them was Eden.

Although the Bible never specifies Eden’s elevation, it does make it the source of four great rivers that flow to the ends of the Earth. Armed with the knowledge that water does not flow uphill, scholars from Philo’s time to the present have placed Eden in the mountains of Armenia, or other mountains vaguely north of Mesopotamia.

As the source of water, and therefore life, for the known world, Eden is a classic world-pole. Classically, too, it crowns its Mountain with a Tree of Life – a tree which, according to the Midrash, “spread over all living things. . . . All the primeval waters branched out in streams under it” (B’reishit Rabbah 15.6). To walk around its trunk would take a man five hundred years.
Eden is the source of life in another sense: it is the navel of the world, the first home of humans and, arguably, of other creatures as well. It is even a home of sorts for God, who walks in the garden in the cool of the day. But while God and plants and animals get to stay in Eden, humans are ejected.

Modern scholars tend to picture Eden as a formal, irrigated garden in the Mesopotamian style. But while some of the sources of the Eden story may have had that shape, others were a good deal wilder and woollier. In the Mountain of God, we have a vision of paradise as a forested peak – the summa and last resort of wilderness in a region chock-a-block with cities, fields, canals, herds, and armies. While the Hebrew word gan usually means an enclosed vegetable garden or fruit orchard, the phrase gan Elohim, “garden of God,” seems to be meant as a kind of analogy: just as we might call the prairie “God’s lawn.”

In passages from Ezekiel (28:12–16; 31:1–18) and Isaiah (14:9–15) – in some of which Eden is explicitly called “the mountain of God” – scholars have glimpsed the glittering shreds of a lost Hebrew epic of Eden, having to do with an angel or god who rebelled against YHWH and was cast down to Earth or into the pit. If even gods and angels were cast out of Eden, what chance did humans have of lasting out their term?

Such wild places were not paradises for humans, but for gods. They were not meant for humans at all.

The cosmic center is not always thought of as a nice place for humans to live in or even to visit. Yet it is the source of life. “All the world is watered with the dregs of Eden,” the Talmud says (Ta`anit 10a); and the dregs are as much as it can take. We cannot see God’s face and live.

As soon as we become fully human, we begin to “fill the Earth and subdue it.” We begin to destroy Eden, and thereby expel ourselves. Only by keeping our distance from some of the wilderness that remains can we keep from fouling the wellspring of our own life. The fiery sword (whatever it is: our awe of wilderness, our fear of its dangers, our dismay in the face of its grueling beauty) is the best friend we have.

The myth of the Fall, like that of the World Mountain, is based on ecological fact. We began to change our surroundings in a drastic way as soon as we mastered fire, but it was the second wave – the alliance with annual grasses – that sealed our self-expulsion. We stripped forests, troubled the soil, uprooted whole ecosystems. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake... In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread...” (Gen. 3:17–19). Indeed, the culture of barley and wheat – first for beer and toasted seedheads, then for bread – did apparently begin in the uplands of the Near East, some ten thousand years ago.

What was the forbidden fruit? In the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 15:7), a rabbi of the second century gives a remarkable answer: “Rabbi Meir said: It was wheat, for when a person lacks knowledge people say, ‘That man has never eaten bread of wheat.’”

The Hebrew phrase usually translated, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake” can, with a bit of license, be read to mean, “Cursed is the ground by thy passing over.” As the waves of human expansion move across the Earth, Eden is trampled underfoot.

Adam was put in the garden “to work it and protect it” (Gen. 2:15). The two jobs are complementary, but they are also contradictory. From what are we to protect Eden, if not from our own work? The more we work the Earth – by which I mean not only tillng but the whole spectrum of human meddling, from setting grass fires to splitting the atom – the more we are obliged to protect it. If we fail to do either, we fail to be fully human.

What light might such an understanding of Eden shed on the present environmental debate?

Two schools of thought dominate now that debate: I call them the Planet Fetishers and the Planet Managers. The Fetishers (including many deep ecologists and other radicals, as well as some old-fashioned romantics) dream of returning to Eden, restoring a state of harmony in which wilderness reclaims the planet and man is lost in the foliage, a smart but self-effacing ape. The Managers dream of a manmade paradise, an Earth managed by wise humans in its own best interest and, by happy chance, humankind’s as well. The Fetishers want to get past the fiery sword that guards Eden by crawling humbly under; the Managers, by vaulting over. Neither has learned the lesson of the Mountain.

At present, wilderness is so worn down and battered that there is no escaping the need to manage it. The best we can do is to follow this rule: so manage nature as to minimize the need to manage nature. To begin with, that means stepping back and giving wilderness a chance to breathe, to dust itself off, to get back on its feet.

If the first lesson of Genesis is that we cannot live in Eden, there may be some comfort in the second lesson: we can yet enjoy Eden’s blessings, if only we let them flow. That is a big if, however. The four rivers of Eden are symbols of the flow of wilderness. Dam that flow, and the man-made world must dry up and blow away; and so, at last, must wilderness itself. Even the biggest wilderness preserves are not big enough if migration, gene flow, and the circulation of energy and nutrients are blocked beyond their borders by highways, dams, development, ranchers’ fences, the dredging of wetlands, and the poisoning of waterways. (I do not mean to ignore the problem of bio-logical invasion. At present we are blocking flow locally and encouraging it globally, which is exactly wrong.) Wilderness is the heart of the world, but a heart is not much good without arteries and capillaries that touch every cell of civilization with wilderness.

This touching is more than mere contiguity. It involves learning from Eden – an activity that goes by such non-
Thus the dream of Eden remains alive, and instructive. The dream of living “in harmony” with nature, as animals do, is dangerous only if we forget that it is a dream. It is dangerous if we pretend that we are just animals; or that animals live in anything that one can seriously call harmony with other animals, or with plants, fungi, or microbes. But if we strive to decipher what this thing we want to call harmony really is, we can try to reproduce it – as far as humanly possible – in the humanized landscape.

Evan Eisenberg

Further Reading


See also: Creation Myths of the Ancient World; Creation Story in the Hebrew Bible; Creation’s Fate in the New Testament; Deep Ecology; Eden and other Gardens; Fall, The; Gardening and Nature Spirituality; Gardens in Islam; Japanese Gardens; Judaism (various); Mesopotamia – Ancient to 2000 B.C.E.; Restoring Eden.

**Egypt – Ancient**

The civilization of ancient Egypt provides a salient example of the ways in which attitudes to nature became embodied in religion, and of the effects of religion on treatment of the natural environment. Egypt’s environment is dominated by the Sahara and the grand Nile River more than by the Mediterranean Sea that abuts its northern coast. The fertility of the land and the growth of crops depended on the Nile’s annual flood, since rain was rare. The gods and goddesses of Egypt in large measure represented this overriding environmental concern. With unclouded sky as the rule, the orderly movements of the heavens were evident. Re, the Sun God, ascended each morning and sailed across the sky to his western harbor, the movement of his path to north and south showing the year’s passage. Stars marked hours and seasons; when Sothis (Venus), star of the goddess Isis, rose just before the sun, it announced that flood time was at hand. The sky goddess Nut arched her body above her fertile consort, the male Earth god Geb, in perfect balance. When the stars, the children of Nut, showed the proper season, then Geb’s children, the plants, bore fruit. This is a reversal of the identifications common in other societies, where Earth is feminine and Sky masculine. But the principle in Egyptian myth was a balance of sexual roles, not the dominance of either. Deities often occurred as pairs of male and female, like Geb and Nut. Sometimes pairs showed contrasting sides of the feminine, such as kind Hathor (nurturing warmth) and angry Sekhmet (withering heat), or aspects of the masculine, as, for example, Horus, hero-god of the black crop land, and his counterpart, the red desert-god Set, enemies whose battles ended, giving way to peaceful co-rule.

The land and its aspects were sacred, and therefore gods. Osiris, a preeminent god, embodied among other things vegetation and agriculture. Every stage of the agricultural year repeated an event in the life of Osiris, whose birth, growth, death, dismemberment, burial, and resurrection became planting, harvest, fallow, and new
growth. Hapi was the god of the life-giving Nile. Though male, he was portrayed with breasts to show his power to nurture. He was called “father of the gods” because they depended on the Nile for offerings from humans, or for their very existence. He suckled Osiris and helped to resurrect him, a myth representing the reliance of vegetation on the Nile flood. When the flood came at an appropriate level, people rejoiced at the advent of Hapi.

The round of the agricultural year was marked by festivals honoring the recurrence of natural events. Originated by villagers in Neolithic times, these celebrations were formalized in the historical period. At the harvest festival of Min-Amun in Thebes, Pharaoh cut the first sheaf of wheat and a bull was led in procession. So the actions of the Egyptians in agricultural ritual reflected their sacred vision of the Earth.

Many aspects of the landscape, along with the river, were considered sacred. People planted trees around or adjacent to a pool, making sacred groves that were early places of worship. Even small villages possessed such locales where they observed religious occasions. Priests and their servants planted trees such as ished and palm in temple gardens beside sacred lakes. Ramses III (ca. 1184–1153 B.C.E.) gave 514 gardens to various temples, which would have been considered incomplete without them. Trees were worshipped, and deities were shown in tree form. Isis, for example, was symbolized by a tree with breasts from which Pharaoh received milk. Mortuary paintings depicted the tree of life, with the deceased bowing low before it or drinking from a spring of water at its base. Planting a tree was considered to be a good work, aiding the soul on its progress toward life in the next world. Care was taken to plant and water trees near tombs and mortuary temples like the terraced monument of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri.

Many animals were sacred to the Egyptians. Certain species were regarded as visible manifestations of deity: the jackal of Anubis, the ibis or baboon of Thoth, the hawk of Horus, the lioness of Sekhmet, the crocodile of Sobek, and others too numerous to mention. Groups of animals were often kept in temple precincts, and when they died were mummmified and accorded an honorable burial. Tens of thousands of these mummies containing Horus hawks, Thoth ibises, and Bastet cats have been found in underground vaults. Worship accorded to animals did not, however, prevent wild animals from being hunted. Amenhotep III boasted that he had killed more than a hundred lions with his own hands, and still less did it save them from the effects of habitat destruction.

The numbers of birds, particularly waterfowl, were astonishing in Egypt, but as centuries passed their abundance was reduced. Nobles enjoyed bird hunting in marshes, but there were fewer marshes as drainage proceeded. Canals were dredged to draw off water and open land to cultivation, leaving fewer wetlands that birds could use for nesting and feeding. Ramses III gave 426,395 waterfowl to temples, including a bequest of 9350 per year to the Temple of Amun at Thebes. Some of these became part of temple flocks, while others were prepared as offerings. Thus bird life was diminished by the Egyptians. A similar fate afflicted the fish of the river, although some were protected; even Pharaoh was forbidden to fish in sacred temple lakes.

The sciences of sacred geometry, sacred astronomy, and sacred records (hieroglyphics) were marshaled to assure the dependability of relationship to the environment. Geometry, which was necessary to reestablish inviolable boundaries between fields when markers had been swept away in the flood, was not a mundane skill developed through trial and error, but a hallowed occupation that descended from gods such as Thoth and was entrusted to trained scribes. Although all Earth was holy, certain places had a more sacred character, and they and their produce were often holdings of temples, which were located according to geomancy and oriented to important points in the revolutions of the sun and stars.

Irrigation was a form of sacred technology shown by art to be an activity of the Pharaoh and the gods themselves. Indeed, canal building was believed to be a major occupation of those in the blessed world beyond death. Laborers dredged channels, built earthen dams, constructed dikes and basins, and used buckets to raise water. These activities were considered to be parts of a holy occupation.

As centuries passed, technological inventions were made and incorporated into the sacred system of environmental regulation. Nilometers (instruments used to measure the height of the Nile river) inscribed with religious symbols and attended by special priest-scribes were installed near the First Cataract and elsewhere to help predict the extent of the annual flood.

The Egyptians’ joy in their environment can be sensed in pictures of human activities such as plowing, hunting, and building. Active as these portrayals are, they show little realization that nature was being altered in the process. Egyptian art has little feeling of human progress or decay, nor of the conquest or destruction of nature. For them, the Earth was unchanging. Time ran in cycles, not along an inexorable straight line. But changes, some of them destructive, were nonetheless occurring. Dangers to sustainability included practices that produced salinization, deforestation, overdevelopment, and habitat destruction.

Environmentally, Egypt at the end of the ancient period was much changed, but still productive and full of life. The Nile still brought its annual floods, with sufficient water and sediment in most years to guarantee good crops. Grain, other foodstuffs, and crops such as flax for linen and papyrus for paper, were abundant enough to meet
Egypt's needs and to be exported as well. This is at least in part due to the attitude of reverence for the land and its denizens that was part of the Egyptian religious view. The principles of sacred space guided the division of land and the regulation of irrigation. Egypt was not lacking in environmental problems such as gradual loss of natural vegetation and wildlife, but in every case where the influence of the realization of the sacredness of the Earth and living creatures was felt, that influence helped to mitigate damage and to preserve life and the natural environment itself.

Egypt was in most respects self-sufficient, so that the Egyptians were content with their land. Some modern writers have interpreted this contentment as an attitude that was limited and complacent. That this was not the case is clear from the vigorous way in which Egyptians pursued the timber trade abroad in order to obtain a necessary resource in which they were not well supplied at home. Cedar wood from Mount Lebanon was called “a wood which [the God] (Amun-Re) loves” (Wilson 1956: 183), so that journeys undertaken to secure it were believed to please the god. At home as well, they understood their relationships to the land to be governed by the gods and sacred principles that were derived from them and from Ma’at, the universal order that controlled the Pharaoh and the gods themselves.

Further Reading


See also: Egypt – Pre-Islamic; Greece – Classical; Mesopotamia – Ancient to 2000 B.C.E.; Roman Natural Religion; Roman Religion and Empire.

**Egypt – Pre-Islamic**

There is a clear correlation between landscape, nature and religion in pre-Islamic Egypt. Natural landmarks (hills, lakes, marshes, the Nile itself) could become objects of veneration, and such idealized but recognizable landscapes were portrayed as elements of the afterlife. Throughout the pharaonic phase of society in the Nile Valley (3000–330 B.C.E., excluding the Hellenistic and Roman periods), there was a clear and close association between the natural environment and the Egyptians’ response to it. In its iconography, language, and use of social space, ancient Egyptian society acknowledged and venerated its landscape and even its towns as divine or semi-divine beings. Religious buildings were not only prominent architectural features in their own right, but were purposely situated across the landscape in such a way as to manage and exploit intervisibilities and to present themselves as closed or open (the most conspicuous example being the pyramids, not only as solar embodiments but also as man-made mountains, located within sight of Heliopolis, the centre of the sun cult). Similarly, the vegetal and animal worlds were evidently observed and explained in religious terms, though why certain regions emerged as being particularly associated with certain totemic objects and animalistic icons remains unclear.

Overfamiliarity with the map of Egypt has perhaps dulled our perception of just how strange a social context it provides: by 3000 B.C.E., when Egypt had developed politically into the world’s first territorial state, it was essentially a hyper-arid desert with a river flowing through it, and the Nile Valley allowed only a ribbon-like pattern of settlement in a floodplain that is rarely more than 25 km across. Significantly, the Nile Delta, which differed from the Valley in several important respects, with its fan of distributary branches spreading to a breadth of 200 km along the Mediterranean, its relatively high coastal rainfall, and its land routes to North Africa and the Levant, was probably always a more ethnically mixed region; however, the relative lack of archaeological investigation in the Delta, combined with the normative effects of a powerful state religious apparatus, combine to give the general impression that inhabitants of the Delta shared a single belief system.

The personification and deification of the elements and of the climate itself reflects some of the oddness of the Egyptian situation: while there were certainly sun, storm and wind deities, in contrast to the usual belief pattern around the eastern Mediterranean rim, the sky (Nut) is female and the Earth (Geb) male. Their relationship is conventionally shown as a post-coital separation in which Geb collapses exhausted beneath Nut, who arches over him with arms and legs outstretched, representing the four supports of heaven. There is thus a strongly architectural quality to this formal conception of the structure of the
The most important climatic event of the agricultural year in this overwhelmingly agricultural society – the annual flood, fed during late summer by monsoonal rains over the Ethiopian highlands and the swelling of the Blue Nile – was deified as Hapi, in distinction from the “normal” river (iteru). Within the state ideological system, the country’s economic vulnerability is reflected by the fact that an ideal flood event and a successful harvest were notionally the responsibility of the king, although many major and minor deities (Osiris; Ernutet the snake goddess; a cohort of androgynous “fecundity figures”) were also associated with the harvest at the state and household levels. Several major towns along the banks of the Nile competed or cooperated as theoretical “sources” of the river: Aswan, as the first (i.e., most southerly) town of Egypt proper; Memphis, as the notional source of the delta; and, oddly, Thebes, where the claim seems to rest on the town’s importance as the dynastic center in the New Kingdom. It is inescapable that the environmental conditions of the Nile inundation also directly fed the development of a creation mythology in which order and society in the form of dry land emerges from the waters of chaos, with a complex set of cultic references that dictated the architectural schemes of Egyptian temples throughout the pharaonic and even into the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, with the main ecological zones of the Nile floodplain being represented by the pylons, courtyards and columned halls, and even the white enclosure walls as simulacra of the desert cliffs defining the valley itself.

The sharp and constant division between the cultivated/populated/valley and the barren/depopulated/desert zones was recognized in ancient Egyptian terminology: “Black land” (Kemet) and “Red land” (Desheret) respectively, each of which was accorded its own assemblage of cult figures and its own exclusive topography, flora and fauna. Interestingly, the conservative nature of Egyptian iconography meant that images of landscapes were probably still being produced long after the environmental conditions for them had disappeared. The black topsoil of the Nile Valley was not surprisingly associated with fertility, birth and regeneration (and later on with magical, spontaneous generation): “Osiris beds” were mummmiform miniature fields or gardens in which “crops” were planted in soil; “birth bricks” of Nile clay were a common adjunct to childbirth rituals, and it has been suggested that mud-brick remained a preferred building material for tombs, long after the introduction of stone, for this reason as well. By contrast the vast expanse of the Sahara desert on both sides of the river valley (except for the Red Sea coast and occasional pockets of settlement in the western Oases) was shunned and feared as a hostile acultural environment, into which the Egyptians only ventured at need and even then delegated the organization of travel to nomadic-pastoralist groups with local knowledge. Significantly, the cult of Amun, the dominant state cult during the New Kingdom, became established almost by default in some of the outposts of Egyptian political control such as Nubia and the eastern and western deserts.

The geography of the Nile Valley dictates however that south of Cairo the desert escarpments are always visible (or were, before modern high-rise vegetation and building and air pollution). Within this essentially linear framework, desert-edge features as viewed from the valley floor assumed a particular importance, and it is clear that at intervals certain conspicuous localities became singularities associated with particular cults. A striking example of this is the Theban mountain – an impressive sheer cliff facing the main east-bank town – which had its own deity, the “Mistress of the Mountain” and was deliberately selected, perhaps because of the resemblance to an animal of the natural rock form, as the backdrop for some of the elite and royal mortuary temples of the eleventh end eighteenth dynasties; the nearby Qurn (peak) with its distinctive pyramidal shape formed a similarly evocative reference for others. Local prominent landscapes could often transcend the conventional need for cemeteries to be on the west side of the valley, as at the sites of Amarna, Bersha and Beni Hassan, where the imposing escarpments containing most of the elite burials are on the east. At Memphis, too, the most numerous (though not necessarily the most prestigious) burials are on the east bank until the Third Dynasty, with its establishment and promotion of the solar religion and the building of the first pyramids.

Other sites, notably Amarna, Abydos, and Memphis, show that equal attention was paid to local natural horizons. At Amarna, the only example available of a major archeologically recovered Egyptian town, the street plan and the distribution of social and sacred space have two main determinants: the river and the bankside road running parallel to it, and the eastern horizon containing the elite and royal tombs. In this instance the horizontal view is especially important because of the association of the king’s burial, located beneath the sunrise, with the new, royally sponsored solar religion of the Aten. At the pre- and proto-dynastic royal cemetery of Abydos, the arrangement of elite and royal tombs and funerary enclosures, and even the internal provisions of the tombs themselves, depend on the processional routes taken and the lines of visibility between the valley and the major wadi (desert valley) system behind the necropolis. At Memphis the western horizon was characterized as tehen (the peak) and was particularly associated with the city’s mortuary cults. The Memphite region is also singled out by the pyramid fields of the Old and Middle Kingdoms in
which the western horizon, noticeably lower in elevation than the eastern, is redeemed by the construction of these artificial mountains (although the high-quality facing stone for them still came from the eastern hills).

At the other end of the country, the towns of Aswan at the first cataract and Semna at the second not only had distinctive landscapes but at different times were regarded as national frontiers. Local manifestations of deities might also be marked out by the produce or natural resources for which the region was known, as for example Hathor “Lady of Turquoise” in the Sinai Peninsula. Animal cults were often geographically specific: crocodiles for example, identified with the deity Sobk, held an almost canonical significance for the Fayyum region (hydrologically an overflow basin with its own residual lake, to the west of the Nile Valley just above Memphis-Cairo) from at least the third millennium B.C.E. to Roman times. Like the crocodile, some other animals became unique identifiers for the nomes or political units, such as the mormyrus fish at Oxyrhynchus in the nineteenth Upper Egyptian nome or the oryx of the sixteenth. On the national scale, the falcon, originally an emblem of the predynastic power centre of Hierakonpolis in southern Egypt, and the vulture, which symbolized the town of Buto in the western Delta, became icons of unitary rule over the two regions during the dynastic period, and an essential item in the royal regalia and official titulary.

Other animal deities became universal through their protective function in critically dangerous and potentially fatal stages in the life cycle. Apotropaic wands or clappers, probably used in childbirth, are engraved with a selection of hostile creatures and confabulations which were ritually destroyed by breaking the objects. One of those deities closely associated with birthing rites and appearing regularly on these wands was the figure of Taweret, combining features of both crocodile and hippopotamus, and typically shown standing, with distended abdomen and a fixed facial grimace, its weight carried by downstretched arms and hands gripping the protective sa (knot) talisman. In terms of regeneration on a national scale, the falcon god Horus and the desert deity Sutekh (Seth) in the form of a composite animal fight for the body parts of Osiris to ensure that natural order is restored and the harvest is successful.

Mortuary landscapes, or the natural scenery favored in the repertory of tomb scenes and models and in the Books of the Dead (magical funerary inscriptions on papyrus) from the Old Kingdom onwards, show a particular range of environments from the “tame” such as the Fields of Yaru and of Hetep – essentially a vista of agricultural activity amid horticultural land plots and canals – to the “wild” such as desert-edge hunting, trapping and fishing activities. An interesting example of different types of natural phenomena shown in juxtaposition is the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hassan in Middle Egypt, in which upper registers of desert scenery and fauna contrast with scenes of farm produce being brought by the tomb-owner’s retinue of estate workers. In the middle, occupying a liminal position between the wild and the domesticated, is shown a group of humans, though in this case not indigenous but foreign interlopers (immigrants?) from western Asia, who carry their equipment and means of subsistence with them in nomadic style. On the one hand they are led in and presented by Egyptians as an exotic entity, but on the other, they themselves also lead in and present as their own contribution two gazelles, perhaps caught by and advertising their own specialist group skills as trappers. A common element in the repertoire of elite tomb scenes from the Old Kingdom (third millennium B.C.E.) onwards is the range of hunting, trapping and fishing scenes, emphasizing the vigor, ability and active life of the deceased; these take place in the extensive marshes that were a regular feature of the valley margins at that time.

Plants as well as the animal kingdom played a key role in the religious vocabulary of Egyptian society. Some were associated with particular forms of deities such as Hathor “Lady of the Sycomore”; and there is the curious image of the tree suckling the dead king in funerary contexts. Like the falcon and vulture, emblemic plants and animals also stand for Upper Egypt (the Valley) and Lower Egypt (the Delta) in the royal titulary. Monumental architecture in stone was undoubtedly derived from vegetal forms, and two plants in particular, the lotus and the papyrus, feature as the prototypes for engaged and freestanding columns in temple and tomb construction. The lotus in particular held a special place in religious iconography, being routinely carried by officiants in tomb scenes and shown supporting the god Horus in his form as the infant Harpocrates.

David Jeffreys

Further Reading

Ehrenfeld, David (1938–)  

David Ehrenfeld is a biologist and philosopher of science best known for his critique of hubris in *The Arrogance of Humanism*. Humanism, Ehrenfeld has argued, has rationalized enormous destructiveness because it rejects all external limitations on human behavior. No God, gods, or nature can lay claim to human fealty – humanity is its own measure. It is freedom without responsibility to or for the world. Humanism, in Ehrenfeld’s assessment, places humanity – though in practice only some of us – at the pinnacle of the universe. It holds that we are the only beings with intrinsic value and all else is reduced to the utilitarian, existing for our purposes. As such, all else may be used, altered, even destroyed, to suit our designs.

Humanism’s sway, Ehrenfeld believes, is not just a coincidence of belief and interest, though, is a rationale for human hegemony. For Ehrenfeld, Humanism is more than ideology – it is like a religion and has the same power to shape and constrain vision and behavior. It is not a religion, he says, in the sense of belief in the divine or supernatural. But it is like a religion in that its major tenets are taken on faith, not questioned or critically reflected upon, and seen as timeless (i.e., sacred).

The religious attributes of Humanism, Ehrenfeld believes, are partly a result of its continuity with Christianity’s similar faith in progress and the centrality of humans in the universe. All one need do, he notes, is substitute “reason” for “soul” to see these striking similarities: humans are special because we have reason; we are different from all other species because we have reason; we are our reason: “I think, therefore I am”; those without similar capabilities are without intrinsic value. This continuity is masked by the modern tension between Christianity and Humanism, but originally there was little or no tension between Christianity and those in the forefront of the drive to control nature.

For Ehrenfeld, faith in reason is Humanism’s holy of holies. Such reductionistic faith is dangerous because it denies all that binds us to ourselves and to the natural world that sustains all life. Our emotions, not reason, Ehrenfeld argues, has been tested by millions of years of selection, teaching us right and wrong, good and bad. He says that to deny our experience apart from reason is to deny our bodies and the bulk of our lives. Humanism ends up, he believes, denying not only nature out there, but our own nature, our humanity.

Faith in reason gives rise to the illusion that through reason humans can understand and control nature. In *The Arrogance of Humanism* Ehrenfeld examined a constellation of beliefs resulting from this faith in Man, the eternal conqueror: we can always solve the problems that confront us; we can usually do so with technology; sometimes we need to alter our social organization to overcome problems; we can rearrange the Earth to suit ourselves without consequences that are beyond our ability to address; material growth and progress are endless - we will never run out of resources or the ability to fashion substitutes; and when push comes to shove, we will hunker down and do what needs to be done to ensure civilization survives.

In Humanism’s Enlightenment infancy these beliefs were not testable, but now nature is unmistakably talking, though the faithful do not hear. What nature is “saying” Ehrenfeld argues, is that every solution creates more problems, and these problems are more complicated and difficult to solve. The Earth is finite and material growth has limits. When we seek to rearrange the Earth to maximize what we value most, the consequences usually cannot be managed. Nature invariably is degraded and civilizations do collapse.

Ehrenfeld’s critics have attacked particulars. Left Humanists, like Murray Bookchin (1988), took exception to Ehrenfeld’s notions that humans are just another species, and that if a species exists it has value. The Humanist Steven D. Schafersman and ethicist Peter Singer (1979) argued that the problem is anthropocentrism not Humanism and reason. Some who share Ehrenfeld’s views about the pitfalls of excessive abstraction and reductionism rejoindered, pointing to positive changes in science and the creation of new disciplines like conservation biology, which Ehrenfeld himself helped to found.

The critics Ehrenfeld has responded to are those who say he offers little guidance on the way out of the current predicament. In *Beginning Again*, Ehrenfeld stated that a positive change in societal “heading” would recognize that rights always entail obligations; we would choose carefully where we place our loyalty; those with expert knowledge would step down from their pedestals, admit the limits of their knowledge, and engage the larger society over values and purpose. Feeding billions will continue to require agriculture, but it must be an agriculture that imitates nature and abandons the industrial model. Society itself must change – and drastically, he argued. In our daily lives we must seek to “creatively imitate” nature, abandoning fantasies of control and limitless wealth for values of resilience, beauty, right scale, honesty. These were Ehrenfeld’s prescriptions, not his predictions; he remained skeptical of human’s ability to learn short of catastrophe.

Ehrenfeld has contributed much to the development of the discipline of conservation biology by his many years as the first editor of the influential journal by that name,
through a major text, *Orion* columns and a series of edited volumes. But it is his *The Arrogance of Humanism* that has earned him a much broader reputation and major influence. Along with Paul Shepard, Ehrenfeld’s critique of hubris has been cited by many conservationists as a major influence on their thinking.

David Johns

**Further Reading**


See also: Deep Ecology; Left Biocentrism; Shepard, Paul; Social Ecology; Radical Environmentalism.

**Ehrlich, Gretel (1946–)**

Gretel Ehrlich is a contemporary U.S. writer whose life and work were shaped by the California landscape of her childhood, as well as by the stories and Buddhist religion of the Japanese Americans who were part of the human landscape. References to her later studies of Zen Buddhism and her Tibetan practice, as well as to indigenous religious traditions, appear throughout her works. Ehrlich is best known for her prose reflections on her experiences within the natural world, especially *The Solace of Open Spaces*, which is set in the Wyoming landscape, where her writing first flourished. She has also written poetry and short stories that use Wyoming as indispensable context, as well as a novel, *Heart Mountain*, which brings together her childhood acquaintance with a Japanese community in California with a World War II internment camp in Wyoming. More recent work has grown from her travels in the Arctic, Asia, and Greenland, as well as returning to her native California. In all her work landscape is central and this is particularly true of her nonfiction works, which center on her spiritual journey in nature.

Unlike some nature writers who use nature as a catalyst to move to transcendent concerns, the natural world is never left behind in Ehrlich. It is the source of understanding the human and spiritual – which are fully embodied. Her art, too, is not apart from nature. “The truest art I would strive for . . . would be to give the page the same qualities as Earth: weather would land on it harshly; light would elucidate the most difficult truths; wind would sweep away obtuse padding” (1985: x). This is not an idealized Earth – suffering and death are very much a part of her landscape. She sees in nature the randomness of things, which threatens human meaning; the painfulness of life, which includes death. She knows the devastation of drought to the land and loneliness to the human heart. She has lost her partner to cancer and almost dies herself when she is struck by lightning – and has to live the anguished life of a survivor.

Yet her healing also comes from the natural world when she is able to give herself to the place, and to find her connectedness to a web of people, animals, and elements through the daily rituals of life – feeding animals, irrigating fields, working with neighbors. “Ritual,” she says, “goes in the direction of life” (1985: 103) and the sacred is found in the ordinary. As human ritual joins with the rituals of nature, she feels the assurance that all things are joined at their roots and this brings solace. But the healing is never complete. Even the phoenix after rising, she muses in *A Match to the Heart* two years after being struck by lightning when chest pains continue to recur, no doubt had to face new trials (1994: 197). But she is able to say, in spite of the darkness, “Yet in all this indeterminacy, life keeps opting for life . . . How fragile death is, how easily it opens back into life” (1991: 82, 85). And in *Solace*, “The lessons of impermanence taught me this: loss constitutes an odd kind of fullness; despair empties out into an unquenchable appetite for life” (1985: x).

Ehrlich’s work affirms a sacramental landscape that interweaves Buddhist notions of impermanence and change, the giving over of herself to place (renunciation), and the nondualistic connectedness of all things with indigenous awareness of the embeddedness of human life – including ordinary work and mystical visions – in the natural world.

Lynn Ross-Bryant

**Further Reading**


See also: Autobiography; Memoir and Nature Writing.
Einstein, Albert (1879–1955)

Albert Einstein is the pioneer of twentieth-century physics. In 1905 he published his Special Theory of Relativity, which was followed by the General Theory of Relativity in 1916. In short, this theory states that time, mass and length all change according to velocity. Space and time are a unified continuum, which curves in the presence of mass. Einstein also was involved in the elaboration of quantum mechanics and had lively discussions with his colleagues, Heisenberg, Bohr, and Pauli, regarding its implications. Contrasting Niels Bohr and (even more) Wolfgang Pauli, Einstein insisted on what he once called “the grandeur of reason incarnate” (i.e., his conviction that there is no room for chance or irrational elements in the universe). Whereas this is exactly what quantum mechanics seems to imply, Einstein held that “God does not play dice.” Instead of accepting non-determinacy and a-causal relations in physics, he was sure that at one time there will be found a comprehensive and unified theory that will reveal the seemingly irrational to be part of a higher order.

Despite his attachment to rationalism it is important to note that throughout his life Einstein regarded himself as a “religious” scientist. While he rejected the idea of a personal god who might interfere with human affairs or with nature – this would have been a severe inconsistency with the notion of causality and lack of freedom – he definitely had a kind of pantheistic religious attitude. In a telegram of 1929, he expressed belief in “Spinoza’s God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists” (Einstein in Jastrow 1978: 28). And in his confessional The World As I See It (1934), Einstein dwelled on the idea of pantheism, talking about the mystery of the eternity of life, the inkling of the marvelous structure of reality, and his endeavor “to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature” (Einstein 1999: 5). In an almost mystical fashion he described his belief in a superior intelligence or transcendent spirit that reveals itself to every scientist who experiences a “rapturous amazement” at the harmony of natural law.

The “mystical” dimensions of physics and its pantheistic connotations have been an issue that Einstein discussed with major proponents of quantum mechanics. With regard to the more esoteric or “New Age” discourse, it is worth mentioning that Einstein debated the topic with David Bohm in the early 1950s. Later, Ken Wilber drew on his theories and pointed out that most of the quantum physicists came to embrace mysticism although simultaneously they rejected any parallelism between physics and mysticism. This is true for Einstein in particular, who remained a classical realist, finding something religious not in nature itself but in the laws of nature.

Further Reading

See also: Bohm, David; Complexity Theory; Pantheism; Pauli, Wolfgang; Science; Spinoza, Baruch; Wilber, Ken.

Eiseley, Loren (1907–1977)

Loren Corey Eiseley was born in Anoka, Nebraska, on 3 September 1907, the son of Clyde and Daisy Corey Eiseley. In his early years he sought refuge from the loneliness of a turbulent home life by living among the books of the Lincoln City Library and observing the wonders of his native landscape. At the age of 14 he wrote an essay entitled “Nature Writing” in which he made the rather remarkable assertion that “Killing for the excitement of killing is murder.” He became interested in geology and paleontology, and was drawn by imagination and personality into creative writing. However, because of the poverty of his childhood he understood the need for practical employment and decided to become a scientist.

He graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1933 with a major in anthropology.

After a period of drifting, Loren went east for graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania, finishing his doctorate in 1937. In 1944 he became Professor of Anthropology and head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Oberlin College, having served his scholarly apprenticeship at the University of Kansas. He spent three years at Oberlin before returning to Philadelphia to become chair of the department from which he had received his doctorate. Eiseley died on 9 July 1977 of pancreatic cancer.

For Loren Eiseley “nature” was not some exosomatic machine that awaited the tactical dexterity of the trained technician. The person who intends to learn what the surrounding world has to teach her must adopt the contemplative comportment of the poets, those “word-flight specialists” who are wary of self-evidence in thought and activity. “They probe into life as far as, if not farther than, the molecular biologist does, because they touch life itself and not its particular structure” (Eiseley 1970: 125). The poets think across the ages, backward and forward, even sideways, according to Eiseley. They perceive more than the bumps of a recent scientific discovery – “this
Eiseley’s thought is unique, but very difficult to accompany in “an age which advances progressively backwards” (Eliot 1952: 108), its eyes fixed upon the endless cycle of invention. Eiseley’s is no “nature religion,” if by that we mean the self-sufficient marvel at beautiful sunsets, awesome canyons, or the fascination with our latest attempt to escape what Eiseley calls “the cosmic prison.” The only escape is by the poet’s perception, which is somehow an awareness that what we perceive, what we know, is more than our perception, our knowledge. It is here that Eiseley’s thought gives way to revelation. “The fate of man,” he writes,

is to be the ever recurrent, reproachful Eye floating upon night and solitude. The world cannot be said to exist save by the interposition of that inward eye – an eye various and not under the restraints to be apprehended from what is vulgarly called the natural (Eiseley 1969: 88 [italics mine]).

Eiseley’s is a “nature religiousness” that makes every measurement and calculation of the surrounding world a transparent observation – perhaps akin to Eastern Orthodox use of the icon.

With Thoreau, Eiseley “dwelt along the edge of that visible nature of which Darwin assumed the practical mastery. Like the owls Thoreau described in Walden, he himself represented the stark twilight of a nature ‘behind the ordinary,’ which has passed unrecognized” (Eiseley 1969: 122). Loren Eiseley does not propose or espouse a religion in the sense of adherence to a carefully articulated, defined, and preserved tradition. That is what he meant when he stated in his autobiography All the Strange Hours: “Ironically, I who profess no religion find the whole of my life a religious pilgrimage” (Eiseley 1975: 141).

His was a religious pilgrimage, first, because he stood with one foot firmly placed in the discipline of the scientific enterprise, while his other foot probed the spinning dust cloud – Job’s whirlwind.

It is not sufficient any longer to listen at the end of a wire to the rustling of galaxies; it is not enough even to examine the great coil of DNA in which is coded the very alphabet of life. These are our extended perceptions. But beyond lies the great darkness of the ultimate Dreamer, who dreamed the light and the galaxies. Before act was, or substance existed, imagination grew in the dark (Eiseley 1978: 120).

Eiseley’s thought is religious in both style and content. In his prose, his historical studies of Darwin and Francis Bacon, and in his poetry, words are the essential human domain. They are transcendental – they create, evoke, and test. They partake of meaning, examining the ideas engaged in inventing our “machines.” Words are host to “the unexpected universe” and must be felt and heard as well as measured and nurtured. Style is fundamental to the imaginative power to be comprehensive as well as pragmatic.

In their content, words provide life orientation; they express ultimate order and meaning. We are liberated from bondage to the belief that the achievements of our disciplines somehow represent certitude on a cosmic scale. That is why Loren Eiseley was as interested in language as in bone hunting – his way of referring to his archeological responsibilities. It is why his reflections are mediated by consultation with theologians, philosophers, the works of Homer, Dante, Donne, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky – and, of course, Emerson and Thoreau. It is why he was often forced to use the word God, or fashion substitutes like “the Player,” “the Synthesizer,” “the ultimate Dreamer.” Whether or not we like the terms “religion” or “religious,” Loren Eiseley insists that we become cultural heretics who move beyond certitude to a sense of the holy.

The term “nature” represents the paradox of the human mind. It is creative ambivalence, a heuristic necessity. We must have the biology and geology upon which the mind feeds. But, in feeding we recognize that nature is a fabrication; in reality there is no such “thing.” The truly responsible mind, aware of the appositional pull – the impulse to reach out, receive, and change – will never assume the absolute claims of its observations. If there are rigidities in Darwin’s “take” on the evolutionary process, it is because he and the Darwinists were unable to observe their observations or to extend themselves into and beyond those observations. Eiseley quotes Pascal: “There is nothing which we cannot make natural; there is nothing natural which we do not destroy” (1978: 159).

According to Eiseley, there is more to the human mind than the pragmatic urge to take things apart or to be homo faber. Failure to nurture this sensibility leaves us in a physiological trap, faced with the difficulty of escaping our own ingenious devotion to making everything natural. Loren Eiseley revised his Francis Bacon and the Modern Dilemma and retitled it The Man Who Saw Through Time because Bacon has been misused by those who took him to be the advocate of making everything natural. “The world is not to be narrowed,” wrote Bacon in The Parasceve, “till it will go into the understanding . . . but the understanding is to be expanded and opened till it can take in the image of the world” (Bacon in Eiseley 1973: quoted on facing page to table of contents).

Loren Eiseley was a prolific author of scientific papers, poetry, and personal essays. He was a recipient of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Award, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, and was a member of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Award, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, and was a member of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Award, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, and was a member of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Award, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, and was a member of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Award, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, and was a member of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Award, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, and was a member of the
Eisler, Riane (1931–)

North American cultural historian Riane Eisler analyzes the connection between contemporary ecological issues and the global suppression of women, which she thinks are both caused by the dominator model of social structures. The model is developed around androcracy – which she defines as the view that men and “masculinity” are superior to women, “femininity” and nature. Since ancient times the dominator model was symbolized by the power of the blade. An alternative suggested by Eisler is the partnership model, developed around gylany, a term she uses to describe a societal structure in which women and men are equally valued. Traditional “feminine” values, such as caring and nonviolence, are, however, given priority in Eisler’s partnership model and are taught to both biological sexes.

Instead of a domination hierarchy, the partnership model counts on actualization hierarchies wherein ecological and social systems are constructed out of a hierarchy of complex entities, from the most basic functions to the actualization of the highest potential of these systems. Eisler believes that the partnership model flourished in Neolithic goddess-centered cultures of southeastern Europe and Asia minor. She draws upon the archeologist Marija Gimbutas’ findings of Neolithic female figurines and symbols of female reproductive organs, which, according to Gimbutas, symbolize the life-giving power of the divine. The chalice is a symbol of these powers. Partnership spirituality is centered on life-giving, nourishing and empathy; mutual love and sexuality are ultimate expressions of life. Eisler also suggests that the partnership model is reflected in the community around Jesus and in Gnostic Christianity.

Further Reading


See also: Ecofeminism (various); Feminist Spirituality Movement; Gimbutas, Marija; Goddesses – History of; Wicca.

Elephants

Cave and rock pictographs and petroglyphs of mammoths and elephants dated to 30,000–10,000 years ago show these large animals have long been of interest to humans. Paleontological analysis of cut marks on bones indicates proboscideans have been a source of sustenance for far longer, perhaps going back to Homo erectus. The debate over whether Paleolithic representations of animals were made for religious, utilitarian, or aesthetic reasons remains unsettled. Information linking gender and elephants is evident. Some early depictions show men hunting proboscideans. Connections of elephants with masculinity and economic/power themes continued in the following millennia. Elephants were used as living battle tanks by state societies in the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Islam dates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad to the “Year of the Elephant,” so marked in the Qur’an because Ethiopian military mounted on elephants invaded Mecca, his birthplace, in 570. Judaism also links elephants to men and military might. 1 Maccabees recounts a 163 B.C.E. Syrian-led invasion, when war elephants turned violent with the “blood of grapes and mulberries,” against Jews.

Going under it to strike “the belly of the beast,” Eleazar

Further Reading


Eiseley, Loren. All the Strange Hours. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975.


See also: Anthropologists; Anthropology as a Source of Nature Religion; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern.
was crushed to death by the largest elephant, which he had thought carried the Syrian king, seeing it was adorned with a great tower and gold. The elephant became a symbol of freedom fighters resisting military might in Judaism. The Jewish holiday of Hanukah, which commemorates the Maccabees, sermonizes about and places the elephant on dreidels, menorah, and other Judaica. Contemporary Judaism, however, puts blame on the Syrian leadership, not their war elephants. One prayer recited when lighting the Hanukah menorah goes as follows:

For the sake of the weak who are trampled underfoot by elephantine power, for the many forms of life that vanish every week from off our planet, I pledge to join with Noah and Naamah to affirm God’s covenant with all that lives and breathes – to save each species from extinction by making all of Earth an Ark of comfort (www.shamash.org).

1 Maccabees became part of the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament for Catholics from the fourth century. Luther later placed it into the appendix of his German translation of the Bible. Scenes of “Eleazar under the Elephant” became a theme for Christian sacred art, taken up by Gustave Doré and others. The elephant came to symbolize “noble deaths” and male heroism for Christians as well as Jews.

Building upon actions modifying the environment, which elephants do on their own, men have also made elephants serve them as living tractors in the clearing of land, construction of roads, and getting of tree products. The Book of Mormon (Ether 9) contains a charter myth which makes Indians of the Americas of Semitic stock. It claims North America was virgin territory until 2247 B.C.E., when immigrants from the land of the Tower of Babel built a “high civilization” using the labor of domesticated animals, “more especially the elephants.” Elephants have served state societies as mobile canvases in parades of civil religion, displaying wealth on their bodies and those of their mostly male riders, both adorned with ivory, gold, jewels, and fine cloth. Elephant masks and other regalia have been prominent in African “cults of masculinity” and chiefly/royal status. During the age of imperium over the non-Western world, Western males cultivated the mythos of the “great white hunter” able to bring down the elephant with their guns.

Cave and rock paintings, such as those of San of southern Africa, dated between 18,000 and 27,500 years ago, present female elephants protecting their young from predators. These images point to another strand of symbolism surrounding elephants: maternity and its powers. While the majority of contemporary archeologists exhibit wariness about “myths of matriarchy” which some feminists read into early human social organization and spirituality, matriarchy is readily associated with elephants. Female elephants do live in closely related groups of sisters, daughters, and their young. They are led by one or more experienced older females. Elephant “matriarchs” are said to be repositories of “local traditions” who guide kin through their “wisdom.”

African savannah elephants (Loxodonta africana) are the largest of living terrestrial animals. Adult males weigh up to 15,500 lbs. and are about 10–13 feet tall. Adult females weigh up to 7700 pounds and are 8–10 feet tall. The African forest elephant (Loxodonta cyclotis) and Asian elephants (Elephas maximus) are smaller with similar dimorphism. After they are about eight years old, “bull elephants” live largely outside “bond groups” in “bachelor herds” which have weak social bonds, or as solitary individuals. Females seem to develop larger “vocabularies” from their greater sociality. Males will reenter female-dominated groups when additional protection provided by their greater bulk is needed, or for sex. Despite greater size and strength, “big bulls” are not essential to bond groups on a daily basis. Female elephants remain inaccessible to males during their 18–22-month pregnancies, the maximum number of which seems to be a dozen, and while lactating. Since breast milk is the exclusive food of elephant young for six months and part of their diet until they are two or older, lactation and pregnancy put females out of reach of males for extended periods.

Elephants appear to show concern for wounded, handicapped, elderly, and “grieving” group members. Elephants have been seen burying their dead under branches, standing around corpses, and examining, caressing, and carrying group members’ bones. One interpretation of their smashing tusks and bones of their dead is that elephants want to release “spirits” indwelling in the bones and tusks. Another is that they are concerned to prevent the removal of the bones and tusks from their “home territory” by poachers and others. Elephants have been seen covering the corpses of other animals and humans. Some observers have “racialized” African and Asian elephants, claiming, for example, to see the map of Africa in the ears of the “proud” and “truculent” African elephants, and the map of India in “Asians,” whom they deem more “manageable” and “calmer.” Others researchers, however, point out that Asian and African elephants demonstrate “altruism,” giving aid to and forming attachments with each other. In 1607, Edward Topsell, an English cleric-naturalist, proposed that “a kind of Religion” existed among elephants. While such views have been called “anthropomorphic fallacies,” beliefs that religion is not confined to humans persist into the present. The counter-defense calls for avoidance of “anthropocentrism” in the study of religion and ethics.

Elephant symbolism figures in a number of religions. Mother-son symbolism is evident in beliefs surrounding...
Elephants

Ganesh, Hinduism’s god of art, wisdom, and well-being. One account states that the first son of Shiva and Parvati gained his elephant head after losing his human one while protecting his mother from Shiva’s unwelcome sexual advances. Parvati showed such "maternal rage" at what had happened to her son that Shiva sent emissaries to find a replacement. Parvati is a symbol of the Earth. Sharing in this symbolism, elephant-headed Ganesh has become a patron for Hindus concerned with the environment. Scholars feel that belief in Ganesh helped preserve elephant numbers in India and Sri Lanka, and link the rise of large-scale killing to the period of British colonial rule.

Elephantine maternal strength is also represented in Hindu beliefs about female elephants caryatids supporting the Earth on their backs. The elephants rest upon a giant turtle, which stands in a pool of milk encircled by a giant snake, a further female symbol. Shri-Gaja, also called Megha (Cloud), is the Divine Elephant associated with rain, fertility, and Lakshmi, Hinduism’s Lotus Goddess. Lakshmi is herself associated with moisture, good harvests, and the fertilizing dung of cows, in which she dwells while retaining her purity. It is women especially who show devotion to Lakshmi in the form of dung. In Hindu history, the breasts and gait of female elephants have been beauty ideals for women to emulate. Mithila house art of Hindu India and Nepal, which is produced in private rituals by women, gives elephants prominence on walls, floors, and household goods. Ayurvedic medicine has made use of elephant urine and dung. As with many other religions, there is more to elephants in Hinduism than male war, work, hunting, civil religion, and political pageantry.

Mother–son symbolism linked to elephants is found in Buddhist beliefs that the Buddha was an elephant in one of his incarnations. His mother is said to have conceived Buddha after dreaming an albino elephant came from heaven and touched her with a white lotus blossom that he held in his trunk. Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and final “ford-maker,” or great teacher, in the Jain religion, who was a contemporary of Buddha, also has a biography with an elephant motif. Jains believe Mahavira was born to Queen Trishala after she had a series of fourteen dreams. The first involved an “auspicious” albino elephant. The Tantric religion of Nepal reveres Ganipathharduaya, who is elephant-headed like Ganesh, and a manifestation of Shakti, the female creative cosmic force.

Judaism and Christianity both place elephants in the Garden of Eden and on Noah’s Ark. One “old Jewish legend” recounts that dung from the elephants shifted in the Ark, which led rats and mice to run out of the dung and start to eat the Ark’s wood walls, whereupon Noah beseeched God for help. He was instructed to strike a lion on the nose, who sneezed out cats, which kept the rodent population in balance. Christianity shows greater use of elephant symbolism than Judaism. Male elephants’ testes are internal, their penises normally withdrawn. Female elephants’ relatively long clitorises can be stiffened like penises, but this too is evident only in amorous moments. Female elephants put plant materials into their vaginas during their “monthly cycle.” This has been seen as their observing a “menstrual taboo.” Some Christian writers have made elephants symbols of “chasteness.” The Physiologus, compiled between the second and fifth centuries, depicted the female elephant “cajoling” the male with whom she wished to mate to eat of a male mandrake root, while she ate a female root. Biblical references record uses of mandrake (Atropa mandragora) to promote fertility and as an aphrodisiac (Genesis 30; Song of Songs 7). Maintaining elephants only became amorous after ingesting mandrake, the Physiologus described elephant mating as “free from wicked desire.” It presented female elephants giving birth in water and providing offspring with “something like baptism.” The twelfth-century Worksop Priory Bestiary described elephant conception taking place without intercourse – standing beside mandrake sufficed.

Elephant caryatids and other elephant statuary gained placement on church fonts, bishop’s chairs, choir misericorde, buttresses, in nativity crib scenes, and other locations. Elephant ivory, a rare material that reinforced notions of purity and durability, was used for statues of Christ and Mary; receptacles for the host, missal covers, crucifixes, and other sacred objects. In the late 1400s, the Portuguese started commissioning artists in Sierra Leone to create “hybrid art” in the form of salt-cellars, horns (oliphants), and other items, often dictating the designs. The ivory decorations incorporated animals, including Asian elephants, men and women caryatids, human mother–child scenes, and male hunters. Ivory crucifixes and vessels were also produced. The Portuguese bestowed these “exotic” ivories upon important personages. Seeking papal favor for his colonial agenda in 1514, the King of Portugal sent Pope Leo X Hanno, a young, rare, Asian, albino elephant. The elephant participated in church processions and stayed in one of the Vatican gardens until its death on 8 June 1516. Pope Leo had Raphael, renowned for his Madonna and Child paintings, make a memorial fresco for Hanno, and himself composed the elephant’s obituary. In 1667, Bernini, recognized for his sculptures of Mary, designed an elephant caryatid for Pope Alexander VII. The Egyptian obelisk placed on the elephant’s back had once stood by Rome’s “Temple of Isis.” The work was placed in front of Rome’s Saint Mary over Minerva church, where elephant-loving Pope Leo was buried. Elephants, both real and transformed by artistic imaginations, have a long hybrid history connecting them to Christianity. While Martin Luther censured Pope Leo and Hanno as symbols of excess in Against the Papacy of Rome (1545), this did not stop Protestants in later times from succumbing to “tusk lust” and acquiring ivory.

Almost five centuries after Hanno’s burial in Vatican
Elephants 587

For many Africans, animal dung does not have negative connotations. Elephants have been called “gardeners of the tropics.” One aspect of this role is their sowing while defecating. Elephants produce 300–400 pounds of dung daily. They engage in synchronous defecation “greeting rituals.” Their dung contains plant seeds. It serves as a matrix for insects and beetles useful to humans and their ecosystems. For elephants, coprophagy is ingestion of a “health food” that adds essential bacteria and nutrients to their diets. In Africa, animal dung has been used as a plaster in building, basketry, and flooring. Mixed with mud and clay, plant-fiber-rich dung is a material providing stability and waterproofing. Dung and clay, in contrast to ivory, are “soft substances.” In Africa, working with soft substances is associated with women, and women are especially associated with dung-based sculptures. Dung fuel has been utilized to fire clayware and for other purposes. Dung also has served as a poultice, an ingredient in indigenous medicines, and as a cleansing substance when turned into ash. The elephant dung on the breast of Ofili’s Mary can be seen as a multivocalic compliment, rather than a sacrilege.

The Luo of Kenya, for example, used to use elephant dung as a fertilizer and put it into “strong medicines.” Elephant dung was part of medicines Luo used for the protection of crops, the treatment of eye ailments, and for other purposes. Luo women would eat a bit of elephant uterus cooked in soup to treat placental retention following childbirth. Luo believe female elephants utilize the bark of Albizia coriaria and Kigelia africana to stop their flow of menstrual blood. These plants have also been used by Luo women to treat menorrhagia and other reproductive problems. Luo appreciation for the parallelism between elephant zoopharmacognosy and human ethnobotanical knowledge is shared by other ethnic groups in Africa.

When elephant had been available for the Luo to eat, there had been proscriptions against eating breast meat. The reason given was the resemblance between female elephants’ breasts, which hang between their front legs, and women’s breasts. Luo say that elephants form groups that can be called by the same term they use for lineages. This terminology cannot be applied to cattle because cattle “are controlled by men.” Elephants have been seen as capable of organizing themselves into matrifocal groups, of living contiguous to but apart from humans, while contributing to the ecosystem and humans with their dung and in other ways. Several Luo narratives feature old women found living among elephants, or deciding to go among them. These old women possessed spiritual powers enabling communication with elephants with whom the women shared commonalities.

Some African groups proscribe all elephant meat out of respect for the “grey matriarchs.” Samburu of Kenya present an explanation like those who prohibit only breast meat: the correspondence between the bodies of women and elephants. Members of the Orkor clan of Gabbra in Kenya explain that Gabbra build their houses to look like an elephant’s body because in the past a new mother, displeased with her marital family, left the community with her house on her back and turned into an elephant. In Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, and the Gambia, women’s secret societies identify with elephants and use elephant masks as symbols of female strength, maternity, and wisdom. In Onitsa, Nigeria, it is praise to call an old woman an elephant, and proper for her to dance in rituals with the ponderous steps of a pachyderm.

The near “genocide” of elephants has reduced the frequency of human encounters with elephants. For many Africans, wild elephants are but a memory. However, even now some Africans have fields trampled or devoured by nature’s “ultimate harvester.” Family compounds and school grounds are “invaded.” People lose their lives in clashes with elephants. Killing “rogue elephants” and “culling” elephants to prevent problems have the approval of some Africans, who see some conservation efforts as “eco-colonialism.” Yet elephants who keep their distance from human settlements remain highly regarded by many Africans.

In the last few decades, elephants have become creators and not just subjects of art, largely at the prompting of people who have raised funds from the sale of their
Eleventh Commandment Fellowship

The Eleventh Commandment Fellowship (1980–1988) played an early but significant role in the creation of a viable national movement of environmental activists working from within the mainstream American Christian churches during the late twentieth century. The fellowship was also successful in fostering awareness and implementation of an ethic of ecology that was firmly rooted in traditional Christian teachings and doctrine.

The group derives its name from a 1979 article by Vincent Rossi, “The Eleventh Commandment: Toward an Ethic of Ecology.” Rossi was the director general of the Holy Order of MANS, an independent Christian service and teaching order that had been founded in 1968 in San Francisco. The order practiced a Theosophical and Rosicrucian-based system of initiatory spirituality and proclaimed the dawning of an age of spiritual enlightenment. Group members took traditional monastic vows, observed daily periods of meditation and prayer, celebrated cyclical festivals such as winter solstice and the full moons, and lived in common in over 46 centers throughout the United States and Europe. In the wake of the Jonestown mass suicides, the group moved away from its esoteric and Theosophical origins toward a more mainstream Christian identity. Rossi’s article in the order’s new journal, Epiphany, was an attempt to communicate the group’s vision of a spiritually informed ecological lifestyle to a mainstream Christian audience.

The article indicted American materialism and consumerism for the wholesale desecration of the Earth. Rossi declared that the dire condition of the Earth’s biosystem called for a profound alteration of human values and goals, a revolution of consciousness that would reawaken humanity to the presence of the divine throughout the natural world. Toward this end, he proclaimed an eleventh commandment: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof: Thou shall not defile the earth, nor destroy the life thereof.” In grafting a new commandment on to the Ten Commandments, Rossi was following in a tradition that began with Walter Lowdermilk’s famous 1939 address on Jerusalem Radio, which outlined an eleventh commandment of eco-justice.

Rossi also issued a call for environmental action that included education concerning the ecological crisis, the use of appropriate technologies, the elimination of personal actions harmful to the environment, and the formation of environmental action groups. In 1980, The Eleventh Commandment Fellowship was organized to carry out this action plan. Between 1980 and 1984, the fellowship promoted a broad, ecumenical approach to educating Christians about the ecological crisis. It organized local chapters in major cities throughout the country, set up food cooperatives, planted community organic gardens, and convened public educational

Further Reading

See also: Animals; Animals in African Legend and Ethiopian Scriptures; Art; Bestiary; Dolphins and New Age Religion; Gimmutsa, Marija; Hinduism; Hyenas – Spotted; Nile Perch; Primate Spirituality; Whales and Whaling.
Christian ecology during the early 1990s, but these continued to organize local and regional conferences on Brotherhood and the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship's funding for the magazine dried up. Christ the Savior NAACE's publication, in influence on NAACE was waning. Kreuger, who had edited intent. By 1991, the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship's notion for repentance and was anti-Christian in nature and NACRE's creation-centered spirituality substituted evolutionary worldview – rejected this splinter group and argued that Churches, and the Threshold Foundation. Despite major disagreements during planning meetings in 1986 over the meaning of Christianity and the Church's relationship to the broader environmental movement – in particular Wiccans and secular ecologists – enough agreement was reached to schedule a major conference.

In August 1987, over five hundred people representing nearly every major Christian denomination in North America attended the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology in North Webster, Indiana. The stated purpose of the conference was to stimulate a Christian response to the global ecological crisis. The conference's 63 sponsoring organizations represented a broad cross-section of secular and religious organizations. Its working document stated the conference's belief that God was calling humanity to: 1) preserve the Earth's diverse life forms; 2) create an ecologically sustainable economy; 3) overcome the despoliation of nature wherever it was occurring.

Deep divisions between moderate and conservative Christian groups in the NACCE that were simmering during the Indiana conference led to the formation in 1989 of the North American Conference on Religion and Ecology (NACRE). NACRE founder Don Conroy hoped to foster an ecospirituality that was open to interfaith cooperation on ecological issues. The North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology (NACCE) – strongly influenced by the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship's Fred Kreuger, who, like the Holy Order of MANS' successor organization, Christ the Savior Brotherhood, had embraced a traditional Eastern Orthodox worldview – rejected this splinter group and argued that NACRE's creation-centered spirituality substituted evolution for repentance and was anti-Christian in nature and intent. By 1991, the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship's influence on NACE was waning. Kreuger, who had edited NACCE's publication, Firmament, left the conference after funding for the magazine dried up. Christ the Savior Brotherhood and the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship continued to organize local and regional conferences on Christian ecology during the early 1990s, but these conferences had a more exclusivist and anti-modern Eastern Orthodox tone. The Eleventh Commandment Fellowship's brand of hard-edged, apocalyptic Eastern Orthodoxy isolated it from both NACRE's and NACCE's more ecumenical and interfaith approach.

During its early years, the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship's writings, workshops, and conferences helped a diverse array of regional and local religious/ecological groups organize themselves into what became, by the mid-1990s, a national and international movement. It also helped mainstream Christians to formulate a response to Lynn White's charge in a 1966 address to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for the ecological crisis.

Phillip Charles Lucas

Further Reading

Eliade, Mircea (1907–1986)

Mircea Eliade was a dominant figure in twentieth-century history of religion studies. Born in Romania, he graduated from the University of Bucharest in 1928. He then studied yoga and Vedanta in India until 1931. Throughout the 1930s, the young scholar was a much-discussed Romanian writer, professor, and newspaper commentator. In the latter part of this period he had a controversial relation to the fascist Iron Guard. During the Second World War, Eliade served as cultural attaché to the Romanian legations in London and Lisbon. In 1945, no longer welcome in his now-communist homeland, the historian of religion became a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, and in 1957 joined the faculty of the University of Chicago.

Eliade was a prolific writer whose works include fiction, memoirs, and treatises on the history of religion. Among

Fundamentally, Eliade as historian of religion was concerned to recover the mind of *homo religiosus*, the ideal type of traditional, pre-modern persons acting and thinking religiously. Basic to this perspective was the experience of the world as "non-homogeneous," contoured by the "dialectic" between the sacred and the profane. Certain times and places, such as those of festivals and temples, were experienced by traditional humanity as "sacred," of a different character from the ordinary "profane" world. Above all, the sacred revealed itself in the sites, often situated amidst nature, of "hierophanies" or spontaneous/mythical manifestations of divine power. The sacred, according to Eliade, was seen as participating in some way in the energy of *illud tempus*, the "strong" time recorded in creation myths, the time of the beginning when God or the gods made the world. Especially important were sacred sites that could also be identified as an *axis mundi*, a "center of the world" that was also a way of access to heaven. These sacred axes could be an actual or mythical sacred tree or mountain, the sanctuary of a temple, or even a holy city like Jerusalem or Mecca.

Such dimensions of the sacred were especially prominent in their nature-oriented form in what Eliade called "cosmic religion," the form of religion which obtained prior to the emergence of religions like Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam that are centered on historical event. Cosmic religion was focused instead on hierophanies [manifestations of the sacred in nature, in such phenomena as the turn of the seasons, or holy mountains, trees, rocks, and waterfalls. To cosmic *homo religiosus*, the gods might dwell atop a mountain like Olympus, the New Year's festival may be the principal temporal "opening" to the divine as in Shinto or ancient Babylon, and the land of the immortals an island just visible on the horizon.

In Eliade's view of the history of religion, nature appears as powerful but ambivalent. In cosmic religion, nature and natural sites exuding power are likely locales for hierophany. Yet nature was also the realm of chaos and danger, the abode of demons and the terrain into which apprentice shamans or those on a vision quest would venture to engage in spiritual warfare and gain the favor of a divine patron. At the same time, in the camp, later the town and finally the city, with their symbols of demarcation between the human and natural worlds, and their *orientation* toward controlled sacred space and time, the natural as well as the supernatural could be "tamed" and integrated into the rhythms of human life.

Later, as the great historical religions perceived the most important hierophanies to be events in human history rather than in nature – the Exodus, Bethlehem, the Bodhi Tree, the Hegira – nature and the attributes of cosmic religion were still more marginalized and regarded with suspicion, although Eliade was aware that the Enlightenment and Romanticism had set in motion a recent reversal of that tendency. Deeply sensitive to humanity's lingering "nostalgia for the sacred" and aware of the distortions of human life attributable to its modern "eclipse," he believed that study of the history of religion could lead to a recovery of human fullness.

*Robert Ellwood*

**Further Reading**


*See also*: Religious Studies and Environmental Concern.

**Ellul, Jacques (1912–1994)**

Jacques Ellul, social historian and biblical theologian, author of some fifty books, influenced many resisting the assault on the natural environment, including many neo-pagans, primarily because of his radical critique of technocracy.

Born in Bordeaux, France, on Epiphany, 6 January 1912, to parents of eclectic European ancestry, Ellul was pushed by his father into the study of law and excelled. As a youth he became a Marxist (though not an uncritical one) and went through an obscuresly mystical conversion to Christianity, two commitments which he could neither reconcile nor entirely abandon. After being removed as a professor of law by the Vichy government in 1940, he spent World War II in the French Resistance, peasant farming and spiriting Jews to safety across the border. His post-war assessment was that Hitler won the war. The Nazi spirit had triumphed. The atom bomb was emblematic of the necessary “fact,” the apotheosis of “technique” – of means overwhelming and supplanting ends.

In this terrible dance of means which have been unleashed, no one knows where we are going, the end has been left behind. Humanity has set out at tremendous speed – to go nowhere . . . Everything
that “succeeds,” everything that is effective, every-thing in itself “efficient,” is justified (Ellul 1967: 69).

Ellul elaborated this prescient theological reflection with a lifetime of sociological examination. These remarks presaged a major critical project of his life: analyzing the emergent technocratic system. The Technological Society (1954 French; 1964 English), was the first book of a trilogy which examined the mechanisms by which technology takes on a life of its own. He identified the “automatism” of technical choice. Efficiency in and of itself, rationally calculated, in effect preempts human choice, and by this process the technical movement becomes self-directing, and self-augmenting. Things occur as if the system were growing by an intrinsic, internal power, without decisive human intervention. It seems to operate by a self-generating logic of necessity. Techniques and technologies recombine in incessant new innovations which preclude any external value, ethic, or judgment apart from efficiency itself. Supplanting the natural environment, they act as if exempt from it.

Ellul was often criticized for making this technological pessimism an article of faith, a nearly dogmatic presumption. There was some basis for the argument. However, he tended to publish simultaneously on parallel tracks: a sociological work would be matched with a separate biblical study. This reflected a rigorous methodology partially rooted in his early tension between Marx and the gospel, but there was more. Ellul desired the scathing sociological works (including others about political power, propaganda, or ideology) to stand on their own as analyses, but he also wanted Christian readers to live with the dialectical tension of the two tracks. Eco-pagan anarchists to whom his analysis of the technological juggernaut has strong appeal, are often oblivious to if not dumbfounded to discover his biblical theology.

By way of example, The Meaning of the City (1960 French; 1970 English), a topical survey of the scriptures, radically pessimistic about human works and radically hopeful about God’s grace in history, was the theological counterpoint to the first technological study. It mines the etymological roots of the Genesis pre-history to find the city, especially the imperial city, an act of rebellion against God, a rejection of the creation in favor of a self-constructed world of security. In the alienation seeded by the violence of Cain, who was the first city-builder, the city takes on a life of its own. It becomes in effect a power on the spiritual plane. (Critics would add that the totally consistent theology of the city which Ellul manages to unearth in scripture, comports entirely too well with the totalizing view of technological culture that he proclaims.)

Marva Dawn has shown convincingly that the biblical concept of “the principalities and powers” indeed figured programatically in Ellul’s overall work, and that he contributed to the recovery of “the powers” in social ethics. He was among the first to apply the notion to structures other than the state, such as money, law, technology, or, as here, the city. Biblically, he understood the principalities to have active agency in dominating and possessing human beings, precisely at the moment human beings imagine they control and possess the powers. Moreover, it can be demonstrated that this comprehension of the principalities is precisely the bridge between Ellul’s twin tracks of social criticism and theology. For example, the dominating “logic of necessity” in his sociological stream of thought, parallels and verifies the bondage of fallenness in the theological stream.

The powers are a concern of environmental theology. They are proving useful in analyzing the structures of globalization, both the technology which has so compressed time and space, and the new structures of political economy such as the global corporation and the overarching institutions of world trade. Where ecological theology has stressed awareness of relationship and has rejected an overemphasis on fall and redemption often at the expense of naming the aggressive ascendency of these structures, Ellul’s theology of the powers can identify their contemptuous assault on human community and the planetary environment.

Jacques Ellul thought and wrote globally, but he lived and acted locally. Despite incessant invitations he never traveled to the United States. He lived almost his entire life in and around Bordeaux, the place of his birth. As part of the environmental movement he engaged a long-standing and largely losing struggle to defend the Aquitaine coastline against overdevelopment. He was indeed an anarchist, generally of the Anabaptist variety, formed in French Personalism. This he defended and explained biblically. It seemed no contradiction to a French Calvinist who was, paradoxically, also a universalist. He advocated a social ethic of radical freedom. And in that freedom he died and lived.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Further Reading
Religion

The best-known deities of the pre-Christian, pagan religion of the Norse peoples of old Scandinavia are Odin, god of wisdom, war and poetry, and Thor, god of thunder, strength and protection, of the Aesir family of gods, and the brother–sister pair of fertility deities, Freyr and Freyja, of the Vanir group. There are however many other types and classes of deities and supernatural beings known from Old Norse texts and folklore. These include the fate-ruling Norns, the protective Dísir, the metalworking Dwarves, and the generally malevolent Frost-Giants. Two further categories, the Álfar (Elves) and Landvaettir (Land Spirits) are of special interest as divine beings closely related with the natural landscape. It is notable that while the worship of the major gods and goddesses of past times was suppressed by Christianization, belief in the Elves and Land spirits has remained popular in the religious imagination of Icelanders to the present time, at the level of folk religion and oral tradition.

The nature of the Elves and Land Spirits is not straightforward. They cannot be precisely defined nor sharply distinguished from one another, from the gods, or from the spirits of dead. It is advisable to conceptualize the Norse pantheon of divine and semi-divine beings as a continuum; a spectrum of divine powers and presences some of which are close at hand, others more remote.

The Poetic and Prose Edda collections, the primary Icelandic literary documents for Old Norse mythology, contain quite a few references to the Elves. These are generally not sustained discussions and descriptions, but brief formulaic phrases whose matter-of-fact repetition establishes their grounding in long-held beliefs and tradition. In a number of different texts, the Elves are listed alongside the Aesir in phrases in which the two classes of gods represent the entirety of Norse divinity, in the manner of a synecdoche (a figure of speech in which the word for part of something is used to mean the whole). For example, the Seeress, describing the fate of the gods and of the cosmos in Voluspa 48, poses the question, “What of the Aesir? What of the Elves?” to introduce her account of the final collapse of the gods and their world. In Hāvamál 159, Odin illustrates his broad range of knowledge with the boast, “Aesir and Elves, I know the difference between them: few who are not wise know that.”

The description of the Elves as the primary category of divine beings other than the Aesir places them into the position in Norse cosmology that is normally assigned to the Vanir, the class of gods that includes the fertility deities Njörðr, Freyr and Freya. There are certain indications that Elves and Vanir may be synonymous. Grimnismál names “Álheim” as Freyr’s home (Grimnismál 5), and the humorous poem Lokasenna includes Loki’s taunt to Freyja, “Of the Aesir and Elves that are in here, each one has been your lover” (Lokasenna 30). As the deities gathered in the hall are otherwise described as the Aesir and the Vanir, the “Elves” to which Loki refers to can only be the Vanir. However, the Eddic poem Fafnismál clearly distinguishes the Aesir, Elves and Vanir as three separate categories of beings (Fafnismál 13), for which reason a straightforward identification of the Elves with the Vanir is not tenable.

Nonetheless, there would seem to be considerable overlap between the Elves and the Vanir, particularly in regard to the fertility function explicitly identified with the Vanir but also shared by the Elves. The sun, the mightiest power in all nature, is a feminine being called Álfrodull (Elf-disc). Fated to be devoured by the monstrous wolf Fenris in the cataclysm of Ragnarok, Elf-disc will first give birth to a new sun who will shine on the new world that will rise from the ashes of the old (Vafthrondismál 47).

A complex of beliefs centered on fertility links together the Elves, the dead, the god Freyr and deceased kings. According to Ynglingsaga (chapter 10), the god Freyr provided the blessings of fair weather and rich harvests during his life, and was after his death worshiped in his grave-mound in the hope of continuing the benefits of his past reign. Similarly, Flateyjarbók reports that when the Norwegian king Olaf of Geirstad died, his subjects worshipped him as the “Elf of Geirstad” for the same reasons as with the legendary worship of Freyr. In Gísli’s Saga (chapter 18), Thorgrim, a pious worshipper of Freyr, is buried in a grave-mound, which remains free of snow and ice in the worst of weather, as a kindness of the god toward his fallen devotee. In each case, worship is offered to the dead for the sake of fertility and related benefits, with reference to both Elves and Vanir in different cases. Of the three major seasonal Blóts (literally “blood-sacrifices,” but actually meaning solemn community feasts in honor of the gods) described in the Ynglingsaga and believed to have been practiced across Scandinavia, one was the Álfablót, dedicated to the Elves. Jormundur Ingi Hansen, Alsherjargóði (High Priest) of the Icelandic Neopagan association Ásatrú from 1994 to 2002, says he once knew old women who would put out offerings of food to the Elves, hoping to thereby secure future prosperity.

The association of benevolent supernatural powers, whether of the dead, of Freyr or Elves, with grave-mounds is highly significant and suggests linkages with other religious traditions of Europe and beyond. In Celtic Irish myth, there is a similar belief in sacred hills, which are often grave-mounds, called Sídhe, which are gateways to the Other World. On the night of Sáimhain, the Sídhe were believed to open wide, enabling the living, the dead and
the gods to cross into one another’s domains. In ancient Russia, persons of high status were buried in immense grave-mounds called Kurgans. The late archeologist Marija Gimbutas theorized that such burials were a distinctive trait of Indo-European culture, spreading from the Russian steppe region toward Europe through a series of migrations or invasions over thousands of years, possibly as early as the fifth millennium B.C.E. Eyrbyggja Saga tells of Helgafell (Holy Mountain, a rocky hill with an impressive view, located in the Snaefellsness peninsula) opening to welcome the newly deceased into the community of ancestors (chapter 11). The saga literature also describes other cases of the dead buried in sacred hills. It is tempting to see such tales as a far-flung extension of the Indo-European Kurgan idea; even if they are not, the commonalities remain of interest.

Turning to Land Spirits, these beings are mentioned less often in the Edda collections than the Elves and are more in evidence in the Sagas and other later Norse texts. An oft-cited passage which very well illustrates the importance of the Land Spirits in the early history of Iceland is an injunction against ships with dragon-head ornaments on their prows coming into port, for fear that the dragon-heads might upset the native Land Spirits of Iceland (Landnámabók, Hauksbók version, chapter 268). This and other passages express the belief that it is vitally important to maintain the goodwill of the Land Spirits, the native powers of any given region, as their enmity can spell disaster. In Egils Saga (chapter 58), Egil Skallagrimsson attempts to purposely rouse such supernatural ill-will by composing a poem in which he calls on the Land Spirits to curse the Norwegian king Eirik Bloodaxe and his wife Gunnhildr.

The same belief is still influential in modern-day Iceland, where a special division of the government highway commission is entrusted with the task of determining whether Elves, Land Spirits, or other such invisible beings inhabit particular hills, boulders or other natural formations. If such a place is believed to be the dwelling-place of a Land Spirit or other divine being, then that area is held off-limits to road construction. Folk belief holds that whoever disturbs the dwellings of the Land Spirits will suffer illness or other calamities, possibly including death. The location of the Land Spirits in large stones and hills is again reminiscent of the Celtic Sidh and the Russian Kurgan.

An important common feature of the Elves and Land Spirits is their lack of individual identity. They are generally referred to not as named individuals but as anonymous, divine collectives, in contrast to such distinctive individual personalities as, for example, Odin, Thor, Freyja and Loki. The lack of distinctive identity of the Elves and Land Spirits may be among the factors that enabled belief in such beings to survive suppression by Christian authorities over the centuries.

Modern Icelanders are of two minds about displaying their belief in Elves and Land Spirits. Most are quite guarded about openly admitting to such beliefs, for fear of seeming foolish or superstitious, and it is more common to hear statements that other Icelanders believe in such things than to meet with a direct confirmation of these beliefs.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are certain entrepreneurial Icelanders who have come to see local customs concerning Land Spirits and Elves as a business opportunity, and have taken it upon themselves to market maps, books and tours to foreign visitors.

The Elves and Land Spirits are linked both with the power of nature and with the world of the dead. This is most clearly borne out in the association of the Elves and Land Spirits with hills and mountains, which resemble and are in some cases identical with grave-mounds where ancestors are believed to continue their existence. This linkage echoes very early levels of Indo-European religion, with reference to the Kurgan grave-mounds of southern Russia. The myths, beliefs and folklore concerning Elves and Land-Spirits suggest an enduring connection between fertility and death and between gods and ancestors in the Nordic religious imagination, which survived the official suppression of Old Norse Paganism and continues to the present day.

Michael F. Strmiska

Further Reading

Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1803–1882)

Ralph Waldo Emerson can rightly be called the first American “man of letters.” By the end of his life, Emerson had published nine books of essays, had served as the editor of the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, had traveled and lectured in Europe on three occasions and had regularly delivered a series of lectures on the Lyceum circuit almost every year between the mid-1830s to the late 1860s.

The son of a Boston Unitarian minister and heir to a long ancestral line of Protestant leaders, Emerson trained for the same career in his early youth. Nevertheless, significant personal losses (the early death of his father and of his first wife Ellen Tucker) helped to shape his increasing theological doubt, which included a growing disbelief in the idea of immortality, in the “miracles” of Christ’s ministry and in the efficaciousness of such rituals as the Lord’s Supper (Communion, the Eucharist). Emerson’s intellectual development also turned him away from his early fascination with Scottish “Common Sense” theologians and philosophers and toward the writings of Plato, Swedenborg, Kant and the European Romantics. These personal, theological and intellectual transformations all mutually reinforced Emerson’s growing sense that he must re-create his life according to his own sense of intellectual and spiritual truth.

Emerson was perhaps the single person most responsible for what has come to be called “The American Renaissance,” a flowering of literary and artistic production of the mid-nineteenth century which consciously strove to establish a unique “American voice,” distinct from the constraints and conventions of European culture. His two most famous lectures, both delivered at Harvard, established his particular contribution to this Renaissance. In “The American Scholar” (1837), Emerson voiced the call for American intellectual independence from Europe, urging on his audience the importance of individual self-expression, though importantly, a kind of self-expression that is contained and tempered by the disciplined pursuit of self-culture (a theme he later elaborated in his essay, “The Poet”). His 1838 Divinity School Address was much more controversial, challenging not only the theological orthodoxy of the time, but even its most liberal expressions in the form of New England Unitarianism. Calling the Unitarianism of his day “corpse-cold,” Emerson literally faced-down his ancestors and teachers, arguing for the spiritual authority of individuals in communion with their own consciences and deemphasizing the role of Jesus as a source of authority. He emphasized the importance of discerning spiritual truth from everyday life, a wide range of reading and ongoing experience in nature.

Emerson’s first published work, the extended essay *Nature* (1836), is particularly important for our understanding of Emerson’s contribution to the many and varied “spiritualized” visions of nature in American culture. While one of Emerson’s first career ideas (after rejecting the ministry) was to become a naturalist, it is clear that his understanding of nature is weighted more toward nature’s symbolic, rather than scientific importance. Throughout his life, however, Emerson continued to weave together a complex reading of nature that was informed by both his own amateur experiments as a botanist and his more sophisticated intellectual meditations on the meaning of nature as a source for human, spiritual growth.

Written as he was setting into a second marriage, a new home in Concord, Massachusetts and a newly launched career as a writer and lecturer, *Nature* can be seen as Emerson’s personal manifesto, a claim to his self-fashioned spiritual and intellectual vocation. While entitled “Nature,” the essay is much more than a study of the natural world (though it includes moments of precise, naturalist observation); rather, it is a broad-ranging inquiry into language, art, beauty and spiritual experience as these are informed and illuminated by what we commonly think of as “nature” (landscape, mountains, rivers and so on).

While physical nature is the touchstone throughout the essay, Emerson’s text ultimately concerns itself with the figure of the ideal Poet (whom Emerson both creates and embodies) whose task it is directly to experience the spiritual lessons inherent in nature and then to transform the language of the natural world into the written word for a wider audience. The Poet, in Emerson’s view, replaces the minister as the modern version of the ancient biblical prophets, open to direct, spiritual experience and called to share that experience with others.

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See also: Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Heathenry – Ásatrú; Middle Earth; Odinism; Seidr (adjacent to Heathenry – Ásatrú); Trees (Northern and Middle Europe).
While drawing on the Christian concept of the "Book of Nature," Emerson disavows Christian traditionalism and argues that the human mind (consciousness) and the natural world are the only necessary foundations for genuine, spiritual experience and the cultivation of the self. Nature is portrayed by Emerson as a democratic medium, available to all, for a broad range of uses. The common use of nature is that of "commodity," nature as a resource for shelter, food, tools and other human creations. But nature's more important and authentic uses, Emerson argues, is as a medium for immediate, spiritual revelation that provides each individual with a vision of truth, beauty and goodness. Like other Romantic and Transcendentalist thinkers, Emerson includes in his definition of nature almost anything that can be defined as the "not me." Not surprisingly, then, his essay is as much about the effects of the "not me" on the development of self as it is about bio-physical nature as such.

The vision of "The Poet" (and his or her proper relationship to the natural world) that Emerson first outlined in Nature, would become a centering point in his life and his writing throughout his career. At the same time, while Nature can be said to be more "about" the self than about the natural world as such, it played a significant role in a growing shift in American culture toward attentiveness to nature, rather than seeing the physical world as primarily a stage in the human–Divine drama, or as a resource for human use.

Emerson's writings set the intellectual foundation for Henry David Thoreau's, John Burroughs' and John Muir's own arguments on behalf of nature as a beneficent force which must be respected, studied and protected. While it would be a mistake to see Thoreau's Walden (1854), Burroughs' Locusts and Wild Honey (1879), or Muir's My First Summer in the Sierras (1911) as merely "Emerson put into practice," all are "conversion narratives" that testify to finding a new spiritual life "close to nature" which depend heavily on Emerson's earlier insights. In this sense, the ripple effects of Emersonian thinking about nature extended far beyond the reach of his immediate contemporaries to include early conservationists such as George Perkins Marsh, as well as environmentalists Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson in the twentieth century. While Emerson is remembered most broadly as a literary figure who set the terms of a new flowering of American writing in the nineteenth century, his influence on liberal religious life and his unintentional contribution to American environmentalism continue to this day.

Rebecca Kneale Gould

Further Reading

Emissaries of Divine Light

In the 1930s, Lloyd Meeker, also known by the spiritual name Uranda, gained a following as a lecturer on human potential. In 1939, he met Martin Cecil, a hereditary British Lord, and together the two visionaries began to develop a network of intentional communities. The first was opened in 1945 at Sunrise Ranch, near Loveland, Colorado. By 1948, a second community, known as 100 Mile House, had opened in the remote interior of British Columbia. By the 1980s, the movement had about a dozen intentional communities worldwide and well over 100 other organized centers, although later some of the communities and centers closed. A distinctive type of New Age spiritual outlook that embraces both body and soul characterizes the Emissary movement, which sees its central task as the spiritual regeneration of humankind and attempts to embody its spiritual values in all parts of daily life.

A strong connection to the natural world has always been central to the Emissary outlook. Individual members seek to attune themselves with the divine force that is held to permeate everything. The communities have worked toward self-sufficiency, with extensive organic gardening and farming operations, including hydroponic installations. Through a strong outreach program of publications, seminars, and retreats they have spread their spiritual message to the general public.

Timothy Miller
Further Reading
Cummings, Michael S. “Democratic Procedure and Community in Utopia.” Alternative Futures 3 (Fall 1980).
See also: Back to the Land Movements; New Age; New Religious Movements.

Entheogens

The history of religion is intertwined with the use of drugs believed to facilitate the religious experience. Such substances are best referred to as “entheogens,” a term coined in 1979 by a group of scholars including R. Gordon Wasson, Carl A.P. Ruck, and Jonathan Ott to denote “drugs which provoke ecstasy and have traditionally been used as shamanic or religious inebriants, as well as their active principles and artificial congeners” (Ott 1996: 15). The term’s Greek roots translate as “god generated within,” which better describes the drugs’ religious use than do such words as “intoxicant” (literally, poisonous), “hallucinogenic” (causing hallucinations), “psychotimimetic” (mimicking psychosis), “narcotic” (sleep-producing) or “psychedelic” (soul-showing).

In both traditional and contemporary societies, entheogen users believe that they experience a more primal and unmediated spirituality than those persons not using them. Their human spirituality is connected to and mediated by the plant world, rather than transcending it. Yet at the same time, many entheogen-based religions speak of another world that is more real and true than our three-dimensional world.

Nor is the entheogenic experience essentially different from other religious experience, argues historian of religion Huston Smith in Cleansing the Doors of Perception (2000: 37), any more than a religious experience introduced by physical danger or illness. However, Smith suggests that, lacking a supportive spiritual community, entheogenic ecstasy could be less likely to effect permanent life changes.

Modern study of the relationship between entheogens and religion began in the 1890s, when the American psychologist William James wrote about changes in consciousness produced by inhaling nitrous oxide. His English contemporary, Havelock Ellis, experimented with peyote (from which mescaline was chemically extracted in 1919), as did a variety of other Americans and Europeans, mostly physicians and psychologists. The British writer Aldous Huxley experimented with mescaline in the early 1950s and described his reactions in an influential short book with a title taken from the mystical eighteenth-century poet William Blake, The Doors of Perception. LSD was first synthesized in 1938 but not extensively investigated until the 1950s, first by psychiatrists who thought its use replicated schizophrenia and then by scholars of religion who investigated parallels between entheogenic experience and other reports of mystical experience.

A famous experiment took place on Good Friday, 1962, at a Christian religious service in the Boston University chapel. Walter Pahnke, M.D., who was completing a Ph.D. in religion at Harvard University, conducted a double-blind study of psilocybin (found in the psilocybian mushrooms) by giving it to half of a group of twenty theology professors and students before the service, while the other half received a placebo, nicotinic acid. Participants recorded their experiences in writing the following day, and the reports were scored for mystical traits by independent raters on a scale of zero to three. Almost all of those receiving psilocybin reported significantly higher scores for mysticism, based on a list of seven traits (Smith 2000: 100–6).

Researchers began to consider the influence of entheogens on ancient religions, particularly Hinduism during the Vedic period and the Eleusinian Mysteries of Classical Greece. In addition, Renaissance and Early Modern accounts of possible entheogen use by European witches were reexamined to see if such substances played a part in the witches’ poorly understood activities.

Richard Schultes (1915–2001), a botany professor at Harvard University, had learned in the 1930s that the use of entheogenic psilocybin mushrooms survived in remote southern Mexican villages, despite four centuries of effort by the Roman Catholic Church to eradicate their use. The British writer Robert Graves (whose book The White Goddess played a significant role in the contemporary Pagan revival) put mushroom researcher R. Gordon Wasson in touch with Schultes. Wasson and his associates visited Mazatec Indian healers who used psilocybin mushrooms and other entheogens in their ceremonies. From Schultes’ and Wasson’s research flowed a stream of publications describing an unbroken tradition of shamanic use of entheogens in Mexico.

In the 1960s, Wasson asserted that soma, a miraculous substance celebrated in the Vedas (holy texts dating from the second millennium B.C.E. and fundamental to the Hindu religion) was actually the mushroom Amanita muscaria. The Brahmans, priests of the Aryan tribes who moved into northwestern India in this period, composed numerous hymns mentioning soma, a substance that was pressed, mixed sometimes with milk, and then drunk by the Brahmans, but which was not alcohol. Hymns describe the war god Indra, in particular, delighting to consume vast quantities of soma before battling demonic opponents. One Vedic hymn (RV 8.48) proclaims, “We have drunk soma . . . we have become immortal; arrived at light. We have found the Gods.”

Examining the textual evidence, including such hints that soma was associated with mountains and that its active principle remained in the drinker’s urine, and
Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics can be defined, in very general terms, as efforts to articulate, systematize, and defend systems of value guiding human treatment of and behavior in the natural world. Philosophical and religious

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Comparing that evidence with ethnographic descriptions of modern *Amanita muscaria* use by Siberian shamans, Wasson and his associate, the Indologist Wendy Doniger, argued that the Aryan tribes had used the mushroom in the homeland. After they expanded into India, however, they were only able to acquire it through trade, since it did not grow in India, and eventually soma’s actual nature was forgotten.

Subsequently Wasson, together with research chemist Albert Hofmann (discoverer of LSD) and Classics professor Carl A.P. Ruck, advanced a theory that the Greek mystery religion of Eleusis, practiced from about 1500 B.C.E. until 395, had at its climax a ritual ingestion of a water solution of ergot, *Claviceps purpurea*, a psychoactive fungus that grows on wheat and barley, from which LSD was chemically derived.

Entheogens provide evidence for the persistence of an “Old Religion,” some form of pagan religion persisting in Europe until relatively modern times. Roughly 40,000–60,000 accused witches were executed between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, and almost all were at least nominal Christians. Nevertheless, some accused witches were found to use ointments containing such psychoactive plants as *Atropa belladonna* (deadly nightshade) and *Hyoscyamus niger* (henbane), plants which can be deadly if misused. These findings suggest the presence of an underground tradition of their ritual use.

The chief North American religious tradition employing entheogens is the Native American Church, whose rituals include consumption of its sacrament, the peyote cactus. Used for millennia in Mexico, peyote’s use spread into the United States in the 1890s as Plains tribes were fractured and relocated onto reservations. In its teachings, the church combines Plains tribal religious ideas with Christianity, thus competing with the Christian missionaries who flocked to the new reservations to make converts. As one church member said, “Our favorite term for Peyote is Medicine. To us it is a portion of the body of Christ, even as the communion bread is believed to be a portion of Christ’s body for Christians” (Smith 2000: 117).

An ancient South American entheogen, *ayahuasca* or *yagé*, has also swarmed formalized international religious organizations. Ayahuasca (“vine of the souls” in the Quechua language of the Peruvian Amazon) is the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*, containing the alkaloid harmine, frequently mixed with other psychoactive plants to increase its potency. (Harmine is also present in a Eurasian plant, Syrian rue, *Peganum harmala*, which has also been put forth as the source of *soma.*) Its use continues unabated today.

Two Brazilian churches employing ayahuasca sacramentally were founded in the twentieth century. The *Santo Daime* church originated about 1930 and the *União do Vegetal* was founded in 1961. Like members of the Native American Church in North America, followers of the Santo Daime religion speak of their sacramental entheogen in Christian terms: the Daima, the sacred drink, is described as giving them a form of Christ-consciousness. Yet its followers also say that their religion incorporated the spiritual force of the indigenous Amazonian peoples. Santo Daime reaches out as well to the Spiritist and Afro-Brazilian religions and urges activism on behalf of the rain-forest. Daimistas, like many other entheogen users, see their sacrament as “both a shortcut and a medicine” that helps them to discover their spiritual identity (Polari de Alverga 1999: 131). “There are no human intermediaries in the Daima” (Polari de Alverga 1999: xxiii).

In Peru and Brazil, since the 1970s in particular, *Ayahuasca* has also become a component of ecotourism, as outsiders visit Amazonia to study with local shamans and partake of their sacrament. Santo Daime in particular has spread to other South American countries outside the traditional ayahuasca-using region and also to the United States and Western Europe, where Dutch members won in court after being arrested as “narcotics users.”

Chas S. Clifton

Further Reading


See also: Ayahuasca; Ethnobotany; Huxley, Aldous; Leary, Timothy; Peyote; Umbanda.
reflection on human obligations toward nature or “other-kind” has a long pedigree in human cultures, whether occidental, Asian, or indigenous. Environmental ethics as a distinctive subfield within Western philosophical and religious ethics, however, did not emerge until the last three decades of the twentieth century.

The roots of modern environmental philosophy predate the emergence of “environmental ethics” as an academic field. In North America, for example, there are critically important antecedents that can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, perhaps especially in the writings of American naturalists Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Both Thoreau and Muir influencedly promoted environmental preservation and the setting aside of forest reserves. This encyclopedia is replete with additional examples of the many, global tributaries to contemporary environmental ethics.

**From Leopold to Earth Day**

But among environmental ethicists in the West, at least, there is widespread agreement that the forester and ecologist Aldo Leopold provided a benchmark against which subsequent environmental ethics can be measured. His short essay “The Land Ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) provided an evocative and profound effort to articulate ethical guidelines for human interactions with nature. In it Leopold defined ethics as guidelines for social or ecological situations, based on individual membership in “a community of interdependent parts.” Applying this definition to the environment, a “land ethic,” he claimed, “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (239). This enlargement of humans’ moral community transformed their place in relation to the natural environment, “from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (240).

Leopold’s land ethic provided a model of and foundation for a type of environmental ethics now known as “ecocentrism” (ecosystem-centered ethics), or alternatively, “biocentrism” (life-centered ethics). Such ethics assert that the well-being of entire ecological communities, not just individual species (like *Homo sapiens*) or individual organisms, should be the axial moral concern. Ecocentrism therefore challenges most Western philosophical ethics, which tend to be “anthropocentric,” namely, focused on human welfare. For such ethics, non-human life is valuable at most indirectly, to the extent it satisfies some human need or preference. For ecocentric ethics, human interests do not trump that of all other life forms and the well-being of the biosphere as a whole. An ecosystem, rather than its constitutive parts, is the axial point of moral concern.

The ecocentric approach presented by Leopold and his progeny, challenges environmental ethics to specify which individuals and groups should be given moral consideration, that is, have their interests considered or protected in some way. It also implicitly demands justification for claims limiting moral consideration to individuals or groups that are less than wholes. Indeed, much environmental ethics is engaged in the effort to determine the extent and nature of the moral community and to develop principles for deciding hard cases, such as when the interests of morally considerable organisms conflict.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance and influence of Leopold’s land ethic, although this influence took some time to germinate and grow. To understand its influence, however, the affective, aesthetic, and even religious underpinnings of his writing need to be fully recognized. But the religious dimensions of Leopold’s writings are often overlooked in the environmental ethics literature, making it difficult for some fully to apprehend the evocative resonance Leopold has had with readers. Curt Meine’s biography of Leopold revealed what can be discerned by the perceptive reader throughout his work: Leopold had a deep spiritual connection to the Earth’s living systems and a profound sense of their sacrality, this being the foundation of his land ethic (Meine 1988: 506–7, and in his biographical entry in this volume).

Following Leopold’s untimely death in 1949, the next intellectual landmark in the development of environmental ethics was the work of ecologist Rachel Carson. In the late 1950s Carson began publishing magazine articles exposing the dangers of radioactive materials, pesticides and herbicides, the creation and use of which had boomed in America after World War II. In her now-famous *Silent Spring* (1962), Carson argued that industrial society was decimating avian populations and threatening the health of many other organisms, including humans.

Less well known are two of Carson’s books on oceans, published in 1951 and 1955, in which her own nature spirituality is more obvious than in her exposés of chemical culture. These books illustrate the most powerful themes in Carson’s work: a religious reverence for the sea, which she considered the womb of life, and a belief in the connectedness of all living things. The sea, she believed, was the generator and the grave for all: the alpha and omega of the planet. The life of the sea controls the life of the land and thus human life, an axiom that Carson believed should humble human beings (McKay, this volume).

This humility coheres with Leopold’s sentiment that humans should act as plain members of the land community, and it subtly conveys her own ecocentric spirituality. It also reflects how important such humility has been in much of the subsequent evolution of environmental philosophy, religious or otherwise. Carson not only helped set the stage for explicitly ecocentric environmental ethics, she also criticized the reductive and instrumental methodology that characterized (male-dominated) Western science since Francis Bacon (1561–1626), thus tilling the
soil for ecofeminism, which would emerge as a particularly vital form of environmental ethics a decade or so later.

While many events and thinkers contributed to the ferment shaping the field of environmental ethics, several additional critically important figures who published in the second half of the 1960s deserve to be singled out for playing a decisive role. Two articles in particular had an immediate impact because they were published in the widely read journal Science.

Lynn White’s 1967 argument blamed much of the environmental crisis on ideas that he believed had incubated for centuries within Christianity. White was hardly the first to suggest such a connection, of course. The historians Perry Miller in Errand into the Wilderness (1956) and Roderick Nash in Wilderness and the American Mind (1967) had both argued that Christianity fostered anti-environmental attitudes and behaviors. And in The Rights of Nature (1989) Nash showed that a number of Christians, including Walter Lowdermilk, Joseph Sittler, and Richard Baer, had earlier criticized their tradition’s complicity in environmental decline before White had.

A year later the biologist Garrett Hardin argued in Science that there is a “tragedy of the commons” wherein, given an ecosystem open to all, individuals pursuing their own interests degrade that ecosystem’s resources and their own life-prospects if there are no mutually agreed-upon constraints to limit self-interested behavior and prevent overexploitation. Combined with apocalyptic environmental predictions such as in the ecologist Paul Ehrlich’s The Population Bomb (1968), Hardin’s much debated 1974 article “Living in a Lifeboat” – which infamously argued that aiding the poor intensifies population growth, environmental degradation, and human suffering – generated additional controversy. It forced many to consider, for the first time, the environmental dimensions of public policies and ethical decision making.

Two other works published in the 1960s, one by ERNEST FRIEDRICH SCHUMACHER, the other by Gary Snyder, merit special attention when considering the antecedents to the discipline of environmental ethics and its religious dimensions. In 1966, first as a chapter in a book, then republished two years later in the first volume of Resurgence, which would become a leading venue for the discussion of religion, mysticism and nature, Schumacher published “Buddhist Economics.” In it he argued that “The teaching of the Buddha . . . enjoins a reverent and non-violent attitude not only to all sentient beings but also, with great emphasis, to trees” (1966: 699). Such reverence, he asserted, offers a Buddhist approach to economics that rejects economic growth and material acquisition and strives instead for “highly self-sufficient local communities [which] are less likely to get involved in large-scale violence than people whose existence depends on world-wide systems of trade” (1966: 698). Reflecting and promoting a decentralist ideology that would become common among environmentalists, Schumacher’s essay was republished widely and included in the economist Herman Daly’s influential, edited works promoting a “steady state economy” (1973: 231–9; 1980: 138–45). Such economies, wrote Daly, Schumacher, and the other contributors to these volumes (discussed below) are more ethical and fitting for a world of limited resources. Schumacher’s influence increased dramatically after the publication of Small is Beautiful (1973), which is now considered a classic environmentalist text, and includes his essay on Buddhist economics.

Meanwhile, the poet GARY SNYDER began his influential publishing career in his own way by promoting decentralized bioregional economies, and what in America were alternative spiritualities, as a pathway toward sustainability. Snyder considers himself a “Buddhist-Animist” (Taylor 1995: 114) and his remarkable book, Turtle Island (1969), focused on the ecological spirituality and wisdom of North America’s indigenous cultures, becoming the first of many writings in which he offered a religious green alternative to occidental religions. His influence grew rapidly after he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for this work in 1975.

While much of the religion-and-nature-related intellectual work during the 1960s was critical of occidental religions and/or proffered supposedly greener alternative spiritualities, an important dissent was published by the geographer Yi Fu Tuan in “Discrepancies Between Environmental Attitude and Behaviour: Examples From Europe and China” (1968). Tuan rejected as facile the assumption of a close connection between nature-related beliefs and ideals and actual practices. Specifically, he rejected the claim that occidental cultures before Christianity were relatively benign by pointing to the environmental devastation caused by the Greeks and Romans, and he argued that the Chinese devastated their environment long before Western civilization could have exercised any influence in this regard.

A significant portion of the subsequent debate over religion, ethics, and nature engaged the arguments advanced by all of the above figures. The ferment they created contributed to the social forces that precipitated the world’s first “Earth Day” in 1970, which further focused attention on environmental values. Soon the term environmental ethics would come into common usage and the related scholarly field would develop rapidly.

Environmental Ethics beyond the First Earth Day (1970)

Ecocentrism and Deep Ecology become focal points of debate

In 1971 philosopher J. B. BAIRD CALLICOTT placed environmental ethics as a discipline on the academic landscape, teaching what may have been the world’s first course with this title at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens
Point, where he then taught. In the following decades Callicott became the world’s leading interpreter and promoter of Leopold’s land ethics. A central part of his constructive efforts was engaging the Lynn White thesis. In his many articles, eventually collected in books, Callicott argued that generally speaking, Asian and indigenous religions provide more fertile ground than occidental religions for generating an environmental ethics compatible with Leopold’s land ethics. In this way, he supported the outlines of White’s thesis and implicitly contradicted part of Hardin’s argument, at least insofar as he was convinced that indigenous societies, which traditionally held land in a commons, generally develop environmentally sustainable lifeways and religious mores (now often called “TRADITIONAL ECOCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE”) that help to protect their habitats – a point that the naturalist Gary Paul Nahban and many anthropologists also argued.

The next watershed in environmental ethics occurred in 1972 when the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined and explained the term “DEEP ECOLOGY” at a conference in Bucharest, publishing his thoughts in Inquiry the following year. He contrasted “deep ecology” with anthropocentric, “shallow ecology” (which he later more diplomatically called “reform ecology”), by which he meant environmentalism concerned only for human well-being and unwilling to radically reconfigure society toward sustainable lifeways. Naess called his own approach and pathway toward deep ecology “ECOSOPHY T” – “ecosophy” was another Naess neologism meaning “ecological philosophy.” In his discussion of “Ecosophy T” one can see the religious dimensions to his belief that nature has “intrinsic” or “inherent” value. (Environmental philosophers variously define and debate the terms “intrinsic” and “inherent” value; specific reasoning about such terms involves “meta-ethics,” a task beyond the present purpose. Here these terms are used simply as synonyms for the idea that nature has in some way value in and of itself, independent of human need.)

“Deep Ecology” rapidly became a catchphrase for most environmental ethics claiming nature had intrinsic value. The wider extension of the term and its growing popularity obscured some of deep ecology’s distinctiveness, which was frustrating to Naess and his collaborators. But in its generic, easy-to-understand version (Naess’s own writing, by his own admission, is difficult reading), in which deep ecology is equated simply with a belief in the intrinsic value of nature, the trope found a widespread resonance among environmental activists, scientists, and scholars. “Intrinsic value theory” thus became an important element in the growing environmental ethics debate. Indeed, Naess himself was influential upon scientists developing CONSERVATION BIOLOGY, a field which, like environmental ethics, had important antecedents (in this case in earlier conservation science) but which emerged with a catchy name and thus a stronger identity in the 1970s.

The next watershed in the evolution of environmental ethics in general, and of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics in particular, was the “Rights of Non-Human Nature” conference held in California in 1974. The conference was convened by John Rodman, a political theorist at California’s Claremont Graduate School, who would later declare himself a “radical environmentalist” and articulate his own theory of intrinsic value (Rodman 1983). But the conference was at the time inspired by a 1972 law review article entitled “Should Trees Have Standing?”, written by University of Southern California law professor Christopher Stone. Stone argued in this article and a subsequent book that natural objects, including trees, have interests and should have standing in the courts, represented by sympathetic humans. Although the claim that nonhuman nature has rights had been made before Stone’s better-known argument, the conference nevertheless was a landmark because it drew together for the first time many of those who were or soon would shape the emerging environmental ethics field.

Indeed, speakers at this conference included several whose publications in the 1960s have already been noted, for example, Gary Snyder, Garrett Hardin, and Roderick Nash. Others included professor of human ecology Paul Shepard, who in 1973 published The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game, the first in a series of books arguing that the spiritualities and lifeways of the world’s foraging cultures are superior to the world’s agricultural societies and the religions that accompany them. Shepard’s contributions to deep ecology and radical environmentalism can hardly be overestimated. Dave Foreman, the most charismatic of Earth First!’s co-founders, for example, considers Paul Shepard to be “the most brilliant and provocative intellect of our time” (promotional blurb inside Shepard 1998). Native American scholar Vine Deloria added his complementary argument, first published in God is Red in 1972, accusing Christianity of waging a genocidal war against Indians and nature and arguing that only indigenous wisdom could save the planet. George Sessions and Bill Devall were also present; they became influential deep ecology proponents upon their publication of Deep Ecology in 1985.

Sessions, a philosophy professor at a small college in the foothills of California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains, during this conference and in subsequent publications, joined the bandwagon, blaming anthropocentrism and its most forceful bearer, Christianity, for repressing the ecologically sustainable lifeways and spiritualities of the world’s indigenous, foraging peoples. He suggested that Western humans could work their way back to a proper understanding of the “God/Nature/Man relationship” via the pantheism of the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Sessions also likened the presumed
nature-beneficent spirituality of indigenous peoples to what ALOUS HUXLEY (following Leinartz and others) called THE PERNIAL PHILOSOPHY (1945), the nature-mysticism and feeling of oneness with the universe that some believe is a widespread, crosscultural human experience. Sessions credited not only Huxley but also the anthropologist LORI ESLEY (1970) for recognizing the ecological sensitivity of “primitive man” (Sessions 1977: 481–2), and lauded the poet ROBINSON JEFFERS as “Spinoza’s twentieth-century evangelist” (Sessions 1977: 509). Arne Naess had also been influenced by Spinoza, and this provided one of the affinities with Sessions that led to their collaboration on a “deep ecology platform” (Naess 1989: 29), which shaped the identity of this branch of environmental ethics.

While many of the voices at this conference had affinities with what would soon afterward be understood as deep ecology (Snyder, Shepard, Sessions, Devall, and in some ways Deloria), there were other perspectives as well. Another Claremont professor, process philosopher and theologian JOHN COBB also presented, providing an environmentally sophisticated version of Christianity. His presentations suggested that the prevalent critiques of Christianity might well be overbroad. In his conference presentation he drew on Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology (1972) the first of his many publications exploring Christian environmental responsibility. Also presenting was Roderick Nash whose work reinforced White’s thesis about the ecological calamities brought on by Christianity (1973). Observing the greening of Western philosophy and religion in the 1970s and 1980s, however, Nash eventually argued differently in The Rights of Nature, asserting that environmental ethics can be well built on occidental cultural roots.

Not long after this conference, in 1976, George Sessions began publishing the first of six issues (the last in January 1983) of Ecophilosophy (a term borrowed from Naess for “ecological philosophy), an irregular newsletter distributed to about 150 scholars around the world. Many of these scholars consider this to have been an important incubator for the emerging field. But by 1979, another philosopher, Eugene Hargrove, with the support of the John Muir Institute for Environmental Studies (illustrating the field’s continuity with early conservatism), began publishing Environmental Ethics, which would become the discipline’s flagship journal, and facilitate the rapid development of the field. The journal regularly engaged religion, and Hargrove facilitated such discussion not only in its pages, but also in Religion and Environmental Crisis (1986), which examined a number of religious traditions. On the tenth Earth Day in 1980, a colloquium on environmental ethics held at the University of Denver was organized by Donald Hughes, who had himself joined the fray as early as 1975, analyzing occidental culture’s contributions to world environmental degradation. (See EGYPT, GREECE, and the ROMAN EMPIRE for his current perspectives on these cultures.)

**Animal Welfare Ethics add to the ferment**

Not all environmental ethics, of course, express eocentric or deep ecological values, as did so many of those drawn to the 1974 conference. The mid-1970s were also a time of creative approaches that focused on the welfare of individual animals or certain kinds of animal species. In 1976, for example, philosophers Tom Regan and Peter Singer co-edited Animal Rights and Human Obligations, introducing to a wide audience both animal rights and animal liberation. Regan’s “animal rights” theory endeavored to convince others to extend individual rights to those other beings who were “subject of a life,” that is, basically conscious of their own good. Singer, an Australian philosopher, borrowed from the English utilitarian Jeremy Bentham for his secular theory of animal liberation. Singer argued that the pleasure and pain of all sentient organisms deserves moral consideration and that actions are right that, on average, increase the former and decrease the latter. He used the argument to defend both illegal and extra-legal campaigns to reduce animal suffering. His later hiring at Princeton University into a prestigious academic position drew strong protests from those who rejected his view that humans deserve no more moral consideration than other sentient creatures.

Others followed with theories of their own focusing on the rights or interests of animals. Paul Taylor, for example, drawing on the early twentieth-century work of physician ALBERT SCHWEITZER, argued that moral agents owe respect to all organisms, as individual “teleological centers of life,” which properly pursue their own ends and should be allowed to do so.

The role of primatologists (first and especially JANE GOODALL) and other ethologists (scientists who study animal behavior), contributed decisively to theories of animal welfare. They did so by overturning a wide variety of common assumptions regarding human uniqueness (such as that only Homo sapiens use and fashion tools, or have emotional lives and suffer), and the notion that animals are mere moving machines, “automata,” as French philosopher Rene Descartes famously put it in Discourse on Method (1637).

Although animal rights ethics have usually been articulated in non-religious terms (arguing essentially that there are no morally relevant differences between humans and sentient animals), it is common to find in publications or interviews that those advancing such ethics have had profound experiences of connection with the animal subjects they seek to protect. Such experiences can often be understood in religious terms, and sometimes are expressed in them. Tom Regan, for example, thinks that while most drawn to animal rights activism slowly grow into the needed awareness, others are “like Franciscans
who just seem to be able to enter into an "I–thou" relationship intuitively," while others have a "road to Damascus" experience and are suddenly "infused with animal consciousness." Not a few animal activists recall that their beliefs really began suddenly, or intensified greatly, upon the occasion of eye-to-eye contact with an animal, where its full personhood seemed immediately obvious. Examples can be multiplied, including many in this encyclopedia, such as the biographies of Captain Paul Watson or Jane Goodall, or in Goodall's own reflections upon primate spirituality.

Regan's own presentations can involve a kind of ritualizing. He often urges his audiences to choose a "totem animal," and make a commitment to its well-being. He thinks this is one way to facilitate an emotional reconnection to our earthly animal companions and to ensure long-term participation in the animal rights movement (Regan's views are from a 14 February 2003 interview with the author).

Such examples suggest that more research into dimensions of environmental ethics that are not at first glance religious might well prove fruitful. Clearly, environmental ethics that may not be necessarily religious often make sense to people either because of religious experiences or as the result of religious cultural influences they have had. The forerunner Gifford Pinchot, for example, who articulated an anthropocentric and utilitarian rationale for forest protection, was significantly influenced by America's politically progressive social gospel movement. Nevertheless, few recognize the religion-related roots of his environmental ethics.

Environmental Ethics Debates from Earth Day 1980 and Beyond

The discussion thus far has identified antecedents to the decade in which environmental ethics became established as an important field for exploring moral and religious aspects of nature–human relations. It spotlighted some of the diverse influences that pushed these developments forward, including certain ecological sciences (especially population dynamics and ethnology), anthropology, and environmental economics (and below we will add environmental history). The analysis suggests that environmental ethics is necessarily interdisciplinary.

"Environmental ethics" emerged during a time of cultural upheaval affecting people with a wide variety of religious perceptions and backgrounds. Many religionists and scholars of traditions not singled out for special blame nevertheless began their own reappraisals during this period. These developments, which intersect with the present analysis, are described in Religious Studies and Environmental Concern and are discussed in detail in the many tradition-focused entries analyzing contemporary developments.

This discussion concludes by summarizing important religion-related issues that emerged in the environmental ethics field since Environmental Ethics began publishing in 1979. The major issues are related to (1) ecofeminism, (2) social philosophy, (3) the idea of wilderness and the social construction of nature, (4) the relationship between science and religious ethics and, (5) the relationship between environmental values and practices.

1) Ecofeminism

Two arguments made by some ecofeminists are particularly relevant to religious environmental ethics. One is the assertion that the oppression of women and nature are closely connected and that establishing proper human relationships among humans and other creatures requires an overturning of patriarchal civilization and the corresponding breach between men and women. The other is the claim that women are essentially closer to nature, more naturally able to appreciate its sacredness, and that this ability needs to be recognized and nurtured as an important resource in the struggle to reharmonize life on Earth. The latter claim is controversial among ecofeminists (some of whom reject any assertions that women are "essentially" one way or another) and those unsympathetic to such a perspective. The vitality and diversity of these approaches are discussed in Ecofeminism and related entries.

2) Social philosophy

So much environmental ethics has been invested in debates regarding moral considerability (anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism vs. animal rights), and over the relative merits of Western vs. Eastern philosophies and religions, that relatively less attention has been devoted to social philosophy. Indeed, many environmental ethicists seem unaware of a rich literature in political science that has struggled over the relative merits of different political arrangements. Environmental ethics, however, needs a strategy, and since the environmental diagnosis generally involves a claim that there is something wrong with society, the prescription must also be political. There is no avoiding social philosophy, therefore, which seeks to analyze, discover and defend the social arrangements and political systems that best cohere with morality. Green social philosophy adds environmental sustainability as an essential litmus test for any social philosophy; the effort to discern what sorts of social arrangements are most likely to ensure the flourishing of all species and ecosystem types is crucial to this investigation.

This is not to say social philosophy has not been discussed or debated. Two contributors to Herman Daly's steady-state economy books, Garrett Hardin and the political scientist William Ophuls, did so explicitly. Ophuls surmised that a benevolent green dictatorship was needed to arrest environmental degradation and ameliorate social conflicts exacerbated by environmental scarcity. In a
more democratic vein, Hardin urged mutually agreed-upon coercion. These kinds of perspectives have made many nervous, even leading to charges that environmentalism can promote FASCISM or ECOFASCISM.

Vermont-based communitarian anarchist Murray Bookchin pioneered one school of thought focusing on social philosophy. Known as “Social Ecology,” this approach could be described briefly as communitarian anarchism. Social ecology resists hierarchy in general and capitalist market societies with special intensity. It offers as an alternative decentralized community self-rule, and voluntary federations of these participatory bodies, as the path to social justice and environmental sustainability.

Bookchin has been sharply critical of the nature mysticism he accurately perceived as animating much contemporary environmentalism, including that of radical environmentalists. But Bookchin’s antipathy to such spirituality does not mean anarchism and social ecology cannot provide fertile ground for religious environmental ethics. As the work of the anarchist scholar John Clark has shown (in his books and in ANARCHISM and SOCIAL ECOLOGY in this encyclopedia), and certain direct action environmental groups such as the DONGA TRIBE, many anarchistic environmental ethics are sympathetic to if not grounded in nature spirituality. These forms of environmentalism generally view the animistic, pantheistic, and/or panentheistic spiritualities of indigenous peoples, or certain religions originating in Asia, as offering positive environmental values superior to those found in large-scale, centralized, monotheistic societies. Indeed, especially in the mid-1980s in the United States and Europe, “green anarchism” has become one of the most rapidly growing popular fronts within RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM.

On the one hand, this is unsurprising, for to be “radical” an ethics must purport to get to the root of the problem and offer a solution that does more than address symptoms, but eradicates causes. This is unsurprising as well because much environmental ethics has criticized large-scale industrial civilization, especially in the Occident, and because many of the earliest proponents of such critiques, such as GARY SNYDER and BIOREGIONALISM, a movement he helped inspire, trace their roots to anarchist thinkers and movements and see affinities between such movements and indigenous cultures. On the other hand, this is ironic, for deep ecology, a form of radical environmentalism in many minds, has been criticized for refusing to be specific about which political systems are warranted, while other forms, such as EARTH FIRST! AND THE EARTH LIBERATION FRONT, are often viewed as one or more of the following – anti-democratic, violent, terrorist, Malthusian/anti-poor, racist, sexist, or in general fascistic – for putting concern for the whole biosphere and ecosystems over the well-being of particular groups or individuals.

Many environmental ethicists and activists, of course, simply take for granted the existing political systems and institutions, viewing these as the structures within and through which they must work toward environmentally sustainable lifeways. With such a presupposition, there is little impetus to focus on social philosophy. Most of those in Western democratic countries, for example, who focus on ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM, do not seek to overturn existing political institutions, but rather, to hold them accountable to their own, stated ideals.

Since societal majorities do not think revolution desirable or feasible, this may help to explain why social philosophy, despite pressure from more radical groups, has not received more attention than it has. It may be, however, that if political scientists such as Thomas Homer-Dixon are correct in their projections of intensifying environmental deterioration, scarcity and concomitant social conflict, that increasing attention to social philosophy in environmental ethics will follow. This would seem to be a likely response as frustration intensifies regarding the inability or unwillingness of existing political institutions to respond to environmental crises. One possible piece of evidence in this regard is the draw that green anarchism seems to hold for many frustrated radical environmentalists. Another example of this kind of dynamic might emerge based on the assertions of those Muslim intellectuals who have begun to argue that ISLAMIC LAW provides the best ground upon which to establish environmental and human well-being.

There are many other possible futures, of course, including the repressive green government that in the 1960s Ophuls and others asserted would become necessary. This much is reasonably clear: to the extent that liberal democracies are viewed as tethered to anti-nature religions, religious environmental movements will offer competing social philosophies; moreover, as people struggle for power and over social arrangements in order to arrest ecological catastrophe, religion and politics will be intertwined.

3) The social construction of nature

In 1992 Neil Evernden published The Social Creation of Nature and with it debates about the social construction of reality spread rapidly into environmental disputes. In a nutshell, the resulting battle has been over whether, given the widespread impact of human activities, any “non-human” nature remains available to function as a base-line reference point for environmental conservation or restoration, and even whether there was ever any legitimacy to such endeavor.

The controversy intensified when the environmental historian William Cronon published “The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in 1995, including an abridged version in the New York Times Sunday Magazine. Cronon argued that the idea of a wilderness (defined as a place “untrammeled” by humans in America’s 1964 Wilderness Act) where humans have no
impact is wrong and ethically problematic. It is wrong because there is no such place, and it is ethically problematic because it distracts people from caring for the environment every place else, which on Cronon’s reading, is actually everywhere. The sometimes vitriolic debate that followed was well captured in the first volume and issue of Environmental History (1996), which reprinted Cronon’s article alongside critiques of it by conservation historians Samuel P. Hays and Michael P. Cohen. Soon after that, even broader discussions occurred in the The Social Siege of Nature (Soulé and Lease 1995) and The Great New Wilderness Debate (Callicott and Nelson 1998), as well as in a variety of environmental journals.

Cronon, assailed if not shunned by some in the environmental community whom he considered his allies and friends, offered both an unusual apology and a religious confession in his response to the uproar his article had precipitated:

One problem with “The Trouble with Wilderness,” then, is that in reminding those who worship at the altar of wilderness that their God (like all deities) has a complicated and problematic past, I have perhaps not been as respectful of this religious tradition as I ought to have been. I mean this quite genuinely: to the extent that I have given offense by treading too carelessly on hallowed ground, I sincerely apologize. Had I been writing about Judaism or Christianity or Islam or Buddhism, or about the spiritual universes of native peoples in North America and elsewhere, I certainly would have been more careful to show my respect before entering the temple to investigate and comment on its architecture and origins. The reason I did not do so in this case is that the religion I was critiquing is my own, and I presumed a familiarity which readers who do not know me can be forgiven for doubting.

...I criticize wilderness because I recognize in this, my own religion, contradictions that threaten to undermine and defeat some of its own most cherished truths and moral imperatives. I have not argued that we should abandon the wild as a way of naming the sacred in nature; I have merely argued that we should not celebrate wilderness in such a way that we prevent ourselves from recognizing and taking responsibility for the sacred in our everyday lives and landscapes (Cronon 1996: 56, 57).

Cronon’s pledge of his allegiance to the wilderness church in America was revealing in a number of respects. First, he recognized that only a member of this church could effectively speak to it. Second, wilderness religionists, like their counterparts in institutional religions, are capable of sanctioning their own and forcing recantation. Third, scholars play important roles in nature-related religious production and ethical reflection, even those who rarely if ever write in a religious genre. And fourth, the perception that nature is sacred, especially the Earth’s remaining wildlands, is resilient, even against constructive attack that would relativize such claims. Further discussion of the implications for both religions and secular environmental ethics regarding such issues is found in the entries on WILDERNESS RELIGION and THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NATURE.

4) Science and religious environmental ethics

Conflicts between religious and scientific claims are as old as Galileo and science itself. The cosmogonies of scientists (perhaps especially evolutionary biologists) are always difficult to reconcile with those cosmogonies in which a divine being or beings are responsible for how the world came to be the way it is. Moreover, new scientific theories and understandings often create new cosmogonic conflicts, and this has been occurring in environmental ethics. While many encyclopedia entries explore religion, science and environmental ethics, in this overview it may be helpful to mention several religion-and-science-related issues that promise to preoccupy environmental ethics for a long time to come.

J. Baird Callicott, already discussed as an environmental ethics pioneer who found greater environmental potential in indigenous and Asian religions than occidental ones, went on to publish Earth’s Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback (1994). In the main, he repeated his earlier perception, but in this case, he also described themes within Judaism and Christianity that could undergird positive ethical approaches to nonhuman nature. More importantly with regard to the present conundrum, however, was Callicott’s proposed method to resolve conflicts between religion and science. When religious and scientific understandings conflict, he asserted, scientific beliefs should trump religious ones.

This is certainly one way to deal with the problem, privileging science over religion, but Callicott’s claim proved controversial. In Worldviews: Environment, Nature, Culture (vol. 1, no. 2, 1997), a special issue devoted to Callicott’s book, he was criticized along two major lines. First, he was faulted by someone who argued that science is not sacred, but rather, it is an ideologically shaped cultural construction that often serves anti-human and anti-nature interests and should therefore not be privileged. A related critique was that Callicott was offering a hegemonic narrative that could not fully respect religious or cultural diversity. Secondly, he was faulted for failing to ground his ethics in a religious perception of the sacredness of life. Purely scientific narratives cannot provide an independent ground for ethics in general, let alone environmental ethics, according to this line of criticism (Taylor 1997b). The proper balance between scientific and religious under-
standings, of course, remains contested, and promises to provide indefinitely a lively debate.

Other scientific theories offered different challenges for religious environmental ethics. Ecologists and evolutionary biologists advanced theories that explained human moral sentiments, including ones establishing a basis for environmental concern, without reference to an explicit need for religion. For example, Edward O. Wilson (later with Stephen Kellert) propounded a theory he called _sophilia_, as well as another called _sociobiology_, that viewed our affective and moral connections to nature as adaptive behaviors explainable as evolutionary outcomes. David Sloan Wilson in _Darwin’s Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society_ (and in _ Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and the Stewardship of Nature_), as well as anthropologists (see especially _Ecology and Religion_ and _Ecological Anthropology_ and the cross-references provided in them) argued similarly that religion at its best is a mode through which human organisms successfully adapt to their environments.

These theorists are generally either agnostic or do not believe that the associated metaphysical beliefs of religions are true, even the ecologically adaptive ones. Such perspectives do not seem, therefore, to provide for anything other than a short-term rationale for religion, for it is valuable only to the extent that it promotes environmental sustainability. A question naturally follows, then: If there are compelling non-religious grounds for environmental ethics, then is religion really needed? And if religious metaphysical beliefs are incredible anyway, then does not intellectual integrity and a concern for veracity require that they be jettisoned, even if they might serve other interests?

Of course, such perspectives and reasoning would be troubling, to say the least, to religionists, and would make them suspicious of scientific perspectives they might otherwise embrace, as Anna Peterson points out in, _Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World_ (2001), a book-length study by a religious ethicist and feminist that wrestled seriously with these kinds of evolutionary perspectives without dismissing them out of hand. That this was an exceptional effort underscores that a fully interdisciplinary discussion of such issues had barely begun by the early twenty-first century.

5) The relationship between environmental values and practices

Already mentioned was Yi-Fu Tuan’s assertion of a bifurcation between environmental values and practices. To the extent that this is true much of, if not all of the ferment over “environmental ethics” will be largely or entirely a waste of time. For whatever else it is, environmental ethics is not only about understanding environmental values; it is also about promoting these in such a way that behaviors follow. What if achieving the former does not accomplish the latter? This is one of the least explored areas of inquiry in environmental ethics, perhaps in part because philosophers and religious ethicists are usually not very well equipped to ask such questions.

J. Baird Callicott and Roger Ames did respond to Tuan’s argument, asserting that “there is less evidence for Tuan’s skepticism than for White’s optimism about whether environmental ideas and values can exert a significant influence on environmental behavior” (1989: 287). Little empirical data was assembled in the rebuttal, however, and the studies that have been done on the relationships between environmental attitudes and behaviors do not suggest a close correlation. Glenda Wall, for example, found that environmental action is unlikely “regardless of [levels of environmental] concern, unless an environmental issue is linked to immediate personal concerns, or societal arrangements exist that help to reduce the costs of compliance and facilitate cooperative action” (Wall 1995: 465). She also summarized the growing literature on environmental attitudes and concluded as a result that the correlation between attitudes and behaviors, when present, is low. Similarly, in a broad study of the American Public published in _Environmental Values in American Culture_ (1995) Willett Kempton and his team of researchers found a significant disconnection between environmental values and changes toward environmentally sustainable lifestyles or environmental protection actions. As the geographers James Proctor and Evan Barry show in _Social Science on Religion and Nature_, “empirical work in environment as religion is relatively scarce” and “Social science has done a tremendous service to the study of religion and environmental concern, but it has failed to deliver the conclusive chapter to the story.” They are among those working on getting more definitive answers. Certainly what social science discovers about the various conditions under which environmental ethics, including religious ones, produce concrete environmental action should be and presumably will be important in the evolution of environmental ethics. Equally important, however, are qualitative and historical studies which are better at explaining why small groups and movements break out from the normal patterns and engage in dramatic environmental action, sometimes if not usually motivated by religious perceptions and ideals, as was seen, for example, in the numerous case studies scrutinized in _Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism_ (Taylor 1995), which was itself informed by what has become known as “social movements theory.”

Rather than assuming a close connection between religion, environmental values, and environmental behavior, any practical environmental ethics will have to go further than has been the case to this point to understand the connections between values and actions. Why are these connections apparently weak usually and in
general, but in some cases apparently strong and directly motivating?

Conclusion
The preceding introduction to environmental ethics, although far from comprehensive, does provide a sense of the religious dimensions, tributaries, evolution, vitality, fecundity, and conundrums surrounding it. It also illustrates that the lines between non-religious and religious environmental ethics often blur as they play off of and influence one another. Cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural ethical and religious influence has become an important characteristic of the evolving field of environmental ethics.

Bron Taylor

Further Reading


Environmental History – See Environmental Ethics.

Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism

Environmental justice refers to a broad range of issues that combine values of social justice with environmental values and practices. Environmental justice pertains when the cause of social injustices are mediated by environmental conditions, or the environmental burdens that threaten human health are bound by social injustices of marginalization, exploitation, discrimination, racism, sexism, and various forms of imperialism. Examples of environmental burdens include exposure to hazardous materials and toxic wastes, pollution, health hazards, workplace hazards, as well as the exploitation and loss of traditional environmental practices and depletion of local natural resources. Environmental benefits include a safe workplace, clean water and air, easy access to natural surroundings or parks, fair compensation for environmental burdens, and the preservation of traditional environmental practices connected to local natural resources. Concern for environmental justice grew as a grassroots movement of people of color and poor communities. Various populations including African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Americans of Asian and Pacific Island decent, as well as the urban, rural, and industrial poor populations – who make up their own local cultures – actively defended against the inequitable distribution of environmental burdens and the lack of participation in environmental decision making. The religious and spiritual importance can be addressed in four general arenas of environmental justice: distributing environmental burdens according to religious affiliation; organizing grassroots reactions to environmental threats from the religious community base; struggling to protect sacred spaces and places; and comprehending spirituality through values of environmental justice.

The first arena of religious environmental injustices pertains to the direct targeting of religious affiliation as a criterion for the location of environmental burdens. One of the most dramatic instances of religious targeting for environmental discrimination exists in the report authored by the Cerrell Associates, a public relations firm for the State of California. The now-infamous 1984 Cerrell Report argued that a community with reduced capacity for resistance, rather than geological and other scientific characteristics, would best determine the location of environmental burdens. In the report, characteristics such as high unemployment, high school or less education, and Catholic congregations would prove to be likely sites of least resistance. Identifying the faith of a community exposed a sanctioned religious discrimination in the distribution of environmental burdens.

The second arena of religious and spiritual significance for the environmental justice movement pertains to grassroots organizing around a religious community base. Communities in environmental justice cases often rely upon the moral center and congregational core of their religious organizations. A critical example is also one of the focal points in the movement’s origins in the community of Afton in Warren County, North Carolina, where in 1981 it was chosen as the site for a toxic landfill. At the time, Afton had an 84 percent African-American population; Warren County had the highest percentage African-American population in North Carolina. In 1982, Dr. Charles E. Cobb, Director of the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ), spoke out against this landfill, arguing it demonstrated how African-Americans and the poor are forced to assume heavier environmental burdens than white communities. Other important national organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congressional Black Caucus also protested. This support inspired a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience culminating in protest of activists and residents bodily blocking the trucks hauling toxin-laced soil, which led to over 500 arrests and drew national media attention. The Warren County protest represented one of the first public mobilizations against environmental racism. Although the protest was unsuccessful in stopping the toxic landfill site, the incident sparked the environmental justice movement, and two decades later the state closed the landfill and attempted to compensate the community for the long period of environmental injustices.

As its legacy, the Warren County incident introduced a new set of environmental obligations in the United States: the first of which was to decipher the extent of the disparate distribution of environmental burdens on communities of color and poor communities. For instance, the 1983 General Accounting Office study, Siting of
Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status Surrounding Communities, focused on the Southern states that make up Region IV of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA). This study noted a strong correlation between the location of poor and African-American communities and hazardous waste sites. The study still left many questions about the extent of the problem beyond this region, which prompted the United Church of Christ’s own nationwide study, Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States. It confirmed the disparate distribution of hazardous waste facilities suffered by minorities and lower socio-economic groups, concluding “Race proved to be the most significant among variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities” (UCC-CRJ 1987: xiii). Upon the 1987 presentation of this study to the National Press Club, in Washington, D.C., Reverend Ben Chavis, Director of the UCC-CRJ coined the first official definition of environmental racism:

racial discrimination in environmental policy making, and the unequal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations … the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities … the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in people-of-color communities for toxic waste facilities … the history of excluding people of color from the leadership of the environmental movement (Hearings Before the Subcommittee 1993: 4).

At the same time that studies were confirming the extent of the problem, religious organizations created their own networks as an obligation to protect these communities. The National Council of Churches created the Eco-Justice Working Group in 1983 and later The Environmental Justice Covenant Congregation Program, as way to promote environmental justice. The Black Church Environmental Justice Program established community support among seven historically black denominations. Spiritual and religious support in environmental justice struggles also occurred in many diverse, localized forms, including expressions of cultural heritage. An example of the former is the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), which began as a group of Latina grandmothers who, with their local priest, organized a neighborhood watch group. During one of their meetings, they organized MELA to block the building of a prison in their neighborhood. MELA continued in strength, by blocking an oil pipeline planned to traverse a local schoolyard, successfully derailing plans for a hazardous waste incinerator, and building a women’s grassroots organization capable of leading voting drives for representatives and introducing community improvements on multiple environmental justice fronts. Another front of religious community support in cultural heritage can be found in the struggles against pesticides and labor injustices fought by César Chávez and the United Farm Workers. These struggles were often based on principles found in Catholic papal encyclicals, the Mexicano religious heritage of suffering and penance, and an iconic following of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The environmental justice frame expands into territories beyond the waste and pollution issues; since, vital cultural, spiritual, and natural resources concern social justice and ecological sustainability around values of place. The third arena of environmental justice, therefore, pertains to the protection of sacred spaces and places of ritual. Many examples of indigenous land struggles occur at the intersection of place and spiritual values. Such struggles often are articulated around issues of resource use. In the United States, indigenous peoples struggle for water use that connects them to their spiritual heritage. Acoma poet Simon Ortiz, for example, reflects, water defines our culture, water from the skies, and groundwaters, which are really part of each other. In terms of religion, the gods and the kachinas bring the water, of course they bring it in terms of the weather forces, the climatic conditions that provide that water (Adamson, Stein, and Evans 2002: 21).

In the same conversation, Chicano anthropologist Devon Peña has observed, “for the Pueblo Indian and the Hispano Mexican alike, water was not a commodity. It was not the exchange value that was important, it was the communal and spiritual value that was important” (Adamson, Stein, and Evans 2002: 22). The overall struggle is spiritual: for sacred values, practices, and resources are unfairly distributed to large population centers.

Other kinds of examples include the preponderance of high-level nuclear waste facilities slated and proposed for Indian lands. Sites typically offer attractive economic compensation; however, debates about land rights and respect for sacred lands still ensue. The Shoshone Indians have long debated the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste facility and the extent to which it impacts sacred land. The appeal to ritual spaces and sacred land is a vital sticking point in environmental justice cases for indigenous peoples. Given such values cost-benefit analysis cannot easily be used for such decision making, for resource economics and the values of sacred spaces are construed very differently. Hence, Rep. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) commented to the Shoshone: “God made Yucca Mountain for the express purpose of storing high level nuclear waste. There’s nothing within a 100 miles of the place” (LaDuke 2002: 26).

A fourth example of a religious arena in the environmental justice movement pertains to the emergence and expression of spirituality through values of the movement...
Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism

The history and scope of the environmental justice movement is often mistaken as a recent, merely anthropocentric cause. However, the purpose for conceptualizing environmental problems in terms of environmental justice is fundamentally to resist the separation of environmental degradation from social justice. The environmental justice movement, now recognized by its veteran voices as the largest and fastest growing social movement in the world, refuses the final distinction of anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric concerns. Many global environmental crises, such as global warming, ozone depletion, climate impacts, acid rain, desertification, and downstream pollution are transnational problems that leave the poorest peoples, often previous colonies and indigenous peoples of the world, as the sufferers of environmental burdens produced by the wealthiest, previous colonial powers, of the world. For many communities and peoples worldwide, environmental justice is a matter of protecting ways of living that view religious, environmental, economic, and social values as inseparable. Thus, in Chiapas, Mexico, indigenous struggles are about land rights, sustainable agriculture, cultural self-determination, and spiritual heritage. In India, sacred groves must be protected against new land-use pressures from industry and growing populations. And, in San Jose, Phillipines, farmers struggle against invasive chemical farming and genetically modified seeds from American biotechnology corporations, in order to sustain their heritage of organic land management. Such diversity in global environmental justice movements involves comparatively broad connections between religion, ecology, and social justice.

Robert Melchior Figueroa

Further Reading


Environmental Sabbath

The Environmental Sabbath grew from two seemingly unrelated events: the Assisi Declarations on religion and nature, written by representatives of five major world religions at a 1986 meeting in Italy, and a declaration by the United Nations that 1987 would be the Year for the Homeless.

To the UN Environment Programme, these events were connected. The religious leaders at Assisi wanted to awaken followers around the world to the spiritual dimension of the environmental crisis by declaring how each faith reflects on and celebrates the natural world as a manifestation of the sacred. Similarly, UNEP reasoned that since Earth is our only home, we must preserve it, not destroy it, or we all could become homeless.

In the autumn of 1986, soon after Assisi, John J. Kirk, Director and Professor of Environmental Studies at the New Jersey School of Conservation of Montclair State University, met with Noel J. Brown, Director of UNEP’s Regional Office for North America. Dr. Kirk asked if a dialogue with representatives of some religions might help UNEP in its efforts to protect the planet. Spiritual and ethical values were essential for equitable environmental policy making, they agreed, since science and technology could not provide all the answers. They decided to invite the leaders of several faith communities to the United Nations to initiate a project that would inform North American congregations about the serious environmental problems facing life on Earth.

The planning group of fifteen had just seven months before the first Environmental Sabbath in 1987. Their goal was to create a sabbatical for the planet – an Earth Rest Day to be celebrated annually by faith communities at any time, but especially on the weekend nearest World Environment Day, June 5th, to commemorate the first major UN conference on the environment which took place in 1972. In the spring of 1987, the group sent kits to 1500 religious leaders in the U.S. and Canada, with ecological information and liturgical suggestions from several faiths, inviting them to use the material in special Environmental Sabbath services.

Letters lauding the initiative came in, not only from those on the mailing list, but also from others who wanted to know more: grassroots groups, garden clubs, colleges, the Scouts and other youth groups.

Following this encouraging reaction, the planning group was enlarged to become the Environmental Sabbath Steering Committee with a wider religious scope and greater access to grassroots organizations. In 1988, a more substantial package containing fact sheets on the state of the environment and liturgical suggestions was sent to 3500 faith and grassroots communities.

Although the event had been promoted only in North America, the response was surprisingly international with letters coming in from as far away as the Philippines, India and Australia. By 1989, the number of participating groups had nearly tripled with 10,000 requests for the Environmental Sabbath kit, and the number kept growing. By 1990 the mailing list again had more than doubled to 25,000. The Sabbath network grew so fast that a newsletter began publication in 1989 as a conduit for ongoing action and interaction, and, over the next few years, the simple kit became an annual magazine – an Earth Care Day guide for the faithful, teachers and students alike, in all settings.

As a result of this success, representatives of other faiths expressed interest in participating. A great deal of consideration was given to changing the name from Environmental Sabbath to something more suitable for all faiths that do not celebrate a sabbath. During this time – the mid-1990s – both the newsletter and annual Earth Care Day guides were discontinued and there was no UN outreach, although people continued working independently within their faith communities.

In 1999, the new director of UNEP’s New York Office, Adnan Amin, began working with the recently expanded and renamed group, the Interfaith Partnership on the Environment, to develop a new series of initiatives. The following year Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action was published; within a year, nearly 40,000 copies were in use in religious institutions, schools, community groups and people’s homes worldwide.

What began as an Environmental Sabbath evolved into much more than an annual observance. For many it has become a way of life that has melded scientific knowledge and spiritual values in a new covenant with the Earth.

Libby Bassett
Epic of Evolution

The Epic of Evolution, like its synonymous terms, “cosmic evolution” and “the universe story,” encompasses what Eric Chaisson has labeled “the broadest view of the biggest picture.” This epic tells the sprawling story of the evolution of the cosmos, from the first moment of creation to the present state of the universe. It is the attempt to construct a unified and comprehensive narrative of systematic development throughout the history of the universe, including the origins and the diverse organization of matter, life and consciousness. The Epic of Evolution is premised on the insight that the universe as a whole is best understood as a single unfolding event, beginning with the big bang, about 14 billion years ago, and continuing through the emergence of macroscopic structures (e.g., galaxies, stars, solar systems), and microscopic structures (e.g., atoms, molecules, cells).

The Epic of Evolution has been inspired by the remarkable theoretical unification of scientific disciplines taking place during the course of the twentieth century. The most exciting theoretical advances in science in recent decades are those enabling an integration of the sciences of the large with the sciences of the small. In physics, astronomy has been theoretically coupled with particle physics to produce quantum cosmology. In biology, evolutionary theory has been coupled with molecular biology to produce a grand synthesis. Theoretical breakthroughs have continued into the social sciences, where behavioral genetics and neurobiology are being integrated with cognitive, developmental and social psychology. These advances have gradually revealed what Edward O. Wilson has called “consilience,” that is, a fundamental continuity and theoretical coherence among the physical sciences, the life sciences and the behavioral sciences. Consilience among scientific disciplines now makes it possible to construct a coherent narrative of the emergent properties of matter, life and consciousness. Implicit in contemporary science is an Epic of Evolution.

The task of making the Epic of Evolution explicit is not completed by describing the history of the universe. Religions have developed stories of cosmic evolution that attempt to incorporate scientific knowledge into a larger whole. In the early 1980s, Sister Miriam Terese MacGillis of New Jersey, a student of Thomas Berry who founded Genesis Farm, created “the cosmic walk,” which has become perhaps the most common way in which the Epic of Evolution is celebrated in ritual format. A rope or pathway is laid out in a spiral on the ground, with stations representing major evolutionary events, scaled (arithmetically or geometrically) to the actual time of their occurrence. Thus 14 billion years of evolution is represented along the length of the spiral. Those who take the walk begin their journey at the center of the spiral, at the birth of the known universe, and then advance toward the present as they walk the spiral outward. Scientists refer to this beginning as the Big Bang, but Epic practitioners prefer more sacred terms, such as “Great Radiance” (a term from Philemon Sturges) or “Primordial Flaring Forth” (drawing from Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry). Variations of MacGillis’ initial walk are still in use, as well as completely new texts, though still using the spiral format. Many examples of such ritualizing are available on the internet, which is a good place to track the evolution of such spirituality and ritual processes. Catholic retreat centers are increasingly building permanent outdoor cosmic walks on their grounds.

Further Reading


See also: Bahá’í Faith and the United Nations; Earth Charter; Environmental Ethics; United Nations’ “Earth Summits”.

Epic Ritual

The “Epic of Evolution” is the 14-billion-year narrative of cosmic, planetary, life, and cultural evolution — told in sacred ways. Not only does it bridge mainstream science and a diversity of religious traditions, if skillfully told, it makes the science story memorable and meaningful, while enriching one’s religious faith or secular outlook.

In the early through mid-twentieth century, the Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin promulgated a Christian version of the story, while Julian Huxley (biologist), Aldo Leopold (ecologist), and Loren Eiseley (anthropologist) wrote eloquent tomes from what could be called a “religious naturalist” perspective. But it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the intellectual and literary expressions of the Epic of Evolution began to be celebrated in ceremony and ritual.

The first ritual expressions were associated with the deep ecology work practiced and promoted by Joanna Macy (California) and John Seed (Australia). Although “The Council of All Beings” is the most familiar of their productions, Macy and Seed (as well as Jean Houston in New York) created solemn processes and guided meditations that helped participants connect with their primate, reptilian, and fish heritage.
In his book, *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*, cosmologist Brian Swimme selects several components of the Epic of Evolution and offers practices for bodily awareness of several of them, including: 1) how to experience the Earth turning rather than the sun “setting”; 2) how to experience the center of the Milky Way Galaxy. To experience Earth turning, Swimme suggests going out at sunset and envisioning oneself “standing on the back of something like a cosmic whale, one that is slowly rotating its great bulk on the surface of an unseen ocean” (1996: 27). To experience the center of our galaxy, Swimme invites us to lie on our backs under the night sky, to gaze at the constellation Sagittarius (which aligns with the center of the galaxy), and then to imagine the stars not as “up” but “down.” Earth’s gravity is the only thing that holds the viewer from falling “down” into the gravitational attraction at the center of the Milky Way. “You hover in space, gazing down into the vault of the stars, suspended there in your bond with Earth” (1996: 52).

Around the turn of the millennium, several people in the United States independently originated a way to experience the Epic of Evolution in a new and very personal way: through the stringing of “Great Story Beads,” “Universe Story beads,” or a “Cosmic Rosary.” Beads are purchased (or made from clay) and strung in a loop to signify major moments of transformation (“grace moments”) in the long journey of evolution. Unlike the public “Cosmic Walk” these loops or necklaces of beads enable individuals to personalize the story: choosing which events are most meaningful to them, including significant events in their own life story as beads in the loop. Instructions for creating Great Story Beads, including a suggested timeline, are available online to facilitate this process.

Seasonal celebrations are yet to develop for the Epic of Evolution. The creation of the chemical elements (carbon, oxygen, iron, gold, and so on) inside of stars that lived and died before our sun swirled into existence is beginning to be celebrated at the winter solstice. But it is such an alluring aspect of the epic that it is celebrated also throughout the year. In a sort of “Cosmic Communion” (which has been performed at Sunday services of Unitarian Universalist churches), participants are anointed with “stardust” (glitter) to signify, as Carl Sagan pointed out in the 1980s, that we are quite literally “made of stardust.”

Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd (whose “The Great Story” website details the stardust ritual) have brought the Cosmic Communion into Unitarian churches and spiritual retreat centers, along with an experiential process to “celebrate your cosmic age.” Barlow also emphasizes how one can see the constellation Orion in a new way: the Red Giant star Betelgeuse, in Orion’s right arm, is fusing helium into carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen right now (all are elements that we breathe in and out). The blue-white star Rigel (in Orion’s left leg) is fusing carbon and helium into silicon, calcium, potassium, and will one day forge silver and gold when it expires in a brilliant supernova explosion.

Other forms of Epic Ritual, still evolving, are designed to keep the memory alive, and thus honor, extinct organisms – from dinosaurs to passenger pigeons. One example is the “Coming Home to North America” ritual, designed by Connie Barlow which leads participants through a playful and reverential reenactment of the comings and goings of plants and animals in North America for the last 65 million years, since the extinction of the dinosaurs. In it, participants learn that camels and horses originated in North America fifty million years ago, were isolated on this continent until spreading into Asia and Africa just three to five million years ago, and then became extinct in their land of origin just 13,000 years ago.

In 2001, Epic enthusiasts began writing “evolutionary parables” for teaching values congruent with ecological/evolutionary awareness. In these, a major moment of transformation (such as vertebrates venturing onto land) is rendered into an engaging story and scripts for acting out. Although ancestral creatures may be depicted in dialogue, and thus anthropomorphized, the science underlying the narratives is accurate and up-to-date. Because the Epic of Evolution is “the story of the changing story,” as new advances occur in the sciences, these parables, rituals, and other experiential forms will necessarily evolve.

**Connie Barlow**

### Further Reading


See also: Berry, Thomas; Council of All Beings; Deep Ecology; Eiseley, Loren; Epic of Evolution; Leopold, Aldo; Macy, Joanna; Gaian Mass; Genesis Farm; Religious Naturalism; Sagan, Carl; Seed, John; Swimme, Brian; Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre; Unitarianism; United Nations “Earth Summits”.

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adapt to new environmental niches. The next frontier for cells introduced a stunning diversity of shapes, sizes and specialized in pioneering diverse metabolic pathways. Drawing on these biochemical breakthroughs, eukaryotic biology would begin to make sense. Living systems coordinated within the membranes of primitive cells, both. Once the functions of metabolism and heredity were produced the biosphere, the region of the Earth's surface where living systems emerged from the prebiotic soup. The many ancient religious traditions of the world originated in historic circumstances very much like our own, that is, moments of deepening crisis when nothing short of a transformation in human consciousness would save the day. Human beings are presently faced with an emergency of global proportions. Every natural life-support system on the planet (air, water, soil, climate, ozone, biodiversity) is in a state of serious and rapid decline, creating a suicidal trajectory accelerated by the very social institutions we have invented to safeguard the future. Human beings presently lack the intellectual and moral resources required to achieve solidarity and cooperation on a scale commensurate with the problems we collectively face. We find ourselves spiritually maladapted to our environmental circumstances.

When faced with comparably dire prospects our ancestors did the reasonable thing: they turned to new sources of wisdom and fashioned new myths of enduring promise. It is in this spirit that Epic of Evolution enthusiasts have turned to the scientifically informed narrative of cosmic evolution as a point of departure for proselytizing a new
religious orientation that sanctifies the natural order. What they hope for is the emergence of Religious Naturalism; that is, new forms of ritual and practice that celebrate and serve the sacredness of the Earth. It remains to be seen whether religious naturalism might eventually replace traditional religious orientations, merely stimulate their radical self-transformation, or prove to be of little influence on religion and environmental practice.

Loyal Rue

Further Reading
See also: Berry, Thomas; Evolutionary Evangelism; Gaia Foundation and Earth Community Network; Genesis Farm; Re-Earthling; Religious Naturalism; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Seed, John; Swimme, Brian; United Nations “Earth Summits”; Wilson, Edward O.

Esalen Institute

Michael Murphy and Richard Price founded the Esalen Institute in 1962 and it quickly became a Mecca for the human potential movement. The institute itself sits on 163 acres of California’s Big Sur coast, located in central California, 38 miles south of Carmel. The property, noted for its natural hot springs, belonged to the Murphy family and had been a sacred place for the Esselen, one of many California tribes driven to extinction by waves of European immigrants.

Murphy had studied philosophy at Stanford University and he later spent a year at the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry, India. Aurobindo saw the evolving universe as a manifestation of the divine. In humanity, nature becomes conscious of itself and this consciousness is the key to further evolution. Aurobindo called for a yoga practice combining Western scientific method and a personal discipline that seeks illumination from within. We are called, he said, to a greater consciousness that participates in its own transformation and the world’s advancement. Aurobindo’s thought, through Murphy, shapes Esalen philosophy.

Dick Price, also a Stanford graduate, met Michael Murphy at an ashram in San Francisco. Price had spent a year and a half in a mental hospital and reacted to what he felt was dehumanizing treatment. Price worked with Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy and a resident at Esalen. Gestalt uses imagination, dialogue and movement to more fully enter one’s present emotional state. The process is an effort to break through psychological blocks and allow for natural healing and growth. Together, Price and Perls made Gestalt an Esalen staple. In 1964, the workshops at Esalen shifted from a verbal format to become more participatory. The emphasis was on Gestalt therapy and bodywork (massage and movement exercises).

During the 1960s, the celebrities who came through Esalen represented the driving forces of the human potential movement and included Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Arnold Toynbee, Linus Pauling, Gregory Bateson, Joseph Campbell, Bishop James Pike, Ansel Adams, Norman O. Brown, Virginia Satir, Rollo May, Carl Rogers, Carlos Castaneda, Michael Harner, Ashley Montagu and Paul Tillich. Abraham Maslow, the father of humanistic psychology, stumbled on Esalen by accident during its first year and gave several workshops there, and it remained a guiding force throughout his life.

As a place, Esalen holds a strong attraction. Thickets of redwood trees rise sharply on the Santa Lucia Mountains behind the institute’s facilities. A rocky coastline lies at its base while fog and sunlight interact with land and sea throughout the day. Selig Morgenrath was the gardener during Esalen’s early days and he brought a special touch to his work. Today, some six acres at Esalen are devoted to an organic farm that produces a considerable variety and quantity of food for the kitchen.

The El Nino storms of 1998 created landslides that destroyed the baths, damaged buildings and closed the access road for three months. The crisis became a turning point in Esalen’s development. In rebuilding, the organization shifted its focus to include, not only work on individual human potential, but also efforts to become a model community in harmony with its environment. Plans are underway to conserve energy and preserve the land. The aim is eventually to give back to nature more then we take. The hot springs will be used to provide geothermal heat. Members of the institute are installing solar panels and placing buildings in better positions to utilize the sun. Wastewater treatment will use organisms rather than chemicals and recycle the water to gardens and lawns. Footpaths are replacing paved areas and native grasses are being planted.

Andy Nusbaum, Esalen’s executive director, says that they want, “to utilize nature’s teaching, to mimic life’s underlying proportions in shaping our environment.” He cites discoveries that have uncovered and copied natural structures: fuel cells that imitate plant cells, fibers as hard
as abalone shells, and computers that work like the human brain. Michael Murphy calls for a sustainable society that balances inner and outer resources. Personal and social developments are inextricably linked.

Today, Esalen has two major components. There are the public programs, some 450 seminars and workshops that draw 10,000 people a year. There are also research projects sponsored by the institute’s Center for Theory and Research (CTR).

Since 1967, Esalen’s CTR has sponsored conferences dealing with experience-based techniques in education, Russian–American relations, the place of the body in spirituality, and government systems that would allow for greater equity among people and better stewardship of the environment. The institute has also undertaken a long-term exploration of evolutionary theory. Here, they bring together physicists, cosmologists, biologists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, contemplatives and philosophers to study the evolutionary processes in the physical, biological, and human worlds. Since 1998, Esalen’s CTR has also explored the empirical evidence for post-mortem survival.

Esalen today can be viewed against the backdrop of the philosophies of David Thoreau and John Muir. But whereas “nature” with Thoreau and Muir could be experienced at Walden Pond and in the Sierras, “nature” with Esalen is the whole cosmos, which has a history and a future. “Nature” also includes human consciousness and its efforts to understand itself as part of that evolutionary process.

Thomas Splain, S.J.

Further Reading
See also: Findhorn Foundation Commmunity (Scotland); New Age; Sri Aurobindo.

Estés, Clarissa Pinkola (1945–)

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, a Jungian psychoanalyst, storyteller and poet, is the author of numerous books and articles, including Women Who Run with Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype (which remained on the New York Times best-seller list for three years and has been published in thirty languages). In this book, Estés, a cantadora or keeper of the old stories (Latina tradition), presents intercultural stories and myths, along with Jungian interpretations of these tales. She based the book on a study of wolves and begins by stating that “Wildlife and the Wild Woman are both endangered species,” thus linking the “instinctive nature” of woman with the wilderness. Estés’ roots in Mexican culture and Hungarian culture, specifically in women folklorists and storytellers in these two cultures, lead her to engage story as “medicine.” She understands storytelling as a form of activism, with healing powers and possibilities. Estés’ other published works include The Faithful Gardener: A Wise Tale About That Which Can Never Die and The Gift of Story: A Wise Tale About What is Enough.

Another genre in which she works is the spoken-word performance. In this area, she has produced a series of audio works, among them the twelve-part live performance Theatre of the Imagination, and performed woman-life-song with Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison.

In addition to practicing Jungian psychoanalysis and engaging in various modes of storytelling (both oral and written), Estés founded and directs La Sociedad de Guadalupe, a human rights organization.

Estés holds a doctorate in clinical psychology and intercultural studies from The Union Institute. She served as director of the C.G. Jung Center for Education and Research and has received numerous awards including the Las Primeras Award from MANA (The National Latina Foundation), the Joseph Campbell “Keeper of the Lore” Award (she was the first recipient), the Spirit of Women Award (National Consortium of Health and Hospitals) and the President’s Medal for Social Justice (Union Institute).

Laura Hobgood-Oster

Further Reading
See also: Campbell, Joseph; Ecofeminism; Feminist Spirituality Movement; Jung, Carl Gustav; Men’s Movement; New Age.

Ethics and Sustainability Dialogue Group

The Ethics and Sustainability Dialogue Group (ESDG) is an ongoing series of exchanges in the United States between a contingent of environmental and social ethicists and representatives of the Chlorine Chemistry Council and its member companies. The purpose of the dialogue is to
explore the ethical issues associated with the processes, products, and by-products of the chlorine chemistry industry. The partners and their purpose make this dialogue an unusual model of moral engagement.

The ESDG has had religious connections from its inception. The catalyst for the dialogue was a U.S. church’s resolution in favor of “sunsetting” most chlorine chemistry products. Four persons with ties to this denomination—a social and ecological ethicist, an industry executive, and two chief officers in a business consulting firm—designed the dialogue to focus on the ethical issues in this controversy. Moreover, industry representatives in the ESDG have generally been participants in Christian churches. Similarly, all the ethicists have been students of Christian social and ecological ethics, and most have been associated with Christian churches—of diverse denominations. Specifically, Christian values and norms, however, have rarely, if ever, been invoked in the dialogues. Nonetheless, given the Christian connections of the participants, this moral tradition, in all its diversity, has undoubtedly shaped the character of the conversations.

The ESDG has met twice per year, for a day and a half each time, since November 1998. Some dialogues have included panels of scientists, discussing the state of scientific knowledge on designated problems. Several have used case studies to enhance understanding of the moral dilemmas in decision making.

The agendas have covered a variety of issues, including pesticides, water disinfection, dioxins, and other persistent organic pollutants (POPS), endocrine disruption, and national security concerns about the industry. The “precautionary principle” has been a major topic in a couple of sessions. Yet, the central concern, permeating all the others, has been the moral meaning of sustainability for this industry and the global community. The dialogue has begun to outline some of the social and ecological indicators of sustainability.

The Secretariat for the dialogue is Millian Byers Associates, a business consulting firm in Washington.

To encourage candor, participants agree not to quote or otherwise attribute statements to any other participants outside of the dialogue without their expressed consent. No formal records of the conversations are kept by the ESDG—though for reasons of practicality, not principle. Moreover, the partners understand that participation in the ESDG does not preclude public advocacy on the divisive issues under discussion.

The ESDG has had no preconceived “products.” These depend on decisions emerging out of the process of dialogue itself. Otherwise, the ESDG has viewed the dialogical process itself as a “product”—a way to discover and deal with differences effectively while enhancing human connections.

For the ESDG, dialogue is not negotiations to reach agreements. Nor is it a consultant–client relationship. Instead, the ESDG understands dialogue as a process of communication between equal partners with strong commitments and often divergent perspectives for the sake of mutual growth. Such dialogue is a demanding discipline—requiring, for instance, respect for both the rules of rationality and the rules of fairness, as well as a mutual openness to the partners’ perspectives on the truth.

The effects of this dialogue on the participants and their institutional behavior are impossible to measure. Some, however, have testified to changes they see in themselves and others—not as transformations in worldviews or even as resolutions of some major differences, but rather as growth in understanding moral problems and responsibilities.

The ESDG offers industry representatives a fuller understanding of the moral dilemmas and responsibilities they face, prompted by the challenges and counsel of the ethicists. Equally, the ESDG offers the ethicists a fuller understanding of the moral dilemmas and responsibilities associated with chlorine chemistry, enabled by the challenges and counsel of the industry representatives. The main value of the dialogue depends on the partners being, and perceiving themselves as being, both givers and receivers in a dynamic that finally contributes to social justice and ecological integrity. Indeed, the bottom line for evaluating the ESDG will be its broader social and ecological benefits.

H. James Byers
James A. Nash

See also: Eco-justice in Theology and Ethics; Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism; Stewardship.

Ethnobotany

Ethnobotany is the study of plants and people in their historical and geographic totality. Ethnobotany traditionally has been restricted either to economic botany on the one hand or to cognitive and linguistic anthropology on the other. Economic botany focuses on the utility of economic plants (such as food, fiber, and medicinal crop plants) in specific cultural contexts and often on the systematic biology of these economic plants, namely, the place of these plants in nature. Cognitive and linguistic anthropology have tended to focus historically on how people in diverse cultural milieus name, classify, and in some cases manage and manipulate plants according to codified and usually orally transmitted folk knowledge. Combining the efforts of both botanists and anthropologists, it can readily be seen that plants constitute an irreducible realm of human experience.

Even though plants pertain to a kingdom of the natural world, plants—at least some plants—have been affected in
their distribution, reproduction, and morphology by the ways people have utilized and managed them over time. As such, many plant resources represent cultural as well as biological artifacts that highlight the intimate connection between people and their local environments over time. Likewise, human cultures have been conditioned by the plants occurring in their environments. The motivation for human use and management of plants is diverse, and essentially represents basic material needs for food, medicine, fiber, fuel, and construction materials. Yet plants not only provide a wealth of material resources for subsistence and economic use (the more traditional focus of ethnobotanical research), they also function as important objects of thought, in the same sense that animals are also “good to think,” as Claude Lévi-Strauss said in *A Savage Mind*. Being important objects in the immediate environment, plants are “named, classified, studied, interpreted, and responded to” (Alcorn 1995: 26). Salient plant forms and botanical processes provide important material for symbols, metaphors, mythologies, and legends. Culturally important plants may even exert important influences on religious beliefs and practices. Entire landscapes, such as sacred groves or forests, likewise play an important role in the cosmologies of different peoples.

Certain plants and vegetative associations have been reified in various cultures, such that they are perceived to harbor and radiate supernatural powers, independent of biological needs. To the individual carriers of ethnobotanical knowledge within any human community, plants are experienced as a constellation of different biophysical, economic, social, and mythical connotations from a particular social vantage point within a given cultural setting. Although constituting an understudied aspect of ethnobotany, religious understanding and use of plant resources is therefore embedded within these overlapping spheres of plant use and knowledge. In a sense, religion is the premier locus of human experience, in which plants and people not only interact as mutually important actors in the puzzle of existence, but in which their identities are transmuted. Plants from nature are incorporated into the cultural world, and humans bearing culture are turned into plants. Plants in countless cultures have been perceived and used as fundamental markers of mythology, divinity, and ritual.

The very life cycle of plants provides a rich metaphorical counterpoint to human existence. Whereas human death results in a return of the body to the soil, plants emerge from the Earth and represent the eternal cycle of life springing forth from death. Trees, shrubs, herbs, flowers, fruits, grains and other plant products often appear in mythologies and legends as general symbols of rebirth, decay, and immortality. The ancient Mesopotamian legend of Gilgamesh and his search for the herb of immortality provides an example of the way in which plants symbolize life and the nourishing power of nature. Certain plants have acquired more specific associations in religious folklore. The mistletoe, familiar to Euro-American culture as both a parasitic epiphyte and as a plant that when properly hung at Christmas time can catalyze romance, was historically associated with mystical qualities. For the ancient Norsemen the mistletoe represented the Golden Bough, a protector-spirit against sorcery and the reincarnation (in plant form) of a priest—the King of the Wood—who was believed to have been slain during a specific ritual of rebirth and renewal.

The origin myths and creation stories of many societies likewise invoke the mystical properties of plants. Frequently egalitarian peoples believe themselves derived from particular plants. In the Brazilian Amazon, the Ka’apor culture hero Mair made the original Ka’apor ancestors from logs of *Tabebuia impetiginosa*, a hardwood tree used in making bows, along with other hardwoods. On the other side of the world, Andaman Islanders of the Indian Ocean believe that the first human being was born inside a giant bamboo stalk. Among societies characterized by totemism, plants, animals, or other natural phenomena that represent group identities (called totems) are believed to be founding members of a unilineal society or clan. In addition to claiming descent through one sex from the group’s totem, members of the group may also observe taboos related to their particular plant or animal emblem, generally refraining from killing, eating, or disrespecting it. Spirits or deities may likewise incarnate themselves in the form of a plant or animal totem. Yet while these features of totemism are found among many of the world’s traditional societies, they are not present everywhere, nor even necessarily found together. The supernatural forces that traditional peoples associate with plants, animals, and other natural phenomena invoke more than merely special ties between a social group and its totem. Furthermore, plants play an important role in most world religions, not simply those deemed to be totemistic.

At the most basic level, religious beliefs and cosmologies encompass orientations toward the natural world that inform people’s responses to plants. Showing respect may be the most commonly prescribed behavior toward plants, and it underlies many religious tenets regarding appropriate relations with the natural world. Conversely, taboos may be imposed on the use of plants to ensure the continued availability and vitality of culturally revered species. Humanizing attitudes and feelings of respect may be interpreted more directly as anthropomorphism, the belief that plants and animals have human qualities. More commonly, religiously prescribed behaviors toward plants imply the ascription of a soul.

According to E.B. Tylor, many religious belief systems are founded upon notions of animism, or the belief in souls. The ascription of souls to plants is most likely for plants of great economic or experiential significance. Both
the Balinese of Indonesia and the Ifugao of the Philippines ascribe souls to their staple food crop, rice. Beliefs concerning the souls of rice plants form part of a complex system of religious belief and practice throughout Southeast Asia. The Huichol of Northern Mexico likewise believe that the sacred peyote cactus, which produces a powerful hallucinogenic drug, yields a soul visible to their shamans.

Perhaps more widespread than the notion that plants have a soul is the idea that spirits or deities are associated with them. Supernatural beings associated with plants include ancestor spirits as well as masters or guardian spirits that protect vital plant resources. Among the Dyak of Borneo, the sacred tree mahong is believed to harbor a benevolent spirit that represents the ancestral economic spirit of Dyak legend. As with the ascription of plant souls, plant deities often represent an extremely important economic plant, especially domesticated food plants of high caloric importance. Beliefs in a deity of corn are common in ancient Mesoamerica, as are beliefs in a deity of rice in Southeast Asia. These deities are portrayed unmistakably in iconography so that they impart both human and specific plant properties to the viewer and to the worshipper. In some cases, not all indicators of a deity are plant-related; some deities with essentially human qualities have various markers, both from plants and from animals.

In addition to the spirits and deities affiliated with food plants, religious associations with stimulants and other mind-altering plants are recognized crossculturally. The psychoactive qualities of these plants, in certain instances, have given rise to beliefs in their divine origin and purpose. These plants are literally perceived of as “gifts of the gods, if not gods themselves” (Schultes and Hofmann 1992: 61). The ancient Indo-European god Soma, immortalized in the Rig-Veda manuscripts, provides the most outstanding example. Long considered a mystery, the identity of Soma was discovered by R. Gordon Wasson to be that of the hallucinogenic fly agaric mushroom (Amantia muscaria). Ritual use of this species may have spread from Siberia, where it is incorporated in the shamanic practices of reindeer-herding tribes, to India by the second millennium B.C.E. While most hallucinogens function as sacred mediators between humankind and the supernatural, Amantia muscaria was defied.

Other supernatural associations with hallucinogenic plants can be found throughout the pantheons of the ancient world. Among the Aztec pantheon of deities, Xochipilli, the Aztec Lord of Flowers, was also considered the divine patron of stimulants and hallucinogens. Hallucinogenic mushrooms were known to the Aztecs as teonanacatl ("god’s flesh"), and were ritually ingested. In the neighboring Mixtec region, Seven Flower was an equivalent deity in charge of cacao, tobacco, sacred mushrooms and other poisonous substances. In the mythology of the Mediterranean, the gods of the classical world were associated with particular plants or plant products: Athena with the olive, Apollo with the laurel, Demeter with a sheath of grain, and Dionysius with wine. Before these more common co-identifications, however, the botanical associations of the gods may have served as more than just symbolic entheogens. In particular, the Greco-Roman gods were associated with plants having chemical properties that made them function psychoactively in religious rites. Plants that lacked the original chemical properties may have been adopted as surrogates during a time when corporeal components to the experience of spiritual enlightenment were devalued. As the religious use of hallucinogenic plants in the Mediterranean was abandoned or submerged within secretive initiation practices, these plants were gradually replaced by the cultivated icons of civilization.

Religious beliefs about plant resources are clearly embedded within particular cultural and historical contexts. Religious beliefs are manifested and negotiated within ritual contexts that utilize plants both directly and indirectly (symbolically). Plants play a variety of different functions within ritual contexts crossculturally, from providing the central focus of ceremonial activity to performing numerous adjunctive roles within religious activities. Plants may be directly consumed to reach an altered state of consciousness, consulted for divination, prepared as offerings, used for ritual cleansing or healing, and may even supply the sacred landscapes or raw materials for the sanctified spaces in which such rituals are conducted.

Plants with psychoactive or hallucinogenic properties have influenced the ideology and religious practices of numerous cultural traditions throughout the course of history and continue to play an important role among contemporary indigenous religions as well as syncretic revitalization movements. Botanical hallucinogens are perceived to harbor supernatural power due to their extraordinary physiological effects, which can be attributed scientifically to the presence of alkaloids. Within ritual contexts, these properties are directly employed in order to induce altered states of consciousness that are perceived to place the individual in contact with the supernatural realm.

The basic function of the psychedelic experience in non-Western cultures is to integrate the individual into society and revalidate traditional belief systems. By ingesting hallucinogenic plants (via eating, smoking, snuffing, or the use of ritual enemas), the individual experiences symbolic death and then rebirth “in a state of wisdom” as a full member of society. The psychoactive properties in the plant transport the user to the spiritual realm, whose geography is anticipated through folklore and socially shared experiences; what is encountered on “the other side” therefore serves to substantiate the validity of the religious belief system. The use of hallucinogenic plants for magical or religious purposes is strictly controlled by
taboos or ceremonial circumscriptions, and while the general (usually adult male) population may share in their use, these sacred plants are more commonly administered by shamans or other religious specialists.

The ability to transport the user to culturally validated spirit realms is particularly important within the context of shamanic practices. Religious shamans throughout the world act as intermediaries between the seen and unseen realms, and must learn to master the induction of altered states of consciousness to do so. Although ecstatic states may be accomplished through ascetic means, plants with hallucinogenic or similar psychoactive properties may be employed to induce visions and trances. Anthropologist Michael Harner prefers to call these “shamanic states of consciousness” in order to stress the cultural and religious context of these botanical drugs, and to differentiate the experience from the more recreational use of these species.

Native peoples in the New World alone have utilized nearly a hundred different psychoactive plants, not counting the numerous plants (such as corn, manioc, or mesCAL) brewed for alcoholic beverages that, in turn, are used to induce ritual intoxication.

Probably the most famous sacred hallucinogen in the New World is the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*), which is rich in the psychoactive alkaloid mescaline. As an important part of the peyote-deer-maize ceremonial complex of the Huichol Indians of Northern Mexico, the peyote quest serves to prepare initiates to “learn what it is to be Huichol.” The ritual use of peyote, however, has spread far from the Huichol homeland into the United States and Canada, where it functions as an important entheogen in the Native American Church. In South America, the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*, known has *yajé* or *ayahuasca* (“vine of the soul” in Kechwa), is a powerful botanical hallucinogen used by indigenous groups, such as the Jívaro, throughout the Upper Amazon. Traditionally restricted to the Upper Amazon, the use of this hallucinogen recently has spread into the adjoining lowlands to the east of the Jívaroan area and has been incorporated into religious revitalization movements in urban Brazil. The drug is heavily used in the Santo Daime cult of Brazil, a millenarian offshoot of folk Christianity, founded by a prophet named Mestre Irineu in 1930, whose adherents profess to be able to travel, see, and know phenomena otherwise removed from them in time and space upon taking the drug. Only the proper, group-based ingestion of the “vine” (the “cipó,” as it is called in Portuguese) affords such visions. Outsiders who refuse to ingest the “vine” are not permitted to attend Santo Daime ceremonies.

Non-hallucinogenic, yet mildly psychoactive plants play a similar role in religious beliefs and practices. Throughout the Andes, coca (*Erythroxylum* spp.) is both a medical stimulant and a unifying cultural and religious symbol among peasant and indigenous populations. The religious and shamanistic use of coca is also very ancient and associated with the psychoactivity produced by chewing the alkaloid rich leaves. Although mild in comparison to the physiological effect of hallucinogenic plants such as peyote or ayahuasca, or even tobacco, ritual coca chewing enabled religious practitioners to enter trance-like states and communicate with the supernatural world. Although many of these traditions disappeared from the Andes after European contact, shamanic use of coca prevails among the Kogi of Colombia and several tribes of the Northwest Amazon (who prepare coca in a powdered form), where coca consumption is considered vital for communication with the ancestors.

Despite the occurrence of true hallucinogens, and out of the wide variety of aboriginal New World stimulants and narcotics, alcoholic beverages and tobacco have the widest distribution of mind-altering plant products, being particularly associated with farming practices. From precontact times well into the colonial era, tobacco primarily served magico-religious and related medicinal ends. The incredible diffusion of tobacco as a ritual intoxicant may be due in part to the ability of nicotine bioactivity to furnish empirical support, in many ways, for shamanic beliefs and practices throughout the Americas. Although the vision-producing alkaloids in hallucinogenic plants are effective in inducing the imagery of the shaman’s celestial journey, the biphasic qualities of nicotine as a stimulant-convulsant help to manifest the continuum of dying and rebirth that is so fundamental to shamanic practice. The consumption of large quantities of tobacco via smoking, snuffing, chewing, or eating induces physiological changes experienced mentally as a journey of the soul outside of the body. The tobacco shaman is believed to serve as an intermediary able to travel into the world of the spirits and direct the divine energies of the cosmos toward social ends. Recognizing these powerful qualities, the Warao of Venezuela consider tobacco to be an indispensable part of their spirituality, and have incorporated this pharmacological phenomenon into a complex shamanic lore that involves different ritual specialists and the reverence of a Tobacco Spirit. A parallel example of this form of tobacco religion is found in North America, where the Gitche Manitou (or Great Spirit) complex of the Eastern Woodland Indians was based on the intoxicating and healing effects of tobacco.

Aside from their direct consumption, plants may communicate important worldly and otherworldly information to people through mechanisms unknown to non-initiates in the relevant culture and religion. Through keen observation of the local environment, the behavior of particular plants may be read as portents of the weather, harvest, or community well-being. The responses of plants or plant parts to direct manipulation are also employed for the purposes of divination. Among the contemporary Maya of highland Guatemala, *tz’i*’re beans (various legume seeds) are used for divination, and are considered
especially powerful when found at archeological ruins or other sacred ceremonial sites. Throughout the Andes and adjacent Amazonian regions, reverence for the sacred coca plant is reflected in the widespread use of its leaves in elaborate divination rituals, conducted for both shamanistic healing practices and predicting the future (Plowman 1984). Even tobacco smoke, or smoke produced from the ritual burning of other sacred plants, may function as a divination tool.

Plants or plant products that are considered sacred may likewise be used in ritual offerings. Offerings of coca leaves are considered necessary to appease the gods on numerous occasions. In fact, there are few domestic or social acts conducted by indigenous peoples in the Andes that are not solemnized by making offerings of, or by chewing, coca (Plowman 1984). Offerings of plants may also be likened to animal or blood offerings. For instance, the vital energies of fresh sacred plant leaves are believed to possess “blood” (as opposed to dry leaves of the same plants) needed in offerings to gods in the Afro-American Candomblé Religion of Bahia, Brazil. Several South American tribes consider tobacco to represent a food, referring to their shamans as “tobacco eaters,” who offer vital tobacco substances to the spirits. Many religious traditions of egalitarian peoples involve the exchange of spiritual food between humankind and supernatural beings according to cosmological principles of reciprocity, principles that are not at all foreign to people living in non-surplus-oriented societies.

Maintaining balance between the natural, social, and spiritual worlds is an important aspect of healing practices, including purification rites that utilize plants to effect changes in the mind, body, and soul. Throughout history there has been a strong overlap between healing practices and spiritual belief systems. Medicinal plants may be directly ingested or topically applied as poultices that function to extract or suck out ailments. Plants may also be utilized by shamans and healers to blow out and expel demons or ailments in the body as well as divine their existence and location. Tobacco smoke is often employed in indigenous and folk healing practices throughout the Americas. Smoke is also blown to demonstrate visibly the life-giving breath of the healer or to feed the supernaturals, or it may be swallowed (“eaten”) in enormous quantities to induce trance states that allow the healer to enter the spirit realm for guidance. Tobacco smoke is also used more generally to purify the air during religious or healing ceremonies.

Ritual purification of the air is a common aspect to many religious ceremonial practices. Fragrant plants, flowers, and derived oils and resins play an important role in many purification ceremonies. These may be carefully placed as offerings, burned to release fragrant smoke, or even placed on the floors of temples and churches to be crushed as people walk over them, releasing volatile oils into the atmosphere. Elaborate flower carpets are laid down for semana santa (Holy Easter Week) and on other Catholic/syncretic processions in Mesoamerica they have such an effect. In ancient Mesopotamia, oil-producing plants, many of which may have bactericidal or mycotoxic virtues, were placed on hot coals in order to produce fragrant smoke. This ancient ritual from the Near East may be rooted in the censers of contemporary Catholic churches and the spicers found in Orthodox synagogues.

In summary, the knowledge and uses people have acquired about plants have been incorporated into religions worldwide—regardless of the scale of these religions—and in a variety of ways. Plants, like people, live, reproduce, and die, thereby providing important material for religious thought and practice. Under certain circumstances, cultural traditions have devised plant models to stand for patron deities, ancestral spirits, and guardian spirits, such as of rice and maize, in societies where those crops have been very significant economically. Plants also have served to represent people totemically in their origin myths, wherein the original beings are conceived in local systems of thought as plants of one sort or another. In addition, plants may more generally stimulate attitudes of respect and deference, and are sometimes ascribed possession of souls. Sometimes, sacred plants actually contain profoundly hallucinogenic properties that are sought after in religious ceremony (as with fly agaric, ayahuasca, and peyote cactus), whereas in other contexts, the bioactive principle desired for attainment of religious ecstasy and communion with other-worldly divinities is more of a stimulant (as with tobacco and coca). In numerous religious traditions, psychoactive plants are deemed to be central and indispensable, in terms of the physiological and spiritual effects they induce, with regard to the users’ ability to contact and negotiate with beings and gods in the supernatural world. Plants also play multiple biophysical and symbolic roles in ritual practices, including the sanctification of ceremonial space in many world religions. Plants represent critical aspects of ceremonial behavior and thought, not only in reference to so-called world religions, but also in the context of numerous shamanic and other egalitarian (non-state) religious systems worldwide. As such, in the comparative study of religion, a distinctive and important role exists for ethnobotany more generally.

Meredith Dudley and William Balée

Further Reading
Balée, William. Footprints of the Forest: Ka’apor Ethnobotany – The Historical Ecology of Plant Utilization by
Ethnoecology

Ethnoecology – the study of cultural explications of nature – generates insights into the interface between peoples and the more-than-human world. Ecology is the scientific study of the interrelationships between plants, animals, and the environment, and it has developed into the study of interdependent communities of organisms and their environments. But while most ecologists have been trained to seek knowledge solely from scholarly books or nonhuman nature, tremendous environmental information is stored in the minds, cultures, and arts of indigenous peoples. Ethnoecologists combine ecology and ethnology to shed light on diverse cultural ways of understanding the natural world and the supranatural cosmos. They strive to formulate theories about how people perceive, organize knowledge about, and then act upon the environment.

We are human, in good part, because of the discrete ways we affiliate, not only with each other, but also with the natural world. Ethnoecology entails focused research on what is termed “traditional ecological knowledge,” “indigenous knowledge,” or “local knowledge.” Such knowledge is being lost rapidly as elders die and their cultures undergo tremendous change. Ethnoecology – the recording, understanding, and appreciation of this knowledge – is thus a pressing matter. Traditional ecological knowledge includes those aspects of culture that relate to environmental concerns directly (such as resource exploitation) and indirectly (for example, totemic prescriptions and religious beliefs). Thus, a culture’s ecological knowledge affects subsistence, adaptation, cosmology, and aesthetics, and these things in turn affect the knowledge base. Ethnoecology offers a way to record and analyze human interactions with the natural world. Emphasizing local understandings of environments, it focuses on the importance of cognition in shaping behavior. By pursuing ethnoecology, we are able to gain understanding of the interactions between humans and the natural world.

Ethnoecology entails investigation of systems of perception, cognition, belief, symbols, and uses of the natural environment. It illuminates cultural interactions with the environment, thereby giving us greater appreciation of the depth and scope of knowledge systems as they relate to the more-than-human world. Vignettes of ecological knowledge are precious in their own right, but they also provide grist for a new environmental ethic that we so urgently need. In this light, some of the goals of ethnoecology are to help us: 1) be exposed to the diversity of indigenous perceptions of “natural” divisions in the biological world; 2) understand and appreciate the origins and uses of ecological knowledge and resource management practices; 3) appreciate the connections between aesthetics, religion, and human ecology; 4) develop the tools to acquire effective ways of recording, analyzing, and applying traditional ecological knowledge; 5) discern the variant approaches that peoples have developed cognitively to understand the world around them; 6) recognize the intersections and disjunctions between knowledge and practice; and 7) explore ecological beliefs about relationships between humans and the environment that are shared by Western sciences and Native cosmologies.

Ethnoecology shows us that indigenous practices of land use and resource management are not only adapted to local ecosystems, but have sometimes shaped those ecosystems in ways that have made them more diverse and...
stable. Examples of such mutualism are found more often among indigenous groups that have lived in particular places a long time than among recent arrivals. In most indigenous cosmologies, the human and the nonhuman are interdependent, and ecological limits, restraints, and responsibilities are readily apparent and cannot be externalized. The norm is that indigenous religions and cultural ecologies are based on beliefs in the intrinsic value of the land and all that it contains. Romanticized notions of traditional ecological knowledge, however, will help neither the people themselves nor the lands they inhabit, and a realistic assessment of environmental knowledge is essential for appropriate and effective conservation.

Indigenous perceptions of nature, as expressed through social and cultural processes, enrich our collective environmental understanding by providing regional specificity to global issues. Likewise, the application of ethnoecological research can benefit indigenous peoples by helping them gain greater political and economic control over their lands through articulating and exercising their unique environmental knowledge. Ethnoecology provides insight into environmental ideologies and management practices, and gives us greater appreciation of the options available in addressing contemporary concerns. Understanding ethnoecologies can also enable us to grasp more fully our collective humanity while revealing cultural differences.

Indigenous religious ideologies and ecological knowledge often translate into resource management practices, including such activities as performing ceremonies to ensure the well-being of the land, enacting restrictions to ease the strain of resource exploitation, and prescribing burns to “clean up the country.” Understanding the environmental knowledge of diverse cultures is beneficial in our consideration of issues of development, human rights, and ecological integrity. The application of ethnoecological research to conservation management and cultural survival thus warrants intensive exploration.

Paul Faulstich

Further Reading

See also: Entheogens; Ethnobotany; Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Etsheni Sacred Stones

Scattered about the Port Shepstone area of KwaZulu Natal’s South Coast are a series of natural sandstone outcrops that have, over recent years, become the center of religious fervor among local Zulu-speaking communities.

Sandstone outcrops are typical of the lower South Coast and, being a soft stone, are easily weathered into the most curious shapes and forms. Some of these resemble human or bizarre animal shapes, while others resemble faces. On yet others are interesting markings, interpreted as numerals or mystical signs. Also characteristic of such outcrops are shelters and caves hollowed out of the rock face, some of which were inhabited by the southern San in prehistoric times. Evidence of this is still to be seen in the remains of stone tools and faded paintings, including depictions of eland, an antelope held to be sacred by the San.

It has recently been brought to national attention that some of these sites at Etsheni are being used by local communities as ritual centers and attributed religious significance. Certain caves and shelters are regarded almost as shrines, with offerings being placed and candles burnt. These sandstone outcrops act as focal points of prayer and communication with the deity and the ancestors.

Due to the church’s presence in the area, a strong Catholic influence is seen in this religious canter with the face of the Virgin Mary supposedly manifesting upon one particular rock face. The Virgin, in this instance, is a modern interpretation, under years of missionary influence, of an ancient Zulu deity, the goddess Nomkubulwana. This goddess, also “princess of the Heavens,” is associated with fertility of both the land and people. She is often described as an exquisite young maiden, bare-breasted and with long hair of forest plants and flowers. On occasion she is said to manifest in sacred pools as a mermaid. However, the concept of Nomkubulwana is itself a transformation of the much earlier southern San belief in the spirits of the dead who now live in their own complete world under the water. Indeed, certain Zulu traditionalists still hold that Nomkubulwana is a beautiful young San woman.

Yet other images at sacred sites in this general area are said to be apparent as fixed features, and these include, among many others, faces of baboons, an animal associated with witchcraft in Bantu-speaking belief, and even a rock shaped like a huge passenger liner and likened to the Titanic. Living animals, both real and mythical, are said to haunt the site. A large antelope known as reedbuck, is said to guard the likenesses of babies situated in a hollow, and a
mythical horse-headed snake, the *inkanyamba*, is said to bask on the heat of the rocks.

Clearly these sites have become a religious node, said to date to the late 1800s, but having become most significant in recent years. San paintings, widely recognized as being religious in nature, do indicate to pilgrims that at least some sites have, for hundreds of years, been used as a religious center, and in this way fuel the religious fervor exhibited by the cult’s adherents. Indeed, in an attempt to establish continuity some followers claim that Zulu groups obtained their religion from the San, and that the South Coast sites were “created” by the Zulu. However, the majority, if not all these sites are natural and not manmade formations.

Indeed, the entire area in which the particular site of Etsheni lies is perceived symbolically by adherents to this belief system. The landscape and the features upon it are interpreted in terms of Christian religious concepts. The valley in which the rocks are situated is known as *KwaSatani*, or the “place of Satan,” while the river which flows through and below the rocks, is known as *nkulunkulu*, or the “river of God.” Clearly, as in the case of Nomkubulwana, these names and associated concepts are based upon a much older African belief system.

African traditional healers venerate the spirits of the autochthonous San at some rock-art sites in southern Africa. Such places are often used as training schools for apprentice diviners. It is possible that the Etsheni sites had just such an origin as African traditional religion is very fluid, incorporating new, and often alien elements, without any observed contradiction. It is this aspect of African religion that explains the presence of Christian elements today at the sacred rocks.

This fluid reorganizing and transposing of religious concepts and blurring of doctrines eliminates any possible contradiction in the adoption of novel religious concepts. Adherents apparently have no difficulty in incorporating into a single belief system elements from ancient San and Zulu belief and from the later Catholic missionary influence. Indeed, it is true that there are similarities between shamanistic religion as practiced by the San and certain aspects of Christianity and Judaism. For instance, visions and audiosonic experiences so often associated with prophetic practice in the Bible are a regular feature of shamanism.

Reusing ancient religious sites is practiced world-wide, with Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain perhaps being the best-known example. This ancient lithic site acts as the scene of a New Age Druid and Mother Earth movement but, like the South Coast cult, there is no real thread of continuity between the original builders/artists and later religious groups. However, in both instances some relationship is sought in an attempt to validate the adherents’ beliefs.

*See also:* San (Bushmen) Religion.

Further Reading


**Evangelical Environmental Network**

Despite opposition from conservatives, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) has become a consistent advocate for environmental care among United States evangelicals, engendering the support of many prominent evangelical leaders and lobbying successfully against national anti-environmental legislation. One of four religious groups comprising the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), EEN is a ministry of Evangelicals for Social Action, a small but influential advocacy group that was founded by Ronald J. Sider to promote left-leaning politics from within a conservative theological framework. EEN was created in 1993 specifically to include evangelical representation on the NRPE.

The defining document of the EEN is the “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation,” which affirms such characteristic evangelical tenets as the “full authority of Scriptures” and the need for evangelism while also rejecting nature worship and positing stewardship as the biblical rationale for environmental care. Human sinfulness caused a perversion of stewardship, resulting in seven “degradations of creation”: 1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation. Christ came to “heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order.” Christians are to assist in this task by being “faithful stewards of God’s good garden, our earthly home.” Although attacked by conservatives minimizing environmental problems, the Declaration received the support of many mainstream evangelical leaders, who lent credibility to the EEN’s tacit claim to represent evangelical opinion.

Starting in 1994, as part of an NRPE plan to provide churches and synagogues with “environmental awareness kits,” the EEN mailed copies of *Let the Earth Be Glad: A Starter Kit for Evangelical Churches to Care for God’s Creation* to more than 30,000 congregations. This booklet detailed contemporary environmental threats, presented a theological justification for environmental concern, and
suggested ways for churches to integrate environmental themes into worship.

Although primarily an educational outreach organization, in 1996 the EEN waged a successful campaign to prevent congressional Republicans from weakening the Endangered Species Act. At a press conference heavily covered by national media, EEN representatives called the Act the “Noah’s Ark of our day,” and charged, “Congress and special interests are trying to sink it.” Influential Republicans, who thought they could count on the support of evangelicals, were caught off guard and quickly distanced themselves from the proposed changes. The Sierra Club later acknowledged the EEN as instrumental in this fight. Such political activity raised the ire of prominent members of the Religious Right, who sought to counter the EEN and the NRPE by forming the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship in 2000.

The EEN successfully weathered such criticisms and continues to promote evangelical environmentalism through its Creation Care magazine, its recycling programs, and its efforts to convince congregations to observe an annual, ecologically oriented, “Creation Sunday.” It has formed partnerships with 23 moderate and progressive evangelical organizations, including InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Youth with a Mission, Habitat for Humanity, World Vision, and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Attempting to capitalize on the conservative commitment to “family values,” EEN launched a Healthy Families, Healthy Environment campaign in 2001.

David Larsen

Further Reading
See also: Au Sable Institute; Biblical Foundations for Christian Stewardship; Christianity(2) – Jesus (and adjacent, What Would Jesus Drive?); Christianity(?i) – An Evangelical Perspective on Faith and Nature; Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation; Stewardship; Wise Use Movement.

Evola, Julius (1898–1974)

Julius Evola is the primary Italian representative of the Traditionalist school of metaphysical thought, who further established himself as one of the most radical right-wing and anti-modern spiritual philosophers of the twentieth century.

Born Giulio Césare Andrea Evola in Rome on 19 May 1898, little is known concerning his background or early years. As a young man Evola developed strong artistic interests, and was influenced by iconoclastic writers such as F.W. Nietzsche and Otto Weininger. In World War I he served as an officer in an Italian mountain artillery unit; these and subsequent alpine experiences provided powerful inspiration for some of his later spiritual writings. Following the war he made contact with leading avant-garde intellectuals and produced poetry and paintings as the main Italian exponent of the Dada art movement.

Evola’s subsequent philosophical period (1925–1930) saw him issuing detailed expositions of "Magical Idealism" and a theory of the "Absolute Individual." In these works Evola posited the existence of an Absolute Self – a liberated higher Self that the awakened, active individual may become aware of and identify with only through disciplined, ascetic spiritual practices. His studies of Tantra (1925), Hermeticism (1931), and Buddhism (1943) all reflect this outlook. Of the diverse esoteric thinkers who Evola interacted with in the 1920s – often through his work as the leader of a magical order, the UR Group – the greatest impact upon him was made by French writer René Guénon, whose influence resulted in Evola’s permanent identification with the Traditionalist movement. In 1935 Evola published his own Traditionalist magnum opus in the form of Rivolta contro il mondo moderno (Revolt Against the Modern World).

Evola’s attitudes toward the natural world and modern life can only be fully understood within their larger Traditionalist context. Fundamental to this is a nonlinear view of time, in which history unfolds according to an immutable law of cycles. Humankind is now living in the (Hindu) Kali Yuga, or age of conflict, equivalent to the Greek Age of Iron or the Norse ragnarök, and thus the modern world is inevitably defined by dissolution, chaos, and rampant materialism. At the conclusion of this cycle the impure remnants will be swept away as a new Golden Age takes precedence. Some affinities may be seen between this nonlinear view and the theories of Oswald Spengler, who set forth a cyclical “organic” interpretation of history in his Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The Decline of the West, 1918–22; Evola was influenced by the work and translated it into Italian).

Traditionalism rejects evolutionism, positivism, materialism, and the entire notion of progress. It was also on spiritual-Traditionalist grounds that Evola vehemently opposed humanistic socio-political doctrines such as democracy and egalitarianism. In contrast to the biological racial theories being promoted in Germany and elsewhere, Evola formulated a spiritual doctrine of race that rested upon neither materialistic nor scientific foundations. Although Mussolini officially endorsed
Evola’s racial theories in 1942, Evola himself had long harbored mixed feelings about the fascist regime. He held onto a hope that with time the new political system might suppress its plebian tendencies and strive to embody higher spiritual principles, becoming a sort of “transcendent Fascism.” But the reality of the situation was a source of perpetual disappointment. In diametric contrast to modern notions of the separation of Church and state, for Evola the ideal expression of true statehood would always remain the sacrally sanctioned empire.

In accordance with its technique of “intellectual intuition,” Traditionalist philosophy places greater weight on myths and legends as opposed to the details of profane history. The former are viewed as vestiges of a perennial, sacred tradition with prehistoric origins. (Evola believed that this tradition had emanated from the “Hyperborean” or polar north.) Evola was particularly fascinated by ancient Roman rites and often drew upon Indo-European pagan mythology and religion to illustrate his ideas, although he never espoused any sort of nature religion. To the contrary, his vision was always centered upon the spiritual realm of “pure being,” at a vertical apex and high above the material world of “becoming.” Evola goes even further in his own interpretations, characterizing the higher realm as a regal, masculine solar culture which is superior to that of the chthonic, feminine, earthly world of the “mothers.”

This dualistic symbolism mirrors the physical aspects of human sexuality, but Evola’s conclusions bear no commonality with a naturalistic outlook – hence his elevation of the “magical” or transcendental dynamics of sexual activity, and his insistence that mere procreation is not the aim of such drives when these are understood in the highest sense. In later writings he addressed strongly the issue of overpopulation, calling it the “problem of births.” He opposed this not on strictly environmental grounds, but rather as a gross proliferation of quantity (masses of rootless individuals) at the expense of quality (higher human beings connected to a transcendent ideal).

In his writings Evola spoke of two “natures,” oriented as opposing poles of existence, but “leading from one to the other.” The natural world of matter represents a “fall” from the higher realm; it “included everything that was merely human, since what is human cannot escape birth and death, impermanence, dependence, and transformation, all of which characterized the inferior region” (Evola 1995: 4). The higher realm, possessed of a “superrational and sidereal brightness,” represents “liberation” from the material world, which it also possesses the power to shape and consecrate. This metaphysical view parallels Platonic doctrines and is intrinsic to the Traditionalist school of thought.

He notes that unlike modern man, primordial man’s impressions of nature were not “poetic and subjective,” but rather “real sensations . . . of the supernatural, of the powers (numina) that permeated [natural] places” (Evola 1995: 150). Evola acknowledges the importance of geomancy and the performance of rites and placement of temples in terms of “sacred orientations.” Such actions established an analogous relationship to higher realms and served to sacralize human affairs by infusing spirit into matter. The relationship between traditional man and the land was, therefore, of a “living and psychic character.”

For Evola there is almost nothing of value to be found in today’s science, industry, or technology:

In modern civilization everything tends to suffocate the heroic sense of life. Everything is more or less mechanized, spiritually impoverished . . . The contact between man’s deep and free powers and the powers of things and of nature has been cut off; metropolitan life petrifies everything, syncopates every breath, and contaminates every spiritual “well” (Evola 1998: 4).

Nevertheless, certain remote features of the natural world exist as an uncontaminated antithesis: these are the harsh and lonely mountain tops, imbued with majesty and offering a rare opportunity for select individuals to test themselves to the core of their being, thereby gaining transcendent knowledge of the spirit.

Only nature can help in this task. I mean nature in whose aspects no room is left for what is beautiful, romantic, picturesque . . . nature [that] ceases to speak to man . . . nature that is substantiated by greatness and pure forces (Evola 1998: 32).

In the icy, unforgiving realm of the peaks – accessible only to those few with the discipline and stamina to make the requisite ascent – Evola found his strongest connection to the natural world and its elemental powers.

Toward the tumultuous end of World War II, Evola left Rome and travelled to Vienna. During a 1945 Russian bombardment there, he was injured by an explosion while deliberately walking alone through the streets to “question his fate,” and was permanently crippled as a result. After 1948 Evola was mainly confined to an apartment in Rome where he received visitors, some of them young neo-fascists in search of an ideological guru. In the post-war years Evola wrote critical commentaries on the fascist and National Socialist era, and Gli uomini e le rovine (Men among the Ruins, 2002), a book detailing his idealized socio-political visions. In 1951 he was arrested in Rome for allegedly “glorifying Fascism” and inspiring extremist groups through his writings; at the trial he was acquitted of all charges. In Cavalcare le tigri (Ride the Tiger) he advanced the concept of apoliteia, advocating a detached spiritual bearing that rises above temporal political
entanglements. Other later works include Metafisica del sesso (Eros and the Metaphysics of Love, 1983) and a spiritual autobiography, Il cammino del Cinabro (The Path of the Cinnabar, 1963). After stoically enduring great physical pain in his final years, he died on 11 June 1974. His final requests were to be brought to a window overlooking the Janiculum, the sacred hill where a temple to Janus had once been, and that he might die upright – for Evola this was emblematic of the heroic manner in which a man should confront his mortal end. In accordance with his wishes he was given no Christian funeral and his cremated ashes were later deposited in a crevasse on Monte Rosa, deep within a glacier covering the spot where a legendary town was said to have existed.

Interest in Evola’s philosophy has grown since the time of his death, in scholarly as well as esoteric and rightist milieus. Nearly all of his main books have now been translated into the major European languages, and in Rome the Julius Evola Foundation endeavors to increase awareness of his work. As a forceful antithesis to a contemporary Western world that places great value on science, progress, and humanism, Evola’s brand of Traditionalism continues to fascinate new generations of radicals who question the entire metaphysical basis of modern secular thought and behavior.

Michael Moynihan

Further Reading

See also: ATWA; Devi, Savitri; Fascism.

Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship

Religious believers frequently compare their communities to single organisms and even to beehives, metaphors that invoke selfless dedication to corporate goals. Recent developments in evolutionary biology suggest that these comparisons are more than metaphors. Like single organisms and beehives, religious groups are products of evolution that are adapted to survive and reproduce in their environments. Much of the evolution is cultural in the case of religious groups, but that does not alter their fundamental nature as corporate units adapted to their local environments.

This pragmatic interpretation of religious groups is obscured by the other-worldliness of religious belief. How can religious believers function adaptively in this world when their heads are filled with beliefs about an afterlife, supernatural agents whose desires must be appeased with time-consuming rituals, and so on? The answer is that the other-worldly side of religion begins to make practical sense when we ask what these beliefs cause people to do. We must distinguish between what in Darwin’s Cathedral I termed “factual realism” and “practical realism.” A belief is factually realistic when it describes the actual structure of the world. The goal of science is to be factually realistic. A belief is practically realistic when it causes the believer to behave adaptively in the real world. The goal of religion, I claim, is to be practically realistic.

It might seem that the best way to be practically realistic is to be factually realistic, but a little thought reveals many exceptions to this rule. Fictional beliefs can be far more powerful and decisive in the behaviors that they motivate than factual beliefs. Since fictional beliefs can potentially motivate any behavior, there must be some mechanism for winnowing the few beliefs that motivate adaptive behavior from the many that do not. The raw process of natural selection provides one mechanism. If all beliefs are transmitted with equal facility (like genes), then those that cause the believer to survive and reproduce will increase in frequency and ultimately will replace maladaptive beliefs. However, brains are organs that evolved to anticipate the outcome of natural selection and arrive at adaptive solutions without a costly birth and death process. The human brain is designed to filter beliefs rather than transmit them with equal facility. These mechanisms will probably prove to be both numerous and sophisticated when understood in detail, but in many cases they need be no more sensitive to factual realism than the raw process of natural selection.

Suppose, for example, that you observe one person who is bursting with vitality and another who is sullen and withdrawn. You might be attracted to the first person and avoid the second without knowing anything about the causes of their conditions. You might find
yourself imitating the first person, not only consciously but unconsciously (e.g., speech patterns and body language). In this fashion, psychological and cultural processes might be intricately designed to identify, amplify, and transmit adaptive beliefs without knowing anything factually about why they are adaptive (Richerson and Boyd 2004).

I do not mean to underestimate the human ability to understand the factual basis of reality. According to anthropologists, all indigenous people possess the ability to reason on the basis of detailed factual knowledge that we associate with scientific thought. The important point is that practical realism has been the bottom line in human psychological and cultural evolution and that factual realism must be understood as part of this larger picture. Rational thought is not the gold standard against which all other modes of thought must be judged. Adaptation is the gold standard against which rational thought must be judged along with other forms of thought.

I have presented this evolutionary view of religious groups as adaptive units in more detail in Darwin’s Cathedral. It is not the only evolutionary view of religion. For example, Boyer (2001) regards religion primarily as a non-adaptive by-product of mental faculties whose adaptive value resides in non-religious contexts. For the remainder of this essay, I will explore the implications of the adaptationist view for the “fundamental human question” posed by the editors of this encyclopedia: “What are the relationships between Homo sapiens, their diverse religions, and the Earth’s living systems?”

If religious groups are well adapted to their local environments, it might seem that they would be responsible stewards of their environments. However, the relationship between adaptation in the evolutionary sense of the word and the kind of stewardship at a large temporal and spatial scale envisioned by this encyclopedia is very complex indeed. Adaptation is a relentlessly relative concept. It does not matter how well a unit of selection survives and reproduces; it only matters that it does so better than the other units in its vicinity. This gives the evolutionary concept of adaptation a short-sighted quality that often results in highly maladaptive outcomes at larger spatial and temporal scales. A male lion who takes over a pride and attempts to kill the offspring of the previous male is not benefiting the females, the group, the species, or the ecosystem – only his own reproduction – relative to males who help raise the young of other males. Virtually every behavior that we call anti-social enhances the short-term interests of the anti-social individual in the absence of punishment and other forms of social control. Similarly, the behaviors that we call prosocial typically involve benefiting others at the expense of ourselves, which make them locally maladaptive. When we appreciate the relative nature of adaptation in the evolutionary sense of the word, we can begin to understand why it is so difficult for our species to achieve the kind of far-sighted stewardship of the environment that so clearly would be adaptive in the everyday sense of the word.

However, the situation is not hopeless. Anti-social individuals gain at the expense of prosocial individuals within their own groups, but groups of pro-social individuals robustly outcompete groups of anti-social individuals. Natural selection is a multilevel process and higher levels of selection expand the spatial and temporal horizons of biological adaptations (Sober and Wilson 1998). One of the most important recent discoveries in evolutionary biology is called the major transitions of life (Smith and Szathmary 1995). It used to be thought that evolution takes place entirely by mutational transitions – individuals that vary in a heritable fashion, with some surviving and reproducing better than others. Now it is known that evolution also takes place along a second pathway – by social groups becoming so functionally integrated that they become higher-level organisms in their own right. The single organisms of today, such as you and I, are the social groups of past ages. Each transition requires the evolution of mechanisms that suppress fitness differences within groups, concentrating natural selection at the group level. Social insect colonies represent another major transition, from groups of organisms to groups as organisms. Human social evolution represents the newest major transition, or rather series of major transitions, first at the scale of hunter-gatherer society and then at increasingly larger scales since the advent of agriculture (Boehm 1999). The fact that most of the recent evolution is cultural rather than genetic does not change the fundamentals.

Each transition creates a new corporate unit that manages to limit (at least to a degree) the selfish impulses of its members in favor of corporate goals. The mechanisms required to accomplish this transformation go beyond beliefs that encourage altruism and the abandonment of self-will. Successful religions bristle with social control mechanisms that reward cooperation and punish cheating in material terms, and sociological studies show that actual participation in organized religion (e.g., the number of services attended per year) is more important than religious belief per se (e.g., personal feelings of religiosity) in encouraging self-restraint and adherence to group goals (Stark and Bainbridge 1997).

Although a transition makes it possible for individuals to exercise self-restraint in favor of collective goals, even the collective goals are often short-sighted with respect to the kind of stewardship of the Earth that forms the inspiration for this encyclopedia. When we examine the relationship between any particular religious group and its environment, we need to ask the following question: When does self-restraint and wise stewardship of the environment actually feed back to increase the fitness of
the group, compared to groups that exercise less restraint? It quickly becomes clear that adaptive self-restraint should be highly selective and that groups will frequently be as rapacious as individuals in their treatment of the environment. This is true of indigenous religions no less than modern religions. The idea that indigenous people are more respectful of their environments in some general sense is profoundly mistaken from an evolutionary perspective and is not born out by the evidence (Krech 1999). For example, in many cases it is more productive to exploit a local area and move on rather than managing the local area for long-term productivity. Human groups that have the option of moving on should not evolve a conservation ethic, although they might exercise self-restraint in other respects such as sharing the work and profits of environmental exploitation.

The distinction between practical and factual realism makes it necessary to exercise extreme caution when evaluating the content of any religion, indigenous or otherwise. Expressions of respect toward nature cannot be accepted at face value but must be evaluated in terms of what they cause the believer to do. If we want to find examples of religions that genuinely encourage wise stewardship of nature, we need to find situations in which wise stewardship actually feeds back to increase the fitness of the group, relative to less responsible ways of interacting with the environment. Even then, the solutions that work for these groups may not work for the much longer-term and larger-scale environmental problems that confront us today.

Solving the environmental problems of today requires self-restraint and collective action at a larger temporal and spatial scale than at any other time in human history. Modern evolutionary theory and the study of religions can provide insight by showing how collective action problems can be and have been solved at smaller spatial and temporal scales. The challenges of expanding the scale further are daunting but still possible. The human mind is genetically adapted to cooperate in tiny face-to-face groups. No one could have imagined 10,000 years ago that cultural evolution would expand the size of cooperative groups to the modern nations of today and there is no reason to think that the upper limit has been reached. However, a key insight of evolutionary theory, amply supported by existing religions, is that a belief system that sanctifies the environment is only necessary and not sufficient. The Protestant reformer Martin Bucer wrote, “Where there is no discipline and excommunication, there is no Christian community” (in Wilson 2002: 105). By this he meant that even the most compelling belief system must be supplemented by a social control system to restrain the many temptations for short-term gains that undermine long-term collective welfare. Those far-sighted enough to work toward the next major transition in human cultural evolution need to adopt Bucer’s tough-minded stance to achieve the tender-minded objective of the stewardship of nature.

David Sloan Wilson

Further Reading
See also: American Indians as “First Ecologists”; Anthropologists; Darwin, Charles; Domestication; Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Harris, Marvin; Hunting and the Origins of Religion; Rappaport, Roy A. (“Skip”); Religio-Ecological Perspective on Religion and Nature; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; Wilson, Edward O.

Evolutionary Evangelism

Evolutionary evangelism tells as an inspiring sacred narrative the 14-billion year story of cosmic, planetary life and human evolution that comes to us through mainstream science. This story is inspiring in that it helps people find meaning and connection within a universe that is vaster and older than humans have heretofore believed. Such a story is deemed sacred because it addresses the nature of ultimate reality and deals with the ultimate concern and commitments people have. It also provides an overarching context, a grand narrative, and can be used for value instruction in ways similar to the functional roles of creation stories born of pre-scientific times and situations.

Evolutionary evangelists come from a wide range of religious and philosophical traditions. They share a passion for communicating the “epic of evolution” in ways that many find inspiring. Evolutionary evangelists appeal to the heart as well as to the mind, telling our common creation story in ways that offer listeners guidance and
that respond to their emotional, cognitive, and spiritual needs, while honoring bedrock beliefs and faith structures. They seek to transform cold scientific facts and theories into narratives consistent with the science but that also uplift the soul, empower the psyche, and offer comfort and assurance of deep connection with the whole of Reality. They provide ethical exhortation as well regarding the roles each and every one of us might constructively play in the continuing saga of evolution.

Consistent with Thomas Berry’s portrayal of the evolutionary narrative as a “metareligious” story, evolutionary evangelists do not see this grand narrative as threatening to replace long-standing religious traditions. Rather, they view the evolutionary story as enriching and enlivening to diverse religious and secular traditions by providing the “big picture,” or “great story,” that contextualizes the old stories and teachings in ways consistent with contemporary conditions and understandings.

What distinguishes evolutionary evangelism from other forms of evangelism is its grounding in mainstream evolutionary and ecological sciences rather than the Bible or any other religious text. “Evangelism” (proclaiming the “good news”) is deeply rooted in American religious culture. Evangelistic revivals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often referred to as the “First and Second Great Awakenings,” transformed the religious and social landscape of America on a large scale, and subsequently spread beyond its borders. History suggests considerable potential impact of a green-spirited, evolutionary evangelism within and beyond North America.

In 2002 Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow launched an itinerant teaching and preaching ministry as evolutionary evangelists, “sharing the Great News of The Great Story and fostering the Great Work” in colleges, churches, and other religious and educational settings as well as living rooms and to outdoor gatherings across North America. Their mission was to promote the marriage of science and religion for personal and planetary well-being. In the first two years of this itinerant ministry, they delivered sermons and lectures in more than 200 churches and other organizations in the United States and Canada, from environmental groups and botanical gardens, to Unitarian-Universalist and Unity/New Thought churches, to a multitude of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches and retreat centers.

Much of the strategy for this revivalism was grounded in Dowd’s religious background and experience. Dowd, who grew up Roman Catholic and had a “born again” experience in his youth, becoming a devoted evangelical Christian, developed during this time an interest in and appreciation of the American revivalist tradition.

His own conversion from an anti-evolutionary form of Christianity toward the launching of a form of itinerant revivalism began while he was majoring in biblical studies and philosophy at the Assemblies of God-Affiliated Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. It was there he began to embrace evolution as an expression of God’s creativity and began to feel God’s call to devote his life to sharing the evolutionary epic as an expression of the gospel. Particularly influential was an evening in 1988 when he was first introduced to the Universe Story through a course titled “The New Catholic Mysticism,” taught in Boston by Albert LaChance, who had studied with Fr. Thomas Berry.

After seminary Dowd served for a time as a United Church of Christ pastor, an ecumenical peace and justice activist, and a sustainable community organizer. He also wrote EarthSpirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity (23rd Publications, 1991). Today he seeks to tell the evolutionary epic in ways that audiences, regardless of their theological and philosophical beliefs, will find hopeful, inspiring, and empowering, and he stresses what he calls seven “post-biblical revelations”:

1. Evolution is a grand unifying and empowering worldview.
2. Human language is inherently symbolic, meaningful, and consequential.
3. “The universe” is a sacred story of nested creativity and cooperation at ever-wider scales and levels of complexity.
4. “God” is a legitimate proper name for that Ultimate Creative which transcends yet includes all other levels of reality.
5. “Creation” (the cosmos as a whole) is in a process of becoming more than it was before and becoming more intimate with itself over time, and humanity is now an integral part of this process.
6. As a species and as individuals, we are maturing and our self-interest is expanding.
7. Death, destruction and chaos are natural and generative. Said another way, death and resurrection are integral to the cosmos and are necessary for the continuing evolution of life and consciousness.

Such understandings, Dowd believes, provide a basis for reinspiring the faith in his listeners and, with Christian audiences, they offer new ways of understanding death, resurrection, sin, salvation, heaven and hell, the apocalypse, the second coming of Christ, and the kingdom of God.

Evangelism in any form is meant to positively transform lives and lift individuals to commit to higher callings. Something of vital importance is at stake. Beyond personal salvation is a religious zeal for the common good. In the case of evolutionary evangelism, the consequence of such transformation en masse would be a transformed relationship between humanity and the living planet. Evolutionary evangelism invites a this-world communion with the divine and a wholehearted participation in what
Further Reading


Explorer Petroglyphs (Western United States)

Indigenous peoples were not the only ones who either inscribed rocks (petroglyphs), or painted or wrote upon stone surfaces (petrographs) to mark their presence upon the land. As Euro-American explorers, missionaries, and pioneers ventured into the western half of the North American continent, they too left many such traces. In the nineteenth century Lewis and Clark recorded in their journals several instances of men inscribing rocks or trees with their names or initials, and well-documented sites such as Names Hill and Independence Rock in Wyoming contain thousands of inscriptions carved into the soft rock surfaces by explorers, trappers, and pioneers moving west. Every western state has its own sites where people seemingly felt impelled to record their names and/or the dates of their passing through new territory.

Unlike the immense diversity of inscriptions and paintings left behind by indigenous populations, however, the overt religious context of Euro-American rock art is mostly limited to instances in which the Christian cross was either inscribed or painted onto rock surfaces. Although a few such sites may be funerary in nature, the vast majority seem not to be associated with graves at all, but with travelers employing the cross as a calling card of empire, the mark of a foreign culture staking claim in a new land.

This type of religious context may be subdivided further into two categories, the first consisting of those crosses probably carved by priests, especially those made by Spaniards in the southwestern part of the United States. These carvings come from an overt and declared religiosity, and have corollaries with ancient religions that see cultural conflict as a result of spiritual conflict. Thus, the crosses represent a physical manifestation of a new spiritual presence. The Catholicism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries encouraged priests to plant crosses wherever their missionaries were likely to encounter indigenous peoples, and the veneration of the cross as icon was well established as part and parcel of the missionary experience.

The second religious context bridges the gap between the widespread veneration of the cross encouraged among the Catholic laity, and the common piety and ambition exhibited by many explorers of the period. Not only were laity encouraged to erect crosses in their everyday travels, but explorers also were known to follow this practice. Kit Carson and John C. Fremont carved a cross and a date on an island in the middle of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and Fremont himself carved another cross on Independence Rock. In his memoirs, Fremont explained he was simply following "the custom of early travelers and explorers in our country," and this expression of religiosity is a vital link between westward expansion and how such explorers and travelers viewed nature itself. Like the Catholic priests of the Southwest, these explorers also saw the land as something to be "conquered," but their crosses had less to do with other-worldly hopes for the salvation of natives and more to do with the opening of routes for the fur trade, commerce, and the capture of nature by European immigrants.

Michael McKenzie

Further Reading


See also: Rock Art (various).