Gaia

Gaia (“Earth”) is the name of a Greek goddess also called Ge, from whose name words like “geology” and “geography” are derived. The ninth-century B.C.E. Homeric Hymn calls Gaia “mother of all, eldest of all beings,” while the Theogony of eighth-century B.C.E. Greek poet Hesiod describes the simultaneous birth of Eros (“love ... breaks the limbs’ strength”) and “broad-breasted” Gaia, “immovable foundation of all things forever.” Gaia immediately began to reproduce, “without any sweet act of love,” her children, including the mountains and seas. Her most-beloved parthenogenetic child was Uranus, the sky, with whom she mated to produce Oceanus (ocean), Themis (justice), Mnemosyne (memory), and the other divine beings called the Titans.

Other classical writers offer creation myths in which Earth is not the primary actor. Pliny describes a primordial goddess, Eurynome, who whirled into existence a wind from which she created the serpent Opion, with whom she produced an egg from which the world hatched. Orphic literature calls the primordial mother Nyx (“night”), consort of the wind. But the myth of Gaia was favored by authors including Homer, Euripedes, and Pindar. Such frequent literary use does not prove that the Greeks gave priority to the Earth-goddess as the universal creative matrix; there is little known of Greek rituals to Gaia, who is presumed by some to be a pre-Hellenic divinity barely absorbed into the later pantheons.

Contemporary awareness of Gaia dates to 1969, when physician and inventor James Lovelock, researching with Dian Hitchcock ways of determining from afar the probability of life on Mars, argued that the red planet’s atmospheric equilibrium – its elements rarely changing in proportion to each other – showed it unlikely to host life, while Earth’s atmospheric signature is disequilibrium. When Lovelock expanded this observation into a vision of the Earth as a self-regulating system, his neighbor and friend, Nobel prize-winning novelist William Golding, named the hypothesis “Gaia.” Prominent biochemist Lynn Margulis brought her knowledge to bear on the emergent theory and is now, with Lovelock, generally recognized as its co-founder. The hypothesis has inspired many contemporary theologians and theologians, its founders remaining aloof from, although not publicly disapproving of, such religious use of their ideas.

The non-mechanical vision of the Earth had been previously suggested by the Scottish founder of geology, James Hutton, in the eighteenth century, and again by nineteenth-century Ukrainian scientist Vladimir Vernadsky. Like those forebears, Lovelock and Margulis argued that the Earth is understood better as a living being than as a machine. Rock, sea, cloud, tree, animal are, they argued, in continual and complex relation, with each affecting and subtly altering the others. Thus the exchange of planetary atmospheric gasses can be compared to an individual’s breath, the water system to the circulation of blood, the ozone layer to the skin. Biota, atmosphere, ocean, and soil interact through feedback loops to maintain conditions conducive to life, a process known as homeostasis.

Both “living Earth” and “great machine” are metaphors that can be, and have been, understood literally. Lovelock and Margulis’s use of the ancient goddess’ name drew both fame and notoriety: general scientific scorn as well as an enthusiastic (although sometimes misinformed) embrace by nature mystics and citizens concerned about ecological issues. The controversial hypothesis – often stripped of the name of the goddess to become Earth System Science or Geophysiology – has gained increasing respect among some scientists but is derided by others as lacking sufficient scientific rigor.

While scientists debated, spiritual seekers embraced Gaia, often arguing that it descends from a primal religion. Paleolithic and other early human artifacts – especially the tiny but robust figurines called “Venuses” – are described as expressions of early worship of Earth’s fecundity. The poetic language of Native American spiritual leaders like Claude Kuwanijuma (Hopi), who said that “The Earth remembers; the stones remember,” similarly support contentions that tribal people sustain a connection or “participation mystique” (the term is from French anthropologist Levy-Bruhl) with the Earth. The sense of being part of a universal unity is traditionally associated with religious mysticism, which Evelyn Underhill and William James both describe as an experience of timelessness and a lack of boundary between self and world.

That Lovelock chose the name of a goddess for his living Earth derives from a consistent Western bias toward seeing the Earth as feminine. Under the influence of Greek Orphism, Persian Manicheism and other dualistic sects, “Earth” was set in opposition to “heaven.” Other oppositions followed: evil/good, flesh/spirit, dark/light, moon/sun, with the former typically associated with the Earth and the female, the latter with the heavens and the male. The vision of the Earth as feminine attached itself to
essentialist visions of “femininity,” so that the Earth was often transformed into a maternal, nurturing being. Some theorists, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Carolyn Merchant, and Shirley Nicholson, have turned this dualism on its head, arguing for an ecofeminist view of nature that claims traditionally feminine values (relationship, cooperation) as more natural than those traditionally accepted as masculine (domination, individualism). Rather than domination of the Earth by humanity, Gaian ecofeminists call for a modest recognition of humanity’s place within a living Earth system.

The widespread public acceptance of the Gaia hypothesis – even while scientists argued over its merits – led to controversy in established religions, for acceptance of Gaia implies a pantheism or polytheism unacceptable to believers in established monotheisms. Yet some Christian thinkers, notably the Catholic monk Thomas Berry, see no opposition between honoring the Earth and worshipping a transcendent divinity, although such thinkers typically enforce the traditional distinction between “creator” and “creation.” Non-theistic Buddhism has had an easier time with the Gaian vision, with the conception of sangha (community) easily enlarged to include the community of earthly life and that of dharma (duty) embracing ecological responsibility.

Less orthodox religious thinkers have eagerly explored the philosophical possibilities of the Gaia hypothesis; most prominent has been William Irwin Thompson of the Lindisfarne Association, who has articulated a Gaian politics and economics. Many neo-pagan groups in the U.S. and European countries employ Gaian vocabulary, including the Unitarian-Universalist “Gaian Community” of Kansas and the “Gaia House” meditation center in rural Devon, England. Some neo-pagans specifically employ the name of the Greek goddess in their ceremonies, while others, especially the ReClaiming Collective founded by Starhawk and the ReFormed Congregation of the Goddess established by Jade River, make ecological awareness a primary part of their worldview. Finally, a general-interest, Pagan, ecological magazine bears the name PanGaia and declares itself dedicated to “an Earth-wise spirituality.”

Patricia Monaghan

Further Reading


See also: Berry, Thomas; Environmental Ethics; Epic of Evolution; Holism; Gaia Foundation and Earth Community Network; Gaian Pilgrimage; Lovelock, James; Merchant, Carolyn; Reclaiming; Ruether, Rosemary Radford; Starhawk; Wicca.

### Gaia Foundation and Earth Community Network

The Gaia Foundation (henceforth Gaia), a small international non-governmental organization based in London, is committed to the protection of cultural and biological diversity, ecological justice and Earth democracy. Gaia was established in 1984 by environmental and social innovators, mainly from Southern Hemisphere countries including José Lutzenberger (Brazil), Wangari Mathaai (Kenya) and Vandana Shiva (India), known as Gaia Associates. Their common vision is for a holistic approach to human development, with respect for cultural and biological diversity and the primacy of nature. Gaia, Earth Mother Goddess, is also the name chosen by James Lovelock for the hypothesis that the Earth operates as a living organism. This convergence of mythological and scientific thought is the basis on which indigenous knowledge systems are founded, and one of the underpinning messages of the Gaia Foundation (Gaia).

Gaia was privileged to begin its work in Amazonia through José Lutzenburger and Martin von Hilderbrand (Colombia) where it was initiated into the indigenous world of Earth-centered cosmologies, still intact. Common to all these cosmologies is the recognition that the Earth is part of a bigger universe, all of which is animated by “thought,” consciousness, and spiritual force. Each element of the universe has guardian spirits with whom the shaman learns to communicate. Before any activity takes place, such as hunting, fishing, collecting food or medicine, the shaman asks permission from the guardian spirit of the species or the area to ensure the timing is appropriate. One of the fundamental principles which govern relationships within the human community and
with the wider Earth Community is reciprocity. This is the basis of all interactions in the universe, exchange and reciprocity.

This experience gave Gaia’s founders an appreciation of how the modern human can nurture a sacred relationship with the Earth, where everything in the universe is understood to be imbued with the same spiritual energy, manifesting in different forms and levels of consciousness. While Gaia’s work takes on many forms, the search is always for ways of stimulating a reverence for the Earth as a living being of which we are part.

Gaia’s colleagues share the belief that industrial society has forgotten that we are an integral part of the wider community of life that has flourished on Earth. Our actions are based on the misperception that we are separate from and superior to the natural world. Consequently the way that industrial society functions is proving to be unsustainable and deeply damaging to the human spirit, other species, and the Earth herself.

There is a need for radical change in our worldview, behavior and understanding of the human role in the world. We need to recognize that we are members of the Earth Community: a spectacularly beautiful and intimately interrelated community of plants, animals, atmosphere, water, earth and energy. Each member is an expression of the ceaselessly creative whole that is the universe, and each has its unique part to play in the ongoing evolution of the Community.

As Einstein said, we cannot solve a problem at the same level at which it has been created. More efficient technology, recycling and reusing will not change the underlying cause of the problem: the crisis in the human–Earth relationship. We are an inextricable part of the wider Earth Community of species and elements, and if we harm any part of the whole we diminish the viability of the whole, and thereby ourselves.

The challenge facing our species as we move into the new millennium is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans are present to the planet in a mutually enhancing manner.

Toward this end, Gaia Associates met in 2003 to explore innovative ways of dealing with our escalating crisis in human consciousness. They asked themselves: What is it that will trigger enough of us to change our behavior to tip the balance away from self destruction? They concluded that the source of the problem is not that we need more information, but that we need to become conscious of the awesome evolutionary process of the Earth in which we are participating. The challenge is how to entice ourselves away from the mesmerizing industrial promises of instant gratification, and expose ourselves to experiences which transform our understanding of our role as humans in the wider Earth Community, such that our behavior changes.

It was out of this process that the “Earth Community Network” was founded – to provide individuals and communities with an experiential learning process in Earth Citizenship, and to promote Earth-centered systems of governance at all levels of society. The main sources of inspiration are nature (the primary text) and those cultural traditions that reflect equity and respect for the whole Earth Community. This is based on the understanding that for most of human history, our species evolved cultural systems that were highly adapted to their ecosystems through generations of accumulated knowledge, founded on observation and spiritual dialogue with the Earth Community over the millennia. During the last century, widespread documentation of these knowledge systems became available. Comparative analysis shows common archetypal patterns which provide us with the possibility of developing a unifying story. The Earth Community Network aims to explore this possibility together with Lovelock’s Gaia Theory and the Universe Story of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme.

Human transformation to a viable mode of being will require imagination and willingness to explore the unknown, so that fresh thinking can emerge.

Learning is not simply a logical conceptual process. We learn through all our senses, through experience and full-hearted engagement. Real learning is a transformation process. The learning centers in this network have evolved through decades of work with local communities from diverse cultural livelihood systems, mainly in Africa, Asia and South America. Against the ever-growing tide of industrial globalization, the challenge has been to enhance those governance systems that embody inter-generational equity, restorative justice, exchange and reciprocity with the community of life. These have been learned through observation of the Earth’s laws, as basic principles by which the community and its relationship with the Earth is regulated. They therefore provide the foundation from which to develop a global governance system that coheres with the living Earth system, and can guide the industrial human back to Earth.

At the founding meeting of the Earth Community Network in Gaia House, London, May 2003, Thomas Berry spoke as a visionary for the Earth:

In the Twentieth Century the glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth. The desolation of the Earth is becoming the destiny of the human. All human institutions, professions, programs and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing Earth–human relationship.

In these words he reminded us that sustaining life for future generations requires a more complex understanding of the dimensions that need to be nurtured by the life
Gaian Mass

In 1981, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, the mother church of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, commissioned musician Paul Winter’s “Missa Gaia” or “Earth Mass,” an ecumenical liturgical composition aimed at expanding the traditional Christian celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ into a broader, consciously Earth-referent context. The Mass, recorded both in the institutional space of the Cathedral and in the wild space of the Grand Canyon, harmonizes human and non-human elements in a way that non-verbally communicates the message of a unified “whole Earth community.” Drawing upon the voices of human chorus and sounds from humanmade instruments in conjunction with the “songs” of whales, wolves, and wind, the Mass embodies a theology of the senses that opens the way for participants to experience an intimate connection to the life community on a sensory, non-theoretical level.

The Mass itself has been performed each October since 1985 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine on the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi (the patron saint of animals and, more recently, of ecology). An animal blessing is held in conjunction with the Mass, in which various beings from elephants and llamas to dogs and cats, even to fish and blue-green algae, process with humans down the aisle of the Cathedral to receive the Bishop’s blessing. Over the course of two decades, the Mass has become a staple of “green worship,” a common liturgy shared among humans of diverse religious backgrounds and in solidarity with other species. Winter’s Missa Gaia has also come to stand for a kind of ecospiritual “interspecies ecumenism” that is intended, ideally, to be translated from the worship space into practical “on the ground” action on behalf of the life community.

Winter has structured Missa Gaia explicitly as a “mass” and in doing so, he makes use of traditional, recognizable forms of liturgical music, such as a canticle, the kyrie, the sanctus and the benedictus. The content of these traditional forms, though, has been “greened” to reflect the embrace of an ecological and cosmic consciousness. The canticle, for instance, takes the form of St. Francis’s “Canticle of Brother Sun.” There is also a “Sun Psalm” and other sections of the Mass that bear titles such as “Return to Gaia” and “For the Beauty of the Earth.” The Mass’ Earth anthem, “The Blue Green Hills of Earth,” takes the conventional form of “anthem,” but Winter infuses that form with “greener” content to emphasize planetary allegiance. This flexibility of form and content in composition not surprisingly translates into a flexibility of worship that includes liturgical dance and other modes of movement and gesture that enable the participants to play an active role in co-creating the ritual. There is also a flexibility of symbol, as evidenced by Gaian Mass celebrations, in which a 28-foot “world tree” has been pulled down the aisle of the nave, as a man stationed inside the tree beats a drum that has been built into its trunk. In other Mass celebrations, a gigantic planet Earth hangs above the transept and functions as the celebration’s central sacred symbol.

The first performance of the Gaian Mass initially met with marked criticism from various institutional sources within the Christian community in the U.S. and Canada. This criticism is indicative of ongoing clashes in a number of religious communities between those who see the “greening” of religious practice as a force for spiritual and institutional regeneration and those who deem “greening” movements to be “heresy” and expressions of a dangerous “paganism.” The late New York Roman Catholic Archbishop John Cardinal O’Connor castigated the Episcopal Diocese for promoting “biocentricity” through the Gaian Mass and for turning what are intended to be “celebrations of mankind” into celebrations of “snails and whales” (in Naar 1993: 24). Conservative clergy within the Episcopal Church were also rattled by the introduction of the Gaian Mass. A vocal clergy member from Pennsylvania chided the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for commissioning the Mass and quickly dismissed it as “a New Age gimmick whose novelty would soon wear thin” (in Naar 1993: 24). However, over time, it is telling that the same clergy person who initially dismissed the Mass eventually came not only to support its celebration but to refer to Reverend James Parks Morton, the former Cathedral Dean who commissioned the mass, as “a pioneer with the courage to challenge orthodoxy that was outdated” (in Naar 1993: 24). This shift in perspective highlights the fascinating negotiation process between tradition and change, in which clerical perspectives on the Gaian Mass have
morphed over the years from characterizing the celebration as “New Age apostasy” to embracing it as “innovative liturgical renewal.”

The mainstreaming of the Gaian Mass both at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and within the Episcopal Church reflects a climate of increased public acceptance of the growing partnership between religious organizations and the environment. Year after year, sold-out performances accomplish the formidable task of actually filling what is, incidentally, the largest gothic cathedral in the world, by packing 3000 to 4000 participants into each celebration. At a time when sociologists of religion cite grim statistics on the decline of mainline Christian congregations in the U.S. that suffer from anemic church attendance, the Gaian Mass’s ecological message and body-active worship seem to have struck a chord with those who resonate with the comfort and beauty of traditional liturgical forms infused with ecospiritual content.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading
See also: Cathedral of St. John the Divine; Christianity (6c4) – Anglicanism; Christianity (7e) – Creation Spirituality; Francis of Assisi; Gaia; Music (various); Winter, Paul.

SP Gaian Pilgrimage

A great pleasure I share with my wife, Sandy, is walking in the countryside enjoying the natural world. We are singularly fortunate to live in the southwest region of England where we can walk on the 630-mile path that winds its fractal way from the seaport town of Poole in Dorset. It goes west along the channel coast to Lands End and travels back east over the rugged cliffs of Cornwall and Devon to end where Exmoor meets the Bristol channel at Minehead in Somerset. This path is more than our longest trail, it is a contemporary pilgrim’s way.

A pilgrimage implies something more than just a walk through the countryside. It suggests a goal, or a purpose, something spiritual. This trail, whatever the weather or the season, always has the sea in view with its ever-changing color and motion. Such a view never ceases to uplift and enliven; but more than this, in the course of its undulations the path climbs a total of 91,000 feet, over three times the height of Everest. The effort sets free those natural opiates, the endorphins, which course through the blood and enhance the senses, so that we become aware of our part in the great system of the Earth, and then the trail is the pilgrim’s way to Gaia.

The coast path proceeds uninterrupted for its whole length and it travels over rocks of widely different ages, from the fairly recent at Poole to the 300-million-year-old Devonian, where else but in Devon. To walk the path is to see displayed the fossil history of evolving life on its evolving planet, as in a live museum. At a time not accurately known, but over 600 million years ago, the Earth woke from its long three billion year sleep during which it was a habitat for microorganisms alone. The awakening brought forth the lively world we know of plants and animals, and our journey takes us back through more than half of the history of life forms such as animals and trees. But there is more to the coast path than a display of geology. What makes it so suitable as a pilgrim’s way is that the shore and coastal strip between sea and land is the only remaining natural part of England where the plants and animals are primeval. All other parts of this densely crowded island people use for their own needs, as they do most of the inhabited Earth, so that everywhere it reflects their history, not the Earth’s. Not only this, but the sea is also forever cutting away the land so that on the fresh faces of the cliffs we can see the timeline of the Earth’s history revealed in the rocks and the fossils they bear. There is no better place to get to know our living planet, Gaia, and begin to glimpse our part in it.

The scientific Gaia theory views the Earth as a self-regulating system comprising all life, the air, the ocean and the rocks, that has always kept itself habitable. The theory has been much misunderstood by scientists and some have been unwise enough to condemn it without knowing what it was they condemned. The eminent physicist, Richard Feynman, said “Anyone who claims to understand quantum theory probably does not.” The same is true, although for different reasons, of Gaia theory. Quantum theory is incomprehensible because the universe itself is far stranger than the human mind can contemplate. Gaia theory is difficult to understand because we are not used to thinking about the Earth as a whole system. We often forget that almost all of the science of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was reductionist. The triumphs of evolutionary and molecular biology that revealed the nature of our genes, the fact that we can almost see the edge of the universe and know the intricate details of inner parts of atoms, all this has come from the patient professional dissection of nature into its component parts. Systems science, which is about the whole not its parts,
has illuminated physiology, the understanding of the way our minds and bodies work, but its successes are lost in the omnipresence of reductionism. Modern science is so steeped in reduction that it is often unaware that there is any other science; the Nobel Laureate biologist, Jacques Monod, even called holists (system scientists) stupid. Gaia theory is a systems science of the Earth, geophysiology, and it requires knowledge of the sciences ranging from astrophysics to zoology and with most other disciplines of science included.

Soon after the start of the trail in the county of Dorset we walk over chalk cliffs, a layer of white rock, more than 1000 feet thick, and made entirely of the shells of algae that lived in the ocean during a period before 65 million years ago. From the clifftop vantage point we can look out to sea where the similar microscopic algae are now living in its surface, and wonder about their remote ancestors, whose shells sedimented onto the sea floor only to be uplifted and dried by the Earth’s tectonic forces so as to become these cliffs. The path we tread is not dead ground; we tread on the living Earth. The chalk cliff represents the sequestering of about thirty atmospheres of carbon dioxide gas. Were most of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere instead of in those fossil shells we would be on a dead planet half as hot as Venus. These algae did their part over tens of millions of years and so made sure that the carbon dioxide of the air was kept at a level conducive to a favorable climate and yet still sufficient for the needs of plants. Their skeletons, on which we stand, are the record of their contribution. Like the algae, all life, including us, evolves in a world that is made from the breath, the blood and the bones of our ancestors.

All living things are recondite and they are difficult to understand because we are not used to the circular logic of systems where cause and effect are inextricably tangled. Consider the complexity of the connection between blooms of algae living in the ocean, these chalk cliffs, and the climate. We could start by researching the way the different species of organisms in the ocean surface live with one another, but we would soon find that we needed to know the chemistry and physics of the ocean surface and the way the algae use the carbon dioxide to make their shells, and the way that CO2 in the air keeps the Earth warm. But this would be less than half the story that the algae could tell. Through the inspiration of Gaia we discovered that algae could powerfully affect the climate in another way. Their response to the saltiness of the ocean causes them to synthesize the precursor of a gas, dimethyl sulphide, which plays a vital part in the cycle of the essential element sulphur between land and sea, but this gas is also part of Gaia’s climate-control mechanism. Dimethyl sulphide oxidizes in the air to become tiny droplets of sulphuric acid, and without these, clouds would be fewer and less dense and the Earth a much hotter place. So we also need to know the chemical reactions in the air, the physics of cloud formation, the way that clouds affect the Earth’s radiation balance and the way that all these related processes affect climate. More than this we still have to understand how climate feeds back on the growth of algal blooms, and this is just a small part of Gaia. No wonder the denizens of separated scientific disciplines are uncomfortable with this four-letter word, Gaia, which requires the understanding of a dozen or more apparently unconnected sciences.

As we walk on and leave the chalk cliffs behind we travel further back in time to the Jurassic period, made so familiar by Michael Crichton’s novel Jurassic Park. We come first to the Purbeck limestone brimming with the man-sized spirals of fossil ammonites, and then on to the dark and somber cliffs of Kimmeridge shale. I recall the thrill of excitement felt when walking on a beach in this region and seeing, as if drawn in chalk, the white skeleton of an ichthyosaurus on a flat black slab of shale. Walking on westward we come to Devon with its red sandstone cliffs dating back close to the time when the multicellular life of our world began. After Devon the westward trail takes us on to Cornwall and to Lands End. The cliffs now are of basalt and granite, there are no fossils in these rocks. They are the slag of past volcanoes and tectonic events. These dead rocks were once orange hot and molten but they are still part of our living planet. According to Gaia theory, plate tectonics and the persistence of water are the unique properties of a planet with abundant life. Further on, the trail turns east along North Cornwall’s rugged coast until we reach the Cambrian rocks of Devon again where the westward trail takes us. As we walk on and leave the chalk cliffs behind we travel further back in time to the Jurassic period, made so familiar by Michael Crichton’s novel Jurassic Park. We come first to the Purbeck limestone brimming with the man-sized spirals of fossil ammonites, and then on to the dark and somber cliffs of Kimmeridge shale. I recall the thrill of excitement felt when walking on a beach in this region and seeing, as if drawn in chalk, the white skeleton of an ichthyosaurus on a flat black slab of shale. Walking on westward we come to Devon with its red sandstone cliffs dating back close to the time when the multicellular life of our world began. After Devon the westward trail takes us on to Cornwall and to Lands End. The cliffs now are of basalt and granite, there are no fossils in these rocks. They are the slag of past volcanoes and tectonic events. These dead rocks were once orange hot and molten but they are still part of our living planet. According to Gaia theory, plate tectonics and the persistence of water are the unique properties of a planet with abundant life. Further on, the trail turns east along North Cornwall’s rugged coast until we reach the Cambrian rocks of Devon again where the uplands of Exmoor reach the sea. The trail ends in rocks of the Jurassic period at the Somerset town of Minehead, and from here we return home to the present and to think about our own relationship with Gaia.

Our planet is a unique member of the solar system. It is special not just because it bears life. The moon did not become a living system when the astronauts walked on it, nor would the discovery of an oasis of bacteria on Mars or Europa make them living planets. What makes the Earth special is not just the abundance and diversity of life but that our planet has always kept its material conditions habitable for them. On Earth the evolution of the living organisms and the evolution of their material environment have, since life began, gone forward tightly coupled together, and from this single evolution has emerged the self-regulation of the climate and chemistry, so that always the Earth was habitable. A consequence is that now and in the past the air, the ocean, and the rocks that go to make up the Earth’s surface are utterly and impossibly different from those of a dead planet like Mars. They are as different as we ourselves are from a stone statue.

The coast path is a fine place to sense the presence of Gaia but a full understanding is probably beyond the most capable minds alive today. Gaia theory is not contrary to Darwin’s great vision; but I suspect that it will be some
time before biologists and geologists collaborate closely enough for us to see the emergence of a truly unified Earth System science. The Oxford biologist, William Hamilton, in a television interview, referred to the Gaian view of evolution as Copernican, but added, we await a Newton to explain how it works.

Science is often said to be ethically neutral and the good or bad consequences of its application are attributed to those who apply it. The philosopher, Mary Midgley, reminded us that Gaia has influence well beyond science. She said,

The reason why the notion of this enclosing whole concerns us is that it corrects a large and disastrous blind spot in our contemporary world view. It reminds us that we are not separate, independent autonomous entities. Since the Enlightenment, the deepest moral efforts of our culture have gone to establishing our freedom as individuals. The campaign has produced great results but like all moral campaigns it is one sided and has serious costs when the wider context is forgotten (2000).

One of these costs is our alienation from the physical world. She went on to say:

We have carefully excluded everything non-human from our value system and reduced that system to terms of individual self interest. We are mystified – as surely no other set of people would be – about how to recognise the claims of the larger whole that surrounds us – the material world of which we are a part. Our moral and physical vocabulary, carefully tailored to the social contract, leaves no language in which to recognise the environmental crisis (2000).

President Havel of the Czech Republic expressed similar thoughts when he was awarded the Freedom Medal of the United States, and he took as the title for his acceptance speech, “We are not here for ourselves alone.” He reminded us that science had replaced religion as the authoritative source of knowledge about life and the cosmos but that modern reductionist science offers no moral guidance. He went on to say that recent holistic science did offer something to fill this moral void. He offered Gaia as something to which we could be accountable. If we could revere our planet with the same respect and love that we gave in the past to God, it would benefit us as well as the Earth. Perhaps those who have faith might see this as God’s will also.

Four billion years of evolution have given us a planet unsurpassed in beauty. We are a part of it and through our eyes Gaia has for the first time seen how beautiful she is. We have justified our ancient feeling for the Earth as an organism and should revere it again, and what better way to do it than by a pilgrimage. Gaia has been the guardian of life for all of its existence; we reject her care at our peril. We can use technology to buy us time while we reform but we remain accountable for the damage we do. The longer we take the larger the bill. If you put trust in Gaia, it can be a commitment as strong and as joyful as that of a good marriage, one where the partners put their trust in one another and since they are, as Gaia is, mortal, their trust is made even more precious.

James Lovelock

Further Reading
See also: Epic of Evolution; Gaia; Gaia Foundation and Earth Community Network; Gaian Mass; Science.

Gandhi, Mohandas (1869–1948)

It is tempting to think that Gandhi may have been an "early environmentalist" and yet there seem to be insuperable problems in embracing this view. He was remarkably reticent on the relationship of humans to nature, and it is striking that he never explicitly initiated an environmental movement, nor does the word “ecology” appear in his writings. Though he was greatly animated by the subject of cow protection, the 50,000 pages of Gandhi’s published writings have otherwise little to convey about trees, animals, vegetation, and landscapes.

It is also doubtful that Gandhi would have contemplated with equanimity the setting aside of tracts of land, forests, and woods as “wilderness areas.” The enterprise of retreating into the forest was familiar to him from Indian traditions, but Gandhi spent an entire lifetime endeavoring to remain other-worldly while wholly enmeshed in the ugly affairs of the world. The problems posed, for example, by the man-eating tigers of Kumaon, made famous by Jim Corbett, would have left less of a moral impression upon him than those problems which are the handiwork of humans who let the brute within them triumph. It is reported that when the English historian Edward Thompson once remarked to Gandhi that wildlife was rapidly disappearing in India, Gandhi replied: “wildlife is decreasing in the jungles, but it is increasing in the towns.”
And yet, few people acquainted with Gandhi’s life, or with environmental movements in India, would cavil at the suggestion that Gandhi has been supremely inspirational for Indian environmentalists, and even for the exponents of deep ecology. Arne Naess has testified that from Gandhi he learnt that the power of nonviolence could only be realized after the awareness of “the essential oneness of all life.” To comprehend the ecological dimensions of Gandhian thinking and practice, we shall have to go well beyond the ordinary implications conveyed by the categories of “ecology” and “environment,” for ethics, ecology, and politics were all indistinguishably interwoven into the fabric of Gandhi’s thought and social practices.

The ecological vision of Gandhi’s life opens itself before us in myriad ways. First, as nature provides for the largest animals as much as it provides for its smallest creations, so Gandhi allowed this principle to guide him in his political and social relations with every woman and man with whom he came in contact. Peasants and politicians received his equal attention; and in the midst of important political negotiations with senior British officials, he would take the time to tend to his goat. His own grand-niece, pointing to the meticulous care with which Gandhi tended to her personal needs, all the while that he was engaged in complex discussions on Indian independence, tellingly called her short book about him,  

Bapu – My Mother.

Secondly, without being an advocate of wilderness as that is commonly understood today, Gandhi was resolutely of the view that nature should be allowed to take its own course. He scarcely required the verdict of the biologist, wildlife trainer, or zoologist to hold to the view that nature’s creatures mind their own business, and that if humans were to do the same, we would not be required to legislate the health of all species. On occasion a cobra would come into Gandhi’s room: there were clear instructions that it was not to be killed even if it bit him, though Gandhi did not prevent others from killing snakes. “I do not want to live,” wrote Gandhi, “at the cost of the life even of a snake.” He was quite willing to share his universe with animals and reptiles, without rendering them into objects of pity, curiosity, or amusement.

Thirdly, Gandhi transformed the idea of waste and rendered it pregnant with meanings that were the inverse of those meanings invested in it by European regimes, which represented the lands that they conquered as “unproductive” and “wasteful,” purportedly requiring only the energy and intelligence of the white man to render them useful to humans. Gandhi, contrariwise, was inclined to the view that humans were prone to transform whatever they touched, howsoever fertile, fecund, or productive, into waste. He was pained that people would “pluck masses of delicate blossoms” and fling them in his face or string them around his neck as a garland, as is still common in India. Nor did he shy away from the subject of human waste. Gandhi made the dreaded subject of the disposal of human waste, a task relegated in India to the “untouchables,” as much a matter of national importance as the attainment of political independence and the reform of degraded institutions. Unlike the vast majority of caste Hindus, Gandhi did not allow anyone else to dispose of his waste. His ashrams were repositories for endeavors to change human waste into organic fertilizer, and he was engaged in ceaseless experiments to invent toilets that would be less of a drain on scarce water resources.

Fourthly, and this is a point that cannot be belabored enough, Gandhi did not make of his ecological sensibilities a cult or religion to which unquestioning fealty was demanded. One writer credits him with the saying, “I am a puritan myself but I am catholic towards others.” His attitude toward meat is illustrative of his catholicity in many respects. He was himself a strict vegetarian, but European visitors to his ashram accustomed only to meat were served their customary diet. Gandhi construed it as unacceptable coercion to inflict a new diet upon them. He partook of milk and milk products, and his reverence for life and respect for animals did not border on that fanaticism which is sometimes another name for violence.

Gandhi’s ecological legacy survives in part among sarvodaya workers, the activists of the Chipko and Narmada Bachao (Save the Narmada) movements, anti-nuclear peacemakers, and many others. Though he was no philosopher of ecology, and can only be called an environmentalist with considerable difficulty, he strikes a remarkable chord with all those who have cared for the environment, loved flowers, practiced vegetarianism, cherished the principles of nonviolence, been conserving of water, resisted the depredations of developers, recycled paper, or accorded animals the dignity of humans. He was a deep ecologist long before the term’s theorists had arisen, and one suspects that even the broadest conception of “deep ecology” is not capacious enough to accommodate the radically ecumenical aspects of Gandhi’s life. He wrote no ecological treatise, but made one of his life.

Vinay Lal

Further Reading
Nandy, Ashis. “From Outside the Imperium: Gandhi’s Cultural Critique of the West.” In Ashis Nandy, ed.
One summer day, a child of 11, I woke early, went to my bedroom window, and was embraced by dawn’s rose-and-gold. For a timeless moment I was held in the light; I was part of everything and everything was part of me. I did not think of God. God was ill-spoken of in our household, especially by my atheist ex-seminarian father. My family had no religious practices, no sense of the sacred. But that memory has stayed with me as an experience of sacredness and connection, of being held in the world’s perfection.

We lived on a farm in south-central Pennsylvania. We kids worked in our father’s vegetable garden and spent a lot of time roaming fields and hills, wading in streams, climbing fences, rocks and trees, sliding down leafy ravines. Always a scribbler, I wrote poems about sunsets, clouds and thunderstorms, oak trees, the moon. Sensing something greater than myself, I conceived it as Mother Nature, as Gaia the great mother, and Persephone, bringer of springtime and flowers. These early experiences developed my sense of wonder, and my love of and respect for what David Abram calls the animate Earth – that Earth, reliable and unpredictable, known and mysterious, which has always called me to it and revealed itself as embodying and emanating sacredness.

At age 13, I made my first wildflower garden with plants dug from our woods. This was followed, in my parenting years, by various tiny backyard city gardens. Over the years, gardening taught me that hope and faith are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly, since we are reasonable even in times of drought and despair, and that we humans must not value ourselves too highly.

Even before Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, I figured pesticides could only poison our planet and ourselves and chose to garden organically. But, like many gardeners, I grew what I liked or what was in fashion – for my own pleasure. In the mid-1980s I acquired my own acre of that ecological disaster, the great American lawn, and went through a “get one of everything” phase, indulging passions for hostas, lilies, sedums, and other plants. Grass gave way to gardens. When I met the idea of gardening with native plants and creating spaces reflecting the genius loci, the spirit of the place, I became a native plant gardener. I forgot conventional garden design principles of color, line, texture, balance, and so on (though, in truth, I had never paid much attention to them). I began trying to make my pleasure fit Earth’s needs. I focused on incorporation of my gardening into Earth’s ways of planting abundantly and irregularly, cycling and recycling through growth, decay and reincorporation.

Now I am trying to make my gardens into biologically diverse, agro-ecological communities – plants (natives or not) growing in sync with each other, feeding us, feeding other life and Earth itself. As these ideas have grown, my reading has shifted from gardening books and magazines to the more philosophical and spiritual approaches of deep ecology, ecofeminism and natural history writing.

Today I live eight miles east of my parents’ farm. My garden is several acres of woodland, full of native plants, and an acre of sun gardens. Here I am an Earth mother. Of course I am not the Earth mother – just her helper. I call myself a spiritual gardener. That does not mean my gardening is ethereal. It is handwork, hard work, broken nails and grimy knees work. It is practical: I grow food as well as flowers. But my aim is to be in harmony with Earth, with the natural world, to be included in it as a gentle partner – to live in community with the land, as Aldo Leopold said. I am trying to create a healing landscape, a place that heals the human spirit and also heals our Mother Earth. I also aim to create beauty, not the beauty of conventional garden esthetics, but the wilder beauty of the Eastern Deciduous Forest, a beauty that was here before me and will, I hope, continue after me. For me, that is spiritual gardening – concerned with essences, with the eternal cycles of life and death, mystery and wonder.

Maria G. Cattell

Further Reading
Gardens in Islam

The Qur'an refers frequently to paradise as a garden that awaits the faithful on the day of judgment. Many passages elaborate upon this theme, describing the forms, water features, plants, companions – and, most importantly, the spiritual qualities – of paradise. These ideas, along with historic gardens built by Muslims, have contributed to ideas about what has been called “the Islamic garden.” Some of these ideas are unfounded, while other relationships among gardens, Muslim societies and cultures deserve much more attention. It is useful to distinguish between gardens in Islamic religion, historic gardens associated with Muslim societies, and the cultural forms such as painting and poetry that mediate between them.

The gardens of Islamic scripture may be considered under three headings: the garden of creation (‘adn = Eden); the gardens of this world (dunya); and the paradise gardens (jannah) reserved for those who have faith, do good works, fear God, and are righteous. What distinguishes Islam from the other Abrahamic religions is its limited concern for the garden at the beginning of time and its absolute dedication to the garden at the end of time. Only a few passages in the Qur'an refer to the Garden of Eden (e.g., Qur'an 2:39), and while Adam is the first of the prophets, his expulsion from paradise is a relatively minor theme.

The Qur'an devotes somewhat more attention to gardens on Earth, as signs (ayat) of Allah's beneficence, providing sustenance for humans as well as for all creatures. Everything that sustains a garden, from rainfall to soils and plants and fruits themselves are provided by Allah who transforms the “land that is dead” (mawat): “We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom, of which they do eat / And we produce gardens with palm trees and vines / And we do cause springs to gush forth therein” (36:34). However, worldly gardens are also signs that are “wrongly demanded by the unbelievers” (25:7), which are destroyed and replaced by “bitter fruit, tamarisks, and a few nettle shrubs” (37:17). “How many are the gardens they left behind?” (26:57).

The Qur'an devotes by far the most attention to an eschatology that contrasts a beatific paradise garden with a torturous hell. Those admitted to paradise dwell “in gardens watered by running streams,” in “a cool shade,” “in peace and safety,” “nor shall they ever leave.” They shall “eat therein of every fruit” (47:17), “sit with bashful dark-eyed virgins, as chaste as the sheltered eggs of ostriches” (37:47), and find “two gardens planted by shady trees . . . And beside these there shall be two other gardens of darkest green” (55:46). Most important, they shall be “brought near to their Lord in the gardens of delight” (56:11).

Compared to these scriptural passages, the historical gardens built by Muslim societies have complex cultural origins and associations with Islam. As with other forms of art, architecture, and landscape, they had pre-Islamic and non-Islamic roots. The Prophet’s simple grave was open to the sky in a garden (rawda) in Medina. Shari’a law proscribes monumental funerary monuments of the sort constructed by dynasties in Persia, Central Asia, and Mogul India. The latter historic gardens were more frequently places of political conquest, social control, and personal pleasure than the places of sober piety enjoined by Islam. Gardens of Andalus and the Mediterranean had antecedent Roman influence while the gardens of Turkey have Byzantine influence, those of Persia have Achaemenid influence, and those of South Asia, Indic influence.

Garden forms varied across cultures, and common forms, such as the fourfold chahar bagh garden, had changing meanings in space and time.

Arguably, the art, craft, and sciences of gardening have mediated between religious ideals and human behaviors. While Muslim poets and painters often evoke garden scenes and flowers in stock phrases, in the best cases they reinfuse those forms with religious significance. And when anonymous gardeners humbly tend the plants, soils, and creatures of a garden, however mundane or magnificent, they draw daily attention to the true signs of Allah’s mercy, beneficence and provision for those who understand and are grateful.

James L. Wescoat Jr.

Further Reading


Ivone Gebara is a Brazilian Sister of Our Lady (Canoneses of St. Augustine) and one of Latin America’s leading theologians, writing from the perspective of ecofeminism and liberation theology. For nearly two decades Gebara has been a professor at the Theological Institute of Recife. Gebara articulates an ecofeminist perspective that combines social ecofeminism and holistic ecology, promoting an “urban ecofeminism” shaped by her experiences of working with poor women in Brazilian favelas (slum neighborhoods). Gebara claims that ecofeminism is born of “daily life” and thus considers garbage in the street, inadequate healthcare, and other daily survival crises faced by poor women as they provide for family sustenance to be central issues in ecofeminist liberation theology. Gebara proposes a new theological anthropology, model for God, trinitarian language, Christology, and “religious biodiversity” from the perspective of Latin American ecofeminism.

Following her period of theological reeducation, Gebara returned to Brazil and again became active in writing and speaking about ecofeminism. Her strong critique of the anthropocentric and androcentric view of the world found in the Christian tradition continued after her theological education, as she took on the project of reinterpreting “key elements within the Christian tradition for the purpose of reconstructing earth’s body, the human body, and our relationship with all living bodies” (Gebara 1999: 6). In 1997–1998, she organized the Shared Garden theological program with the Latin American ecofeminist collective, Con-spirando, based in Santiago, Chile. During each of the three “Gardens,” which were held in Santiago, Chile (January 1997), in Washington, D.C. (June 1997), and in Recife, Brazil (July 1998), participants from throughout the Americas met to explore themes and principles of an ecofeminist liberation theology. Gebara remains a central figure for the Con-spirando ecofeminist collective and organizes numerous classes, workshops, and conferences throughout Latin America.

Ivone Gebara and the Costa Rican theologian, Elsa Tamez, chart three phases of feminist theology in Latin America, placing themselves in the third stage. The first phase (1970–1980) coincided with the growth of Christian base communities and of liberation theology. Women theologians tended to identify with liberation theology and see themselves as oppressed historical subjects. During this stage the word “feminist” was rejected as a concept imposed from the North. Construction of a more explicitly feminist consciousness grew during the second phase (1980–1990). Efforts were made toward the “feminization of theological concepts” as well as the reconstruction and questioning of biblical texts from a feminist perspective. The third phase (1990 onward) is characterized, according to Gebara and Tamez, by challenges to the patriarchal anthropology and cosmovision in liberation theology itself and by the construction of a Latin American ecofeminism. Gebara in particular has been critical in articulating the premises of holistic ecofeminism in a Latin American context. By holistic ecofeminism, Gebara means that the daily lives of women in slums of the south show the ways “that the exclusion of the poor is linked to the destruction of their lands” (Gebara 1999: vi) and to women’s oppression. For Gebara, just as holism in ecology means that all things are interdependent, so all forms of oppression are interdependent. All oppressions however, are not the same and not experienced by all groups with the same intensity. Her concern is with the most oppressed, which in her context means poor women in urban slums. Thus, Gebara self-consciously articulates an “urban ecofeminism” shaped by the absence of sewers and safe drinking water, poor nutrition, and the numerous daily survival needs of poor women.

Lois Ann Lorentzen
Further Reading


See also: Christianity (6a) – Roman Catholicism; Christianity (7c) – Liberation Theology; Christianity (7d) – Feminist Theology; Con-spirando Women’s Collective (Santiago, Chile); Ecofeminism (various).

Genealogy and Spiritualities of Place

(Australia)

Across the Western world many people are engaging in family history research. The internet abounds with sites and email lists for genealogical investigation. Large public libraries and records offices have areas set aside for such research. In post-colonial societies such as Australia, both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples conduct genealogical searches, often for different purposes. For indigenous people who were forcibly removed from their families as children, this research may provide information that will help them reconnect with family and country. For those seeking to make native title claims to traditional lands, genealogical research may offer evidence of connection with place acceptable in a Western court of law. For non-indigenous people, however, the search for origins inherent in genealogical quests involves journeying either imaginatively or actually out of place to the places from which ancestors emigrated.

At the same time indigenous peoples are sometimes seen as bearing a sense or spirituality of place which non-indigenous people both lack and desire. The non-indigenous desire to articulate a spirituality of place can tend toward an appropriation of indigenous spiritualities of place. In this context the genealogical quest emerges as an alternative mode of identification with place, reminding the researcher that she or he is not indigenous to, but nevertheless connected with, both a home place and perhaps a myriad of other more distant places. But the scope of this connectedness to place may be limited by the patterns of genealogical research.

In a particular way family history narratives, both fictional and nonfictional, suggest settler spiritualities of place. Notable among these are the two volumes by Australian poet and environmental activist, Judith Wright. The first, *The Generations of Men* (first published 1959; revised, 1995) traces the story of Wright’s grandparents May and Albert. May’s settler ancestors are likened to the patriarchs and matriarchs of biblical religion, and both the country left behind and the home they build in Australia are figured as Eden. Wright’s genealogical narrative, like Frederick McCubbins’ painting, *The Pioneer*, describes a family history that appears to begin in the place of immigration without reference to the conditions that made possible that immigration. Wright’s second genealogical narrative, *The Cry for the Dead* (1981), retells the story of this immigration as a narrative of Aboriginal dispossession and displacement. It relates as well the economic and social circumstances that occasioned the other (albeit voluntary) displacement of her settler ancestors from their former English homes. An acknowledgment of the conditions of being in place for non-Aboriginal Australians forms a context for the articulation of spiritualities of place which involve not only a loving attentiveness to place as displayed, for example, in Wright’s poetry, but also an openness to the relationships, responsibilities and claims to place of indigenous peoples.

In Australian Aboriginal contexts, such as that of the Yarralin people described by anthropologist Deborah Birnrose in *Dingo Makes Us Human* (2000), linear patterns of genealogy are enfolded within the more complex patterns of kinship that describe connectedness to and responsibility for country. For Nyoongah writer Kim Scott in his novel *Benang* (1999), country is the locus for a meandering family history narrative that resists linear patterns, remembers Aboriginal dispossession and displacement, and calls into question non-indigenous narratives of a settler genesis.

As Scott’s work suggests, the genealogical quest itself is destabilizing. For family history researchers the search for origins has no end-point: there is always another great someone to discover. But the question of an origin in place remains. Settler relationship to place in Australia has been marked by profound changes to country, such as the destruction of ancient forests and the salination of land. How might our senses of ancestry create new ways of connecting with place?

For poet Gwen Harwood in “Mother Who Gave Me Life” (Harwood 1990: 161–2) the ancestral trail takes us back to our nonhuman primate ancestors. This suggests an intersection between genealogical imaginings and theories of evolution. This kind of genealogical intersection opens a way for Westerners to reimagine their kinship with other-than-humans and to experience their connectedness with the Earth community in new ways. Although a pattern of linearity remains, the paradigm is less the biblical line of fathers and sons than a tree of life.

But this sense of a wider connectedness within the Earth community, while promising much in terms of an ecological spirituality, does not speak directly to a spirituality of place. What might be needed as well is a sense of the ancestry and agency of place. Judith Wright’s poem “The Ancestors” (Wright 1994: 111) offers a way to re-imagine our genealogies in conversation with a spirituality of place. In a poem evoking the lush fertility of a rainforest, a curled fern frond waiting to open is an ancestor, whose fetal-like appearance recalls in human generation “the old
ape-knowledge of the embryo.” The sleeping ancestors that the place summons gather “round the spring / that feeds the living.”

Anne Elvey

Further Reading
See also: Aboriginal Spirituality and the New Age in Australia; Australia; Sacred Space/Place; Wright, Judith.

Genesis Farm

Genesis Farm is an ecological learning center and community-supported organic farm located on 220 farmland-preserved acres in western New Jersey. Founded by Dominican Sister Miriam MacGillis in 1980, Genesis Farm has been an important “seed community” for the growth and development of the Green Sisters Movement by providing critical training, informational resources and networking support, all of which have helped Roman Catholic religious sisters start their own ecological ministries across North America. MacGillis is a long-time disciple of Father Thomas Berry, who speaks of the ecological healing of the planet as “the Great Work” of our time (Berry 1999). For Berry, this Great Work involves a re-sacralization of nature and an embracing of Earth as primary revelation. It also necessitates a conscious recognition of the fundamental interconnectedness of the universe – a consciousness awakened by a greater appreciation of cosmogenesis (the “universe story” as revealed through modern science) as the central and defining sacred narrative of our time (Swimme and Berry 1992). Berry draws inspiration on both of these points from the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas and French priest-paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Berry 1988).

Genesis Farm’s ecological learning center offers programs that embody Berry’s philosophies and perspectives yet translate them into “on-the-ground” practices such as organic farming, permaculture (sustainable landscape design), natural foods cooking, bioregional activism, straw bale construction, and voluntary simplicity. The farm’s “Earth Literacy” courses introduce students to the Earth community in its many variations. There are modules, for instance, on geology, natural history, plants, star constellations, vermiculture (worm-based organic waste recycling), seed saving, and even on basic organic chemistry and evolutionary science.

An intensive course called “Exploring the Sacred Universe” immerses students in the cosmic epic of evolution as told by Western science but does so through varied creative media: storytelling, “bodyprayer,” ritual, drawing, sculpting, walking meditation, contemplative gardening, and mindful cooking and eating. Miriam MacGillis’ work is dedicated to spreading Berry’s vision of an interconnected sacred cosmic community; however, she is also a thinker and prophet in her own right, and Genesis Farm’s learning center programs reflect MacGillis’ unique creativity and perspective as a green visionary.

Some programs, such as MacGillis’ popular “Re-Visioning the Vowed Life” course, as the name would suggest, are selectively targeted toward vowed members of Roman Catholic religious congregations. This particular program helps participants explore their religious vows within a broader ecologically conscious context. MacGillis also extends this premise to the need for all of Earth’s citizens, regardless of affiliation, “to re-vision the committed life.” She explains that “the committed life is about the deep spiritual call to all people, especially those of industrial, non-sustainable cultures, to reconnect with the natural world in our spiritual, ethical, emotional and intellectual roots” (Genesis Farm 2002).

Although sponsored by the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey, Genesis Farm is neither an intentional community nor a religious order. The ecological learning center staff at different times has been made up of sisters from a variety of communities, including Sisters of Charity, Sisters of St. Joseph, Franciscan sisters, Dominican sisters, and even a Brigitine sister from Australia. The staff also includes Protestant and Jewish laymen and laywomen, among those from other religious backgrounds. Many of those who come to study at Genesis Farm are Roman Catholic religious sisters, but the programs also attract (and increasingly so) laypeople from both Catholic and non-Catholic backgrounds. Students from the local area, from all over the United States, and from abroad come to live and study at the farm for anywhere from a weekend to twelve weeks at a time, although interns may commit to one or two years of working there. Through Saint Thomas University in Miami, Earth Literacy students can earn credit toward a Pastoral Ministries Master’s Degree.

The farm’s mission statement and published materials identify Genesis Farm specifically as “a learning center for re-inhabiting the Earth.” (“Re-inhabiting” is a term that comes from the philosophy of bioregionalism and is about finding more sustainable ways to live in place in order to heal and reclaim that place from ecological damage. “Re-inhabiting” is thus the antithesis of “making a mess”
and then moving on to colonize new ground.) At Genesis Farm, various examples of reinhabiting dot the landscape. A section of woods and brush where humans are directed not to go has been specifically designated a non-human wildlife area in order to conserve vital habitat.

A central feature of Genesis Farm is its “Earth Meditation Pathway,” a wooded trail on which the traveler stops at various stations to contemplate his or her spiritual connection to the Earth. The winding trail, designed as a pilgrimage, works with the natural features of the landscape and culminates in a large altar filled with decorated stones that lie under the shelter of cedar trees. Those who travel the trail carry a stone with them from the beginning, holding it in their hand during the progression of meditative stations. At the end, they stop and decorate it with a design that represents their unique commitment or gift to the Earth. The trail configuration thus forms a kind of “stations of the Earth” that opens up the traditional Roman Catholic meditative practice of walking the “stations of the cross” to ecological meanings and green interpretations.

The biodynamic garden, which provides shares of organic produce 52 weeks out of the year to over 250 local families, replaces conventional food that would otherwise be trucked thousands of miles and consume large quantities of fossil fuel. The garden itself is planted with organic heirloom varieties, native to the region–some of the seeds circulated through seed-saving networks. Through biodynamic methods pioneered by Austrian mystic philosopher Rudolf Steiner, Genesis Farm’s gardeners work on increasing the vitality of the soil and conserving its minerals and microbes, reinhabiting the farmland in ways that restore and revitalize the soil rather than deplete it.

Modes of “re-inhabitation” on the farm also include two straw bale structures on the property, including a hermitage that was made from straw grown and baled by local farmers. In giving a tour of these structures, MacGillis speaks of how we must look to the Earth’s ways of sheltering and providing, and learn from them as our models. For a growing number of student-seekers, Genesis Farm itself has become a model for reinhabiting our landscape, culture, community, and religious tradition in ways that are more ecologically sustainable and spiritually satisfying.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading

See also: Aquinas, Thomas; Back to the Land Movements; Berry, Thomas; Bioregionalism; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Christianity (7e) – Creation Spirituality; Community Supported Agriculture; Epic of Evolution (and adjacent Epic Ritual); Green Sisters Movement; Re-earthing; Seed, John; Snyder, Gary; Steiner, Rudolf – and Anthroposophy; Swimme, Brian; Teilhard de Chardin; Pierre.

Geomancy

Geomancy is today the Western equivalent of the Chinese fengshui, but previously it referred to the system of divination based on signs derived from the Earth. Configurations of Earth could be either natural (such topographical contours as hills, crevices, large stones, water formations, etc.) or artificial (as in the random patterns made by throwing down a handful of Earth or making markings in sand). By Napoleonic times, geomancy comprised simply predicting on the basis of interpreting lines of haphazard dots made by a pencil on a piece of paper. The contemporary understanding of geomancy, however, is captured by Nigel Pennick who describes it as the “detection of various subtle qualities of land and place, and the modification of those qualities so as to harmonize human activity there with the inherent natural character of the place” (1990: 189). More broadly, geomantic art is understood as psychic communication with nature spirits. Consequently, geomancy embraces the various nuances of sacred geography that explore and interpret megalithic stone circles and alignments, shrine distribution, creation through augury of the templum as marked out sanctuary or temple space, and such hypotheticals as ley lines. Related to this paranormal sensitivity is the practice of dowsing – the esoteric use of a forked stick to locate underground water, minerals or lost objects. “However absurd such an institution as a college of Augurs may to us seem, . . . it had, in part, its origin from nature” (Bell 1790: 253). The underlying principle of geomancy is the acceptance of talismanic meridian currents interlinking the Earth. These are understood as invisible but natural formations of telluric energy that inform any immediate surroundings and that influence behavior and outcomes within that locale. The geomancer – whether dowser, pagan augur or
Earth Mysteries seeker – attempts not only to discern these subtle patterns but also to harness or modify them for an optimal holistic environment.

Michael York

Further Reading
See also: Earth Mysteries; Fengshui.

Geophilia

Extrapolated from E.O. Wilson’s concept of biophilia, geophilia asserts that humans have an organic propensity to find wildlands emotionally compelling. It exists as a human tendency to emotionally connect with natural landscapes. While the biophilia hypothesis proposes that humans have a propensity to focus on life and lifelike processes, geophilia relates to our tendency to find compelling the landscape and its component features. This inherent inclination emotionally and spiritually to affiliate with a landscape is, perhaps, part of our evolutionary heritage, associated with genetic fitness, and related to the human propensity for symbolic reasoning. The geophilia hypothesis suggests that landscapes are compelling for humans, and exert significant influence on intellect, intuition, and action. Its cultural expressions are often complex and bear upon prospects for the preservation of wild places.

If geophilia exists as part of our species’ evolutionary heritage, then it is probable that there is evolutionary advantage to emotional, intellectual, and spiritual affiliation with land. Research in this area is young, and findings have yet to appear that irrefutably support the proposition that positive response to nature has a partly genetic basis. The most convincing findings are the decisive patterns across diverse cultures, which reveal a preference for natural scenes over urban scenes, as well as the remarkable predilection for geophysical settings that presumably offered survival-related advantages for humans.

Landscape is part of the iconography of every culture. It provides an “image” of the invisible, a physical link to the creative forces contained within it. Not only are there practical bonds of subsistence between peoples and landscapes, there are also potent religious, social, and emotional bonds. It is through these bonds that people develop a sense of place and affinities with particular locales.

Part of the human quest for meaning involves the ordering of landscape into places. Places are centers of cultural and personal meaning; they exist as foci of emotional attachment. A sense of place unfolds through the religious, moral, and aesthetic discernment of specific locations. Through the sense of place, the boundaries between person and “other” become blurred. People develop a sense of responsibility to the land, which suggests that geophilia is an important element of a land ethic.

Places are fundamental expressions of human involvement with the world. They provide foundations for existence, imparting not only a geographic context to activity, but providing physical and spiritual security and identity. Through natural places humans gain insight into their existence, for there is self-discovery in place. Landscapes are ontologically significant; people are components in the continuation of the land. An individual exists not only in relation to other individuals, but also in concert with the landscape. Through geophilia, self-and-other exist as a continuous and extended entity.

Geophilia is different from bioregionalism in that it just might be inscribed in our DNA; if it indeed exists, it expresses tens of thousands of years of evolutionary encounters with landscape. It is part of our deep psychology, and is rooted in the essential patterns of human life on Earth. Geophilia suggests that humans are of the landscape, and that as a species *Homo sapiens* belongs to the land in ways profound. Geophilia reminds us that it is our nature to be resourceful and attentive to the world in which we live. Through rehabilitation we can begin to dwell in ways that respect ecological limits and engender social justice.

In contemporary industrialized cultures, wilderness as sacred space can be understood partly as expression of a land ethic informed by a deferred geophilic response to nature. On some level – perhaps deeply subconscious – geophilia is the motivating force behind the establishment of wildlife refuges, national parks and other conservation lands, and a variety of sacred sites.

Various research projects have documented human-kind’s strong preference for natural settings, and the literature in environmental perception is rich with examples. People give aesthetic preference to landscapes in which they can function effectively. People tend to prefer, for example, landscapes with water features, trees with broad canopies, and both panoramic views and sheltered refuges. Aesthetic reactions, then, are not trivial; indeed, they form a template for human behavior that is both ancient and far-reaching.

People in both Western and Eastern societies consistently dislike spatially restricted environments but respond positively to landscapes with moderate to high visual depth. This preference can perhaps be related to our common evolutionary heritage in which our hominid ancestors found abundant plant and animal food on the savannah, as well as lower risk because of visual openness and escape opportunities. Modern humans prefer land-
the problem seems only to worsen things. Moreover, our trouble. Any solution derived from the same paradigm as our thoughts and policies repeatedly lead us deeper into ecological problems facing us – the very directions of danger. Often, our solutions are inadequate to solve the problems that are becoming increasingly apparent and mental contact with the land, and it relates to a host of mythologies for materialism parallels the loss of fundamentalized world, the substitution of these Earth-based affirm and express their place in the world. In the industrialized world, the extension of self onto landscape enables the articulation of personal traits in terms of graspable phenomena. Not only is landscape understood as the material manifestation of the highest values and ideals, but it is also understood as a psychological and physiological continuance of the individual.

Land is the organic, emotional, and aspirational core of culture. Peoples from diverse geographical regions and cultural traditions express geophilia (or something close to it) through religion; their myths, rituals, totemism, sacred sites, and the like. For many indigenous peoples, this shared identity is sagaciously articulated through the mythologies, wherein people, spirit-beings, natural species, and localities are viewed as interconnected. This extension of self onto landscape enables the articulation of personal traits in terms of graspable phenomena. Not only is landscape understood as the material manifestation of the highest values and ideals, but it is also understood as a psychological and physiological continuance of the individual.

Rituals and myths arouse emotions; they heighten awareness, bring fresh insight, and enable us to become conscious of connections between the world and ourselves. People construct mythologies to fit the land; to affirm and express their place in the world. In the industrialized world, the substitution of these Earth-based mythologies for materialism parallels the loss of fundamental contact with the land, and it relates to a host of problems that are becoming increasingly apparent and dangerous. Often, our solutions are inadequate to solve the ecological problems facing us – the very directions of our thoughts and policies repeatedly lead us deeper into trouble. Any solution derived from the same paradigm as the problem seems only to worsen things. Moreover, our emotions are no longer structured to make us want to deal adequately with those problems. We seem unable to stop desiring the very things that are destroying the world we long to treat with respect.

Geophobia, the corollary of geophilia, is the fearful response to landscapes. In some cases, geophobic responses sharpen perceptions and make us physically and emotionally more agile; fear of exposed heights and dark caves have, in some instances, adaptive value. Geophobia may correlate with some sacred sites (special caves, mountains, etc.) through the notion that visiting these sites by overcoming our earthly fears can bring us closer to spiritual enlightenment. Mediating between the ancestral realm and the human realm, such landscapes serve as indexes of sacred as well as secular events.

Geophilia may provide the basis for the ethics of both radical ecology and mainstream environmentalism. Radical ecology purports to be largely altruistic, concerned with preserving the intrinsic integrity of nature. Mainstream environmentalism, on the other hand, is most concerned with preserving the utilitarian value of nature. Combining the strands of these two perspectives, an ethic based on our affinity for landscape can be understood partly as an ethic of altruistic selfishness.

Paul Faulstich

Further Reading


See also: Biophilia; Bioregionalism (various); Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites; Conservation Biology; Wilson, Edward O.

Ghost Dance

While the Ghost Dance is widely known and has been studied in great detail, scholars have often emphasized social, political, and symbolic interactions between Indians and non-natives in the context of the dances without paying enough attention to the role and significance of a tremendously important third party: the Earth itself. Our present task, then, is to chart a broad map of the profound religious and discursive relationship of the Ghost Dance to nature.

James Mooney’s classic assessment of Ghost Dance doctrine offers a reasonable starting point for understanding the phenomenon:

The great underlying principle of the Ghost dance is that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease, and misery. . . . The white race, being alien and secondary and hardly real, has no point in this scheme of aboriginal regeneration, and will be left behind with other things of earth that have served their temporary purpose, or else will cease entirely to exist (Mooney 1991: 777).

In terms of a bare historical sketch, the Ghost Dance came toward the end – in ways, marked the end – of a long history of Native American millennial movements and was practiced widely throughout the West by groups as diverse as the Ute and the Arapaho, who embraced the
dance according to specific needs and channeled it through preexisting traditions. The dance had two seminal leaders: Wodziwob, whose version of the dance was promulgated in 1869, and Wovoka, whose dance emerged twenty years later. The phenomenon culminated in tremendous violence on 29 December 1890. Suspected by government officials, who were in turn driven by inflated and inflammatory media reports and public panic, to be mobilizing armed resistance to the local non-native population, an exhausted group of several hundred Lakota Indians were surrounded and killed at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. Few survived, dashing the hopes of a despondent people who sought spiritual relief from earthly suffering in the Ghost Dance.

While the Ghost Dance signaled a nadir in Indian/white relations and the end of physical resistance to non-native domination, it marked the florescence if not beginning of a new form of political resistance to the dominant society: Pan-Indianism, wherein native peoples self-consciously emphasize their solidarity vis-à-vis a common history in order to seek a better common future. Moreover, while the millennial agenda of the dance was not realized, it did represent a this-worldly triumph of sorts in symbolic and rhetorical terms. Through the appropriation and recasting of tropes drawn in part from the dominant culture (namely, messianic apocalypticism), Ghost dancers refined a strategy of cultural criticism that has become one hallmark of Native American political and legal agitation to the present. Speaking in the oppressor’s terms – of paradise lost, for example – has enabled Native Americans to make their grievances audible to an otherwise inattentive and detached nation. Their grievances, more often than not, concern a paradise lost in concrete, historical terms: the land.

Violation of the land was the ultimate source of Native American anxieties expressed through the Ghost Dance. The 1860s–1890s was an era of unprecedented non-native incursion into the West. Railroad tracks cut the land, treaties were crafted and recrafted, territories and states came into being, and Indians were pushed onto ever-shrinking reservations. This process had profound economic and political effects on all tribes. Traditional modes of subsistence were rendered untenable and old alliances and antagonisms took on new and unpredictable configurations. Along with economic and social chaos, Native American religious life was threatened by the newcomers and their treatment of the land. Generally speaking, Native Americans view themselves – now as then – in a kin relationship to nature, which entails obligations of responsibility and reciprocity. Non-native effects upon the landscape imperiled this relationship, causing many Indians to look for novel remedies to their predicament.

If violation of the land was a cause of the Ghost Dance, restoration of the land was its goal. Moreover, religious restoration of the land was imagined to be thoroughgoing, eliminating all traces of pollution and decay and restoring nature and her kin to their rightful place. Here we see an inversion of the moral order of European savagism, even while its basic structure is reproduced. That is, Indians aligned themselves with and as nature vis-à-vis civilization and its representatives. Thus, the restoration of nature and “natural” Indian traditions entailed and would be catalyzed by explicit rejections of certain markers of “civilization,” including, among other things, metal and elements of Western dress (though not including train travel, writing, and messiah imagery). In this way, restoring “nature” was both a goal and a mechanism of the Ghost Dance.

What is more, nature herself was understood to be the primary agent – final cause – of millennial justice. In a radical eruption of the natural order, the land would consume and cover all traces of non-native society. Consider an Arapaho song recorded by Mooney:

My father tells me so, my children,
Look! The earth is about to move,
My father tells me so (Mooney 1991: 973).

Such imagery suggests comparison with other apocalyptic movements, including Christian ones, wherein social order is imagined to be restored through and as the restoration of the natural order of the world. With the Ghost Dance, as with so many religious movements that image a better world, nature takes on mythic proportions, acting as the hero in an all too historical drama.

Greg Johnson

Further Reading


See also: Dance; Lakota; Lakota Sun Dance.
Gimbutas, Marija (1921–1994)

Marija Gimbutiene/Gimbutas, a Lithuanian archeologist, contributed to major advances in the understanding of Bronze Age Indo-European migrations. Author of 22 books and more than 200 articles, she directed five excavations in Europe. As Professor of Archeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, Gimbutas became director of its Indo-European Studies program. She was the first prominently to propose an identity between the Indo-European homeland and the speakers of proto-Indo-European. The kurgan or “barrow” refers to the prehistoric burial mounds used in the steppes of South Russia. While the Indo-European homeland remains a contentious and debatable question within the fields of archeology and comparative linguistics, Gimbutas' locating the Urheimat with the lower Volga steppe lands and Kazakhstan remains the most plausible among alternate possibilities (e.g., central or northern Europe, Anatolia or in the Balkans.) As the chief articulator of the conventional conquest theory of language, she became a leading opponent to Colin Renfrew's “wave-of-advance” theory, namely, that the Indo-European languages spread gradually across Europe with the diffusion of new agricultural techniques. Gimbutas coined the term “archeomythology” to describe her own methodology as a multidisciplinary approach that combines the study of mythology with archeology, linguistics, comparative religion, ethnology and cultural history. In this respect, she advents the growing diversity and trend toward a less exclusively specialized focus within the academic study of prehistoric society.

On the other hand, Gimbutas' later theory concerning a goddess-centered belief system underlying East European Neolithic communities is much more controversial and unaccepted in archeological circles. Gimbutas claims that the non-belligerent matrifocal societies stretching from the Balkans to Crete were later destroyed by patriarchal Indo-European invaders in a westward expansion between 4000 and 3500 B.C.E. from their original homeland. For the matrilineal societies of Old Europe themselves, Gimbutas posited the existence of three goddesses: the Bird and Snake Goddess – principally a water-mother, the Great Goddess of Life, Death and Regeneration; a moon-goddess; and, with the emergence of agriculture, the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess – an Earth-mother who develops from the Great Goddess. She argued that these Goddess worshippers delighted in nature and the crafting of sophisticated pottery and avoided war and the production of military weaponry. Her critics reject what they consider subjective and partial interpretations. Nonetheless, this lack of overall academic endorsement has not prevented Gimbutas from becoming an iconic champion in the eyes of many within contemporary goddess spirituality. Her later works, The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500–3500 B.C. (1974, 1982), The Language of the Goddess (1989), and The Civilization of the Goddess (1991), as well as The Living Goddess (1999) edited by Miriam Robbins Dexter, form the corpus of goddess feminists' belief and/or focus on a “golden age” in “Old Europe” consisting of sedentary, peaceful, egalitarian societies who worshipped a female deity. In this respect, Gimbutas continues to play a central role in the contemporary movement that values femininity and nature in contrast to industrial pollution and its supporting belief systems in which the Earth becomes allegedly devalued as simply something to be technologically used rather than organically nurtured.

Michael York

Further Reading

See also: Christ, Carol; Ecofeminism (various); Eisler, Riane; Feminist Spirituality Movement; Goddesses – History of; Griffin, Susan; Merchant, Carolyn; Paganism – Contemporary; Sexuality and Green Consciousness; Wicca.

Glacken, Clarence James (1909–1989)

Clarence James Glacken authored what many consider to be the most important book on the history of Western ideas about nature, Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century (1st edn, 1967). A Professor of geography at the University of California, Glacken produced his magnum opus through the long-standing support of the Institute of Social Science at Berkeley. Declining health prevented him from fulfilling his dream of bringing his monumental study up to contemporary times.

Glacken’s long-term interest in how ideas affect the landscape arose out of his own role in public service and his exposure to a variety of cultures during decades of social and environmental crisis. Upon graduating from college at Berkeley in the early 1930s he worked with Dust Bowl refugees in California’s Central Valley, and traveled through Europe and Asia. During World War II he served...

Glacken’s great work examined the depths to which early Western thinkers focused their interests on nature. He included important chapters on both classical Greco-Roman ideas of nature (derived from various philosophical treatises and evocative poetry) and those central to the biblical tradition, which frequently extol creation’s marvels and beauties. He laid bare the remarkable extent to which medieval religious writers paid attention to *natura* and environmental custodianship, writing over 350 pages before turning to Renaissance thought (including the later Renaissance and thus seventeenth-century ideas), and after that, to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment mind. In the main, he covered religious thought, and a key argument in the book is that much in the medieval literature reveals applied theology, or the practical stewardship of God’s world, while modernity is marked more by theoretical constructs to explain natural laws, sometimes (but actually not that often) with a view toward controlling nature. Traces presented an alternative way of viewing environmental history, giving new attention to Western spiritual and ecological insights about the care and management of environments through three and a half millennia. Glacken demonstrated what cannot be as clearly shown from any other part of the world: that, in the West, there was a continuous concern among thinkers either to care for environments or create better ones. The implication is that “Environmentalism,” then, has been born out of the Western tradition and its religious lineaments. The book is thus a neglected yet brilliant foil to the (earlier, pre-qualified) claims of the medievalist Lynn White, Jr. that Christianity was basically an anthropocentric, environmentally unfriendly tradition, responsible in the long run for the present environmental crisis. Not only does Glacken’s account of medieval (especially monastic) environmental ideals reveal White’s neglect of vital materials, but the history of post-medieval environmentalism is shown to be littered with Christian thinkers of one type or another. Glacken is well aware, however, that Western ideas and principles cannot be properly understood without attending above all to both the symbioses and enduring tensions between the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian apprehensions of the cosmos. Both these major trajectories have impetuses that are sacralizing and secularizing, nature-conserving and utilitarian, cyclical and linear.

Glacken’s work did not examine the modern wilderness movement; it stressed how the image of the cultivated garden prevails in Western environmental conceptions. Thus wild places are thought to be capable of being transformed into utopian spaces because they are away from areas already “spoilt.” Yet we must remember that he was documenting the thoughts of intellectuals, not the conditions of environments themselves. Whole wilderness areas were left unsubdued for centuries even to the eighteenth century, inhabited by subsistence dwellers, and had a profound impact on others (let us say on the edges of forests) who did not reflect on their surroundings. Glacken’s greatness lies in bringing religion and nature into interface with a patient attention to the resulting complexities, and in his clever detailing of the threads that make up a rich historical tapestry. Unfortunately, his declining health in the 1970s limited the amount of attention he could give to the Americas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Garry W. Trompf

Further Reading


See also: Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; White, Lynn – Thesis of.

Glastonbury

The small southwest English town of Glastonbury, located in the lowlands and reclaimed wetlands of Somerset county, touts a long history as a center of religious pilgrimage. In medieval times it attracted pilgrims from across Europe, and its abbey was, for a time, the second most powerful landowner in all of Britain. When the abbey’s fortunes had fallen in the late twelfth century, monks purportedly discovered the remains of King Arthur in the abbey grounds. Further legends – about Joseph of Arimathea’s voyage with his nephew, the young Jesus, to nearby Wirral Hill, and about the visits of Saints Patrick, Bridget, Columba, and others – are traced back by historians to this time, though they purportedly occurred centuries earlier.

Glastonbury has attracted scattered bands of poets, artists, and mystics throughout the last two centuries, its spiritual and antiquarian reputation promoted by Alfred Lord Tennyson, John Cowper Powys (author of *A Glastonbury Romance*), occultist Dion Fortune, and more recently Arthurian scholar Geoffrey Ashe and author Marion Zimmer Bradley (*The Mists of Avalon*). In the 1930s Canadian artist Katherine Maltwood claimed to find the remnants of a massive terrestrial zodiac carved into the landscape surrounding the town. Since the 1960s Glastonbury has...
Globalization

It is capital accumulation on the basis of private property which drives and determines the modern interaction of globalization, religion and nature. This is not only true in macro-economic terms but also in regard to human behavior. In the early days of the money economy, Aristotle differentiated between the need-oriented household economy and the money-accumulation economy. The former includes local markets and confines itself to the limits of the natural environment and the life of the community. The latter concentrates on long-distance trade and the business of interest-bearing loans. As money creates the desire for limitless growth in individuals, giving the illusion of eternal life, it destroys the community and is against nature. Therefore, according to Aristotle, money-accumulation including charging interest is to be rejected. Jesus in a similar way calls for the decision between God and Mammon, adding the religious dimension to the argument, but religion not as one dimension beside others — as in bourgeois religiosity. Rather, Mammon is seen as the fetish, the idol, asking for the sacrifice of the whole of life. For the followers of God all human needs will be cared for by nature given abundantly by God's grace and full of beauty, while worshipping Mammon is destroying life (Matt. 6:19–34; 16:26).

The ideologists of the modern age promote the contrary. Human beings by nature try to expand their power and wealth (Hobbes). Francis Bacon in his New Organon of the Sciences (1620) introduces science and technology as instruments bringing greater power — for one's own nation and over other nations and nature. Being responsible for the trials of the women known as witches, he recommends torturing nature in order to extract her secrets. Violence against nature goes hand in hand with the violence against women and indigenous peoples (in German Naturvölker).

It was John Locke who in his Second Treatise of Government (1690) showed how money helps to increase power and wealth beyond need. The key category is “property.” Because man has property in his own person and, therefore, his labor “whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature has provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned [sic] to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property” (B27). So the Earth is being regarded as absolute private property. In B36ff., he develops the thesis that money, because it is durable, has been introduced by “tacit agreement” (B50) in order to allow industrious people to get “larger Possessions, and a Right to them” beyond use. As a motive he identifies the “desire of having more than Men needed” (B37). “Government has no other end but the preservation of Property” (B94). Locke religiously legitimates the appropriation of the Earth by quoting Gen. 1:26–28: “God, by commanding to subdue, gave Authority so far to appropriate” (B35). And God gave the Earth to the “Industrious and the Rational” (B34).

Further Reading
See also: Celtic Spirituality; Druids and Druidry; Earth Mysteries; New Age; Paganism – Contemporary; Stonehenge.
Behind Locke's concept of property lies the Roman legal idea of "dominium." This means absolute power and gives the owner the right to do as he pleases with his property: "Ownership is the right to use and to consume (ius utendi et abutendi)." This concept was taken over by the Code Napoleon (Art. 544), which was the basis for later constitutions in Europe: "Ownership is the right to enjoy and use things in the most absolute manner." All these arguments contain the Western capitalist system in a nutshell: industrious and rational men have the absolute, religiously justified right to use the Earth (and slave and waged labor according to Locke) limitlessly to follow their desire to increase their possessions by money mechanisms to lead a comfortable life – not taking into account the consequences for people and nature. And government has to protect this accumulation of property by money mechanisms.

Karl Marx was the first to analyze the fetishist (i.e., religious character of money and capital accumulation on the basis of private property). He also saw that it leads to the destruction of people and nature: "The capitalist production develops only the technique and the combination of the production process in society by at the same time undermining the fountains of all wealth: the Earth and the worker" (Marx 1969: 529f.).

Neo-liberalism – winning the day since the 1980s and even more after the breakdown of the competing system – is the attempt to globalize this fetishist system of unfettered capital accumulation by turning all of life into a commodity. The legal instrument for doing so is the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement in the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO). By the right to patent plants, animals and now even the genes of human beings, transnational corporations (TNCs) increasingly control all natural resources (e.g., seeds, therapeutic plants and bacteria, more and more forests and even the human genome) for the single purpose of private capital accumulation. Consequently more and more biodiversity is being destroyed and the nutrition and medical care of the world's population endangered.

Politically U.S.-led Western state power is being used to deregulate, privatize and liberalize the economic mechanisms dominated by finance capital. Its agents are undemocratic international institutions like the G8, WTO, IMF and World Bank. Their institutional policies are speeding up capital accumulation by speculation, tax flight, pressurizing governments by the threat of capital flight to cut taxes and subsidize profits, and using the privatized media to induce the pseudo-religious, neoliberal values of limitless consumption and money into people's hearts and minds ("cult-marketing"). The result is ever-increasing poverty, exclusion, social degradation, violence, ecological destruction and the decline of democratic participation of the people, not only in the impoverished but also in the rich countries. One example of imperial politics consciously tolerating natural disaster is the decision of the Bush administration in 2001 not to ratify the international Kyoto Protocol asking for the reduction of CO2-emissions, with the simple argument that this would be bad for the economy, (i.e., capital accumulation).

As the large majority of governments has been co-opted or disarmed by the power of capital and public deficits, opposition and alternative vision and spirituality mainly come from civil society. There has been some support from the UNDP's Human Development Reports. These have developed the "Human Development Index" measuring economic success not only as growth in monetary terms like the GNP's, but adding social and ecological indicators. Since the UN is becoming increasingly weakened by capital and the Western powers, the main actors remain the social, ecological and human rights movements. In industrial capitalism it was the labor movement that created countervailing power. In neo-liberalism, capitalism has become global and total, affecting all dimensions of society and life. Consequently all sectors have started to organize resistance: women against the feminization of poverty, Indian farmers against the manipulation and monopolization of seeds and against dams, and indigenous people in Latin America against the destruction of the rainforests and their own social, cultural and religious life. Fishing communities protest against the commercial overfishing of their waters, the majority of Bolivian society against the privatizing of water, French farmers against the "McDonaldization" of the globe – and a growing part of the labor movement is joining in.

What are these people's movements worldwide asking for? There is no blueprint for one alternative top-down system as real socialism thought. The key demand is to give people back the control over their culture and economies, building the economy from the bottom up based on social, ecological and democratic criteria. The key question is: how to serve the concrete life of people in harmony with nature? Given the present power situation a double strategy is being followed.

On the one hand, people can satisfy their basic needs in harmony with nature as much as possible by themselves at the local and regional level, breaking the fetishist totalitarianism of capital accumulation. Douthwaite (1996) has identified four crucial areas: interest-free exchange (LETS); cooperative banking leaving people's savings in the region; decentralized ecological energy production (sun, water, wind, biomass); local ecological food production and marketing. The latter has gained even broader support in Europe after the disasters of industrialized agriculture (BSE etc.).

On the other hand, new beginnings at the local level will be constantly destroyed if the macro-structures of the markets are not politically regulated according to social, ecological and democratic criteria. Therefore, the
movements will have to form alliances at all levels, including the global, as has been shown in the successful campaigns against the total rule of TNCs through the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), the new liberalization round of the WTO (Seattle 1999), the (often illegitimate) debt (Jubilee 2000) and the undemocratic structures of IMF, World Bank and G8 (Prague 2000, Genoa 2001). A special emphasis will need to be given to the democratic control of the financial markets including the taxing of speculative capital transactions (Tobin tax), the drying out of tax havens to curb tax flight, regaining the control of capital flows in order to stop the “hot money” which caused the Asian crisis (Kairos Europa, Pax Christi, ATTAC and other movements).

Breaking the absoluteness of property is the underlying issue at the local as well as the global level. Even the Romans had the concept of “patrimonium” besides “dominium.” It means the property which has to be preserved as a legacy for children and grandchildren. So we need legal systems with a variety of property forms: personal property for basic needs-related use, cooperative, communal and national ownership of public goods and services, and private ownership of the means of production – this being linked to the obligation to also serve life and the common good (e.g., as expressed in the German and Swiss constitutions). This will help humanity protect nature from being exploited, polluted, degraded, and communities from losing control over their public goods (like water) and services. This will also allow nations to redistribute privately produced wealth through progressive tax systems. At present globalization is increasingly eroding these basic rights.

The political will to implement changes has to be created by the people affected. Here the religions have a pivotal role. There is no religion allowing for the basic values of capitalism like greed, egoistic individualistic competition, consumption and a limitless accumulation of wealth at the cost of people and the Earth. Particularly, indigenous peoples clearly state that the Earth does not belong to human beings, but human beings belong to the Earth. In 2000 there was a colloquium which brought together people from the Judeo-Christian traditions, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism who expressed their determination to work for the redirection of the global economy and the capitalist culture in order to stop the destruction of people and nature. Over the last century the ecumenical movement has challenged the adaptation of the post-Constantinian churches to power and money. Since 1997/1998 the World Council of Churches and the denominational world communions have been engaging the churches in a “committed process of recognition, education and confession (processus confessionis) against economic injustice and destruction of nature” (World Alliance of Reformed Churches, The 23rd General Council). This means that the issue of globalization, religion and nature has been qualified as a question of the same seriousness as Nazism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa – affecting not only the practice but also the being of the Church.

Ulrich Duchrow

Further Reading
See also: Anarchism; Bioregionalism (various); Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Environmental Ethics; Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism; Radical Environmentalism; World Council of Churches and Ecumenical Thought.
G-O Road (Northern California)

As early as 1963 the U.S. Forest Service began considering plans to build a two-lane, paved road 55 miles from Gasquet to Orleans (G-O Road) through a remote and rugged area of northern California, rich in Douglas fir and in the traditions of Karuk, Tolawa, and Yurok peoples. The Forest Service claimed it needed the road to maintain the Six Rivers National Forest, to help control fires, to provide access to recreation, and to allow loggers to haul timber to mills in Crescent City. After creation of the Redwood National Park preserved 70,000 acres of the Forest in 1968, the timber industry increased pressure to build the road.

The Indian peoples believed that some 13,500 acres in the Blue Creek Unit of the Forest, a span of about six miles in the middle of the proposed G-O Road corridor, were sacred, places where they could engage in spiritual activity. There, approximately 140 elders meditated and guided adolescents through rites of passage, and tribal healers made medicine, gaining power to lead such rituals as the White Deerskin Dance of the World Renewal Ceremony. These rituals were meaningful only if leaders became empowered by visiting the sacred sites in solitude surrounded by unspoiled natural environment. They contended that any manmade interference with nature in this area prevented their exercising religion freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

This belief was explained and documented by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act Report and by an anthropological consulting firm hired by the Forest Service. The consultants concluded that “intrusions on the sanctity of the Blue Creek high country are . . . potentially destructive of the very core of Northwest [Indian] religious beliefs and practices” (Theodoratus 1979: 420).

Then, in 1981, the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places declared the area eligible for special status, and the national Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation wrote a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture, superior to the Chief of the Forest Service. He maintained “. . . it is fundamentally wrong to so seriously impact an area held sacred by a group of American citizens, if any feasible alternatives exist” (Aldrich 1982: 1). Yet the Forest Service ignored these admonitions and proceeded with plans to build the road. It claimed it could mitigate the adverse impact on Indian religion by not building the road over any “archaeological areas” and by protecting specific religious sites from logging activity.

With their administrative remedies exhausted, Indian leaders turned to the judiciary. The U.S. District Court found evidence to support the Theodoratus Report and issued an injunction to stop the road. The Court of Appeals affirmed, but a 5–3 U.S. Supreme Court reversed.

Writing for the Court’s majority, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor relied on a rational basis test rather than strict scrutiny, which is usually applied in cases involving fundamental rights or insular minorities. Instead of demanding that the government justify the road on grounds that it was necessary to achieve a compelling state interest, she said the road could be built if it were rationally related to a legitimate governmental purpose. While she acknowledged that the G-O Road “could have devastating effects on traditional Indian religious practices,” she perceived that building the road was merely an internal governmental decision related to the use of its own property. Further, she wrote,


She claimed the road was merely an “incidental” interference with religious freedom, not a deliberate government attack on a person’s faith. Therefore, it was permissible.

It is true that members of the Indian community were not prohibited from going through the motions of meditation, making medicine, or performing ceremonies. In that sense the G-O Road would not infringe upon the free exercise of religion. But the Supreme Court decision failed to take into account the nature of Indian religions. Unless the high country remained sacred, where leaders and members of the community could find privacy, silence, and undisturbed natural conditions, their religious acts were meaningless.

Nearly two years after the Court’s decision, on 2 January 1990, the Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association and three individuals appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States. They stated that they had spent their legal remedies under U.S. law and requested the OAS to intervene and protect their basic, human rights. They supported their petition by citing provisions in two international documents.

American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, Article III: “Every person has the right freely to profess a religious faith, and to manifest and practice it both in public and in private.”

American Convention on Human Rights, Article 12: “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and of religion. This right includes freedom to maintain . . . one’s religion or beliefs . . .”

Further, the Tolowa Nation Tribal Council adopted a formal resolution supporting the request, which the parties attached to their petition.
Eleven months later, on 27 November 1990, the petitioners wrote to OAS, withdrawing their request. They said, Congress has “passed certain legislation that prohibits construction of the G-O Road.” This legislation, the Smith River National Recreation Area Act, signed by President Bush on November 16, preserved most of the natural surroundings in the region (PL101–612).

It was a long struggle with an abrupt and curious conclusion. Persons from three Indian tribes failed to persuade the Forest Service and the U.S. Supreme Court to guarantee the right to exercise their religion in a national forest. But, finally, they were able to join with environmentalists and convince Congress to prevent the government from building a paved road through their sacred lands in northern California.

JeDon A. Emenhiser

Further Reading


See also: Black Mesa; Deloria, Vine, Jr.; Devils Tower, Mato Tipi, or Bears Lodge; Indigenous Environmental Network; Law, Religion, and Native American Lands; Manifest Destiny.

Godesses – History of

Books with titles such as The Rebirth of the Goddess are now common but were unheard of thirty years ago, at least as serious offerings to theological literature written in European languages. While there were Pagan groups who worshipped goddesses before the second wave of feminism, beginning in the late sixties and early seventies of the twentieth century, there is no question that, at least in Euro-American contexts, feminism spurred the growth and acceptability of female imagery and language about deity immensely. Today, the “rebirth” of the goddess is not only commonplace in Pagan religions, but is also a theological issue for Jews and Christians, as is demonstrated by the many controversies about non-sexist liturgies in those religions.

A title such as “rebirth of the Goddess” contains two theses that deserve examination. First is that it is proper and permissible to imagine the deity in female terms. Second is that this language represents a “rebirth,” a return to something familiar; it is not a new phenomenon or an unheard of feminist innovation. However, a title such as “rebirth of the Goddess” hides another thesis important to the history of goddesses: some religions are not experiencing a “rebirth” of the goddess because they never lost her in the first place. This third thesis strengthens the cogency of the first thesis while demonstrating the anomaly of a religious context in which the “rebirth” of the goddess could be necessary or controversial.

However, the first two theses are contentious for large segments of the European and North American public, who take for granted the convention that deity could only
be properly addressed in male terms and regard it as silly, offensive, or both to suggest the deity could be addressed as female. But at the beginning of the third millennium, many passionately religious people in the Euro-American context do call the deity with whom they relate "she" and "goddess." They also often claim that such namings of deity are a vast improvement over the male-only language and imagery for deity with which they grew up, especially concerning reverence for nature and environmentally sound practices. However, many other people who care passionately about the environment and about the dignity of women regard goddess worship and discussions about the antiquity and ubiquity of such practices as a diversion from dealing with more critical issues, a luxury that is costly when so much is at stake environmentally and politically.

Many feminist theologians and scholars of religion who work to reconstruct goddess worship base their case on logic, on knowledge of how religious symbols work, rather than on historical precedent. Feminist Christians and Jews rely on the argument that gender cannot be an attribute of deity but is only an analogy based on familiar human experiences. Therefore, the acceptability of female analogies for deity has much more to do with society than with deity, and the horror with which some religious people react to the image of "goddess" says a great deal about their views of society and of women. For obvious reasons, historical precedent is not the first line of argumentation for such Jewish and Christian theologians, though they do appeal to the nearly universal use of female images of deity in world religions.

But what of the claim that contemporary Paganism represents a "rebirth" of the Goddesses worshipped in ancient times? This argument is more complex and difficult to sustain. For some contemporary Pagans, it is important to claim that their practices involve direct historical continuity with ancient religions practiced in pre-Christian times and, perhaps, in an underground fashion, throughout the Christian era until it was safe for them to be practiced openly again in recent years. Some contemporary Pagans, especially in some feminist spirituality movements, combine their fervent belief that they are practicing an ancient goddess-worshipping religion with an equally fervent belief that these ancient religions fostered societies of equality and peace in which women were honored equals, if not rulers. Some would claim that a "matriarchal golden age" existed before the rise of patriarchy and male monotheism.

Other contemporary Pagans are less concerned with claims of direct historical continuity and more likely to regard their religion as a new religious movement partially inspired by and drawing upon the sacred stories and religious practices of ancient religions. They would also state that the validity of their practices and beliefs does not depend on their antiquity and that some or even all their religious forms may be of recent origin even though they resemble ancient myths and rituals. Such practitioners also make strong arguments about the contemporary worth and value of goddess worship, without necessarily claiming that such religious practices led to a social utopia in ancient times.

The weight of opinion among scholars of religion, whether or not they may also practice some form of goddess worship, favors the second version of this hypothesis. Direct historical continuity with ancient goddess worship and the secret practice of goddess-worshipping paganism throughout the Christian era are difficult, if not impossible, to prove. In addition, most scholars of religion are well acquainted with the historical nature of all religious beliefs and practices and regard religions as ever changing and developing collections of ideas rather than static entities having an unchanging essence that endures through time.

The claim, so important to some feminist spirituality groups, that ancient goddess-worshipping societies were ideal peaceful and egalitarian societies has been controversial even among religious feminists. Most versions of the so-called matriarchal hypothesis attribute the rise of female dominance to invasions of peaceful Old European societies by male-dominant warrior societies who worshipped male deities. This event replaces the "Fall" of Christian sacred history in the narratives told by many goddess-worshipping groups. Many critics have pointed out that no explanation has been offered for the emergence of male dominance among the invading warriors, which means the fundamental riddle of why male dominance is so common has not been solved. Furthermore, it is pointed out that evidence about the character of earlier societies is scant, making it difficult at best to assert much about their social and religious practices. Finally, this sacred history still relies heavily on one of the core myths of Christianity, in that it posits a fall into "sinful" history, simply changing the story of how that fall happened. Many religious feminists have questioned the relevance of that motif for feminist forms of religion and many feminists would claim that the appropriateness of naming deity as "she" does not depend on the accuracy of this sacred history.

Thus, one could claim a contemporary "rebirth" of the goddess, if one means a contemporary recurrence of an almost universal religious form among Euro-Americans, rather than a phoenix-like resurrection of ancient deities or direct historical continuity with ancient religions. It is important to set this "rebirth" in global context. Nothing is more useful to these debates than a dispassionate look at the data of world religions in longer and bigger perspective than the history of monotheism or Christianity. The most important fact learned from such study is that the absence of goddesses in monotheistic religions, not their presence in all other religions, ancient or contemporary, is
the unusual situation, the religious practice in need of explanation. In other words, contemporary pagans and other goddess worshippers, including Jews and Christians who address the deity using feminine pronouns, are doing nothing remarkable or innovative if their practices are looked at from the bigger perspective of human religious activity overall, rather than through the much narrower lens of familiar Abrahamic, monotheistic religions.

Goddesses were important in the earliest known religions and all the religions of the ancient world in which monotheism grew up, a point well known to the many religious groups that reject monotheism as part of their advocacy for the rebirth of the goddess. Many have pointed to numerous female figurines found in archeological sites from at least 25,000 years ago, among the oldest religious artifacts known, even though their exact significance cannot be ascertained. All the great ancient civilizations, so thoroughly studied by Western scholars and so beloved by many, were familiar with numerous goddesses. The Sumerian Inanna, who became the Mesopotamian Ishtar, was a goddess who celebrated her love for her husband Dumuzi (Mesopotamian Tamuz) in lusty poetry that still inspires many. The Egyptian Isis also loved her husband Osiris, who she revived from the dead to conceive their son Horus, whom she raised in secret. Representations of her with her great wings outspread or her son seated in her lap are still common. The goddesses of the Greek pantheon – Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, and Demeter – are also still well known and their stories are often retold. The story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone is one of the few mother–daughter stories in classical mythologies around the world. Other mythologies of pre-Christian Europe, such as Celtic, Germanic, and Nordic mythologies also included goddesses.

These stories vary greatly, but all of them involve, in some form or another, death and resurrection, which most scholars think is an analogy for the changing seasons and the growth of the crops on which life depended. Sometimes the male deity dies and is reborn in some fashion, but just as often the dying and rising deity is a goddess. Innana descends into the underworld, and growth stops until she returns. Persephone is abducted into the underworld, and while Demeter wanders in search of her, drought and famine prevail in the world of humans. Parallels with the basic Christian story have been noted many times.

Goddesses are also found in the great Asian religions, including contemporary forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, undercutting the contemporary Westerner impression that goddess worship is an archaic or ancient phenomenon outmoded in the modern world. Hinduism is the most “goddess friendly” of the major contemporary religions, and the goddesses are at least as popular and important as the male deities to most Hindus. Their images are everywhere in India and are even becoming familiar in the West. Perhaps the best known is the beneficent Durga riding her tiger, her many implements displayed in her many arms. But the wrathful Kali is also well known, as is Sarasvatī, who especially patronized art and scholarship. Every Hindu businessperson attends to Laksūmi, the goddess of wealth and well-being.

More surprising is the presence of “goddesses” in Buddhism, which is a non-theistic religion in its philosophical forms. But Buddhism also involves a great deal of symbolism, mythology, art, and ritual. In these dimensions of Buddhism, various anthropomorphic forms, both male and female, abound. As in Hinduism, the female mythological figures are at least as popular and important as the male figures. Tara, a peaceful helper, is especially popular among Tibetan Buddhists and Kwan-yin, her counterpart in Chinese Buddhism, is universally venerated, especially by women. Many Westerners have now begun to do meditation practices associated with both these popular female figures. These are only two of the best-known Buddhist female figures in a mythological universe populated by hundreds, if not thousands, of female figures. In addition to these female compassionate helpers and saviors, the esoteric schools of Tibetan Buddhism use the image of sexual complementarity to convey many of their central teachings. The deities portrayed in their esoteric art are often interpreted as representations of enlightenment, and the female deities convey this message as much as the male deities.

Many have pointed out that even the monotheistic religions imagine deity as female and call upon her. Even in the Bible, the wisdom literature includes the image of personified Wisdom as a feminine dimension of deity. Many contemporary Christians searching for traditional but feminine ways to think of deity have turned to this image and studied the literature about her. In many Christian contexts the Virgin Mary has been the most accessible and beloved divine figure for most ordinary churchgoers, both historically and in many parts of the contemporary world. Some would argue, correctly, that Mary is not really a goddess, but only a human. Nevertheless, if one looks, not to theological judgments, but to how Mary functions in the religious lives of many Catholics, one would have to say that she functions as a goddess, whether or not formal theology regards her as such. Jewish mysticism in the Kabbalah also contains significant female imagery of the deity. In the complex diagram of the flow of divine life used by Kabbalists, a number of the deity’s attributes are female, including the Shekhinah, the indwelling presence of deity who goes into exile with her people.

Clearly, most religions have never lost the practice of goddess worship. For reasons that are still not completely understood, monotheistic religions that developed in the Middle East did begin to regard goddess worship with horror at some point in their development and, as a result,
it became unthinkable to many adherents of those religions that deity could be called “she” as easily as “he.” Until the second wave of feminism, most Jews and Christians took it for granted that masculine language would be used about the deity, even while they also believed that God does not have a body and could not be imaged. But when people began to question other aspects of Abrahamic religions, it was inevitable that they also questioned its peculiar use of gendered images for the deity. Some who are dissatisfied with male monotheism have rejected those religions for a neo-pagan identity, inspired in many cases by our relatively scant knowledge of ancient goddess worship. That is one kind of “rebirth.” Others have tried to reintroduce feminine pronouns and imagery into traditional monotheistic contexts. That is another kind of “rebirth.”

In view of this information, contemporary Western goddess worshippers, whether Pagans or theological radicals in Judaism and Christianity, certainly can sustain the thesis that it is normal, permissible, appropriate, and of religious activity is out-of-doors. Many goddess worshippers as well as many Jews and Christians who favor female imagery for deity are also environmental activists.

Many advocates of goddess worship would claim that this link between worship of female deities and ecological consciousness is inherent in the symbolism of female deities. Others would dispute such a claim, disagreeing with the gender essentialism implied in positing an inherent link between goddess worship and reverence for nature. The evidence of world religions also undercuts this claim. Goddesses tend to mirror and validate the concerns of those who worship them, and the propensity of goddesses to patronize warriors when they are worshipped by warriors is only the most obvious case in point. Thus the tendency of contemporary Western goddess worshippers to be unusually environmentally aware is probably due more to their social location than to anything inherent in the worship of female deities. Contemporary goddess worshippers are iconoclasts who critique the received tradition in many ways; breaking with the ecologically irresponsible ways of mainstream culture is just one way they break with tradition; imagining deity in female ways and relating with her is another. Reverence for nature and female imagery for deity converge in contemporary Western goddess worship, but it would be difficult to sustain that link for all religious contexts in which female deities are worshipped.

Rita Gross

Further Reading


See also: Christ, Carol; Daly, Mary; Ecofeminism (various); Estés, Clarissa Pinkola; Feminist Spirituality Movement; Gimbutas, Marija; Griffin, Susan; Merchant, Carolyn; Paganism – Contemporary; Reclaiming; Sea Goddesses and Female Water Spirits; Sexuality and Green Consciousness; Shakti; Shiva, Vandana; Sjöö, Monica; Spretnak, Charlene; Starhawk; Walker, Alice; Wicca; Women and Animals; Z Budapest.

### Golden Dawn

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was founded in England on 12 February 1888 by William Wynn Wescott, Samuel Liddell Mathers, and William Robert Woodman. It was a graded initiatic magical order that based its structure on the Kabalistic Tree of Life – a diagram purporting to show the structure of the universe and its relationship to the divine – and placed itself within the tradition of Rosicrucian spirituality. Its members included a number of prominent figures, including poet William Butler Yeats and the controversial figure Aleister Crowley. The Golden Dawn is also notable in that, from its inception, it accepted women on equal footing with men. In 1892 Mathers founded a second order, within the structure of the Golden Dawn, to teach practical magic, the Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis. In 1900, because of a controversy over the legitimacy of Crowley’s initiation into the second order, Mathers, who then resided in Paris, was expelled from the order by the British contingent. Further political conflicts over revising the constitution after Mathers expulsion led to multiple schisms by 1903, and with the closing of the original Isis-Urania temple in London in 1914 the Golden Dawn’s life as an institution ended. A number of initiates founded derivative orders, some of which remain active today.

Although rooted in a Christian worldview, the Golden Dawn presented a spiritual paradigm which both affirmed engaged work with the world and approached the cosmos as a manifestation of the divine. Its course of study synthesized wide-ranging European esoteric lore, including alchemy, astrology, tarot, and the Kabbalah. One of the key rites of the Golden Dawn, the Adeptus Minor initiation, identified the “Great Work” of the individual as “to purify and exalt my spiritual nature that with the Divine aid I may at length obtain to be more than human.” This encapsulates much of the teaching of the Golden Dawn; rather than rejecting material existence and human will, it sought to transform them through ritual, meditation, study, and ethical living.

Although its institutional life was relatively brief, the Golden Dawn had a great influence on twentieth-century magical movements in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Americas. It provided basic liturgical structures and esoteric assumptions for Thelema, the religious tradition founded by Crowley, as well as many of the particular symbolic systems and magical approaches for contemporary Pagan and Wiccan spirituality. A clear example is the method of consecrating a ritual space, common in most Wiccan traditions, by calling upon the Aristotelian elements in four directions, which derives from the rituals for invoking the four elements in the Golden Dawn’s Ritual of the Portal and the later Watchtower Ceremony. Numerous early writers and leaders of the Pagan and Wiccan world participated in Golden Dawn-derived groups, and early twentieth-century occult writers who were members of the Golden Dawn, such as Crowley and Dion Fortune, continue to be very influential. Both traditional esoteric groups and contemporary Pagan traditions benefit from the Golden Dawn’s synthesis of Western esoteric systems that revere the natural world as both a manifestation of spiritual mysteries and a key to their understanding. By synthesizing this lore and providing a context for the study of practical magic, the Golden Dawn opened the door for later magical religions, which not only used the natural world as a path to the divine, but located divinity there.

Grant Potts

### Further Reading


See also: Alchemy; Magic; Magic, Animism, and the Shaman’s Craft; Paganism – Contemporary; Western Esotericism; Wicca.

### Goodall, Jane (1934–)

London-born primatologist Jane Goodall is most famous for her ground-breaking study of chimpanzees in Tanzania, but by the turn of the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, she had become one of the world’s leading conservationists. She founded the Jane Goodall Institute
(founded in 1977) and its “Roots and Shoots” program (in 1991) to reach out to young people and get them involved in protecting animals, vulnerable humans, and the environment. She has become increasingly open about her belief in God, in part to bring hope to those who experience despair as they learn about and cope with environmental degradation, species extinctions, and human violence.

Goodall’s fascination with animals and the natural world began early, during her childhood in Bournemouth, England, and waxed stronger as she matured. Encouraged by her mentor, the legendary anthropologist and paleontologist Louis Leakey, Goodall began her landmark study of chimpanzees on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika, East Africa in 1960 at the age of 26. This began what would become the longest continuous field study of animals in their natural habitat.

Early in her fieldwork Goodall observed chimpanzees making and using tools by stripping leaves off twigs to fish termites out of a nest. This tool-making behavior, previously believed to exist only in humans, represented a significant discovery that Leakey concluded: “Now we must redefine tool, redefine man, or accept chimpanzees as humans.” Goodall’s discoveries and unconventional methodology, which included living in her subjects’ habitat, distinguishing them by personality, and giving them names instead of numbers, revolutionized the field of primatology. Her methods were also criticized, however, by many scientists, as insufficiently objective.

Although not formally trained when she began her research, Goodall later earned a Ph.D. in Ethology at Cambridge University in 1965 and then returned to Tanzania to establish the Gombe Stream Research Centre. This began a lifelong pattern of establishing institutions to carry out and continue scientific and conservation work that would benefit science, humans, and the natural world. In 1971 Goodall began working as a professor at Stanford and then later at Tufts, the University of Southern California, and Cornell. She subsequently published more than sixty scientific articles and has been involved in numerous videos and films produced by National Geographic, Discovery, HBO, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and others. She also authored two dozen books, including My Friends the Wild Chimpanzees (1967), the best-selling In the Shadow of Man (1971), and her autobiography Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey (1999), which explored her religious and ethical pilgrimage. Her writings have been published in more than a dozen languages.

Goodall’s philosophy is expressed in one of her often-quoted aphorisms: “Only if we understand can we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help shall all be saved” (2000: 5). Through her work and activities she strives to foster understanding of the connection between environmental conservation and human development, while calling on people to care, take responsibility, and act heroically for the sake of all living creatures. Goodall’s message also includes sharing some of the lesser-known characteristics and abilities of chimpanzees, such as being omnivorous, expressing violent behavior at times, and being capable of learning sign language. Some that she has encountered also enjoy painting and like to watch sunsets. By describing how chimpanzees express emotion, communicate, and share to some degree the human trait of abstract thinking, and perhaps even religious feelings, Goodall has helped change many people’s perceptions about wild animals and the acceptability of species loss as a cost of progress. In Reason for Hope Goodall envisioned a future of ever more environmentally sustainable human progress. She grounded this optimism in the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of young people, in the potential of humans to solve problems and overcome great odds, and in the “indomitable human spirit.”

Goodall embodies what some have called the “civic scientist” – one who goes beyond teaching and research to educate and actively engage society in solving pressing problems. She has received more than a dozen honorary doctorates and fifty awards of distinction including, most recently, the Ghandi/King Award for Non-Violence and the Benjamin Franklin Medal, the United States’ oldest science award. In 2002 United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan named Goodall a United Nations Messenger of Peace, noting her “dedication to what is best in mankind.”

Well into the twenty-first century Goodall continued touring the world (averaging 300 days a year on the road), promoting grassroots development and conservation work in more than seventy countries. In 2002 she was appointed to a United Nations advisory panel to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. As she put it during the summit itself, she was there to bring “the voices of the animals” into that important human council (author Taylor’s fieldnotes, August 2002). She did so in part by speaking strongly in favor of the Earth Charter, as well as by participating in pilgrimages celebrating the nearby Cradle of Humanity, where ancient human ancestors were found. The comments made there by Goodall and the other luminaries constituted a kind of consecration of the Earth’s evolutionary story, and had many affinities with the so-called Epic of Evolution.

Goodall’s message and writing have broad appeal in part because they are suffused with a religiously inclusive spirituality; her theism is not sectarian and is panentheistic in tone. She believes animals have spiritual significance and are able to communicate with humans, even bringing their own messages of hope, oracle-like, into the human world. A lifelong observer of chimpanzees, she also believes that some of them may even have their own forms of nature-related spirituality. It is in such spirituality that her ethics is grounded, namely, an ethics that understands all life has intrinsic value and is related as kin in the evolutionary story. It is also from her spirituality that she
finds her optimistic expectation of a significant world improvement through individual empowerment. Through numerous media and her continuing efforts, Goodall has inspired countless people at all levels of influence around the world to make wider and deeper exertions on behalf of each other, the environment, and life on Earth.

Paula J. Posas Bron Taylor

Further Reading
See also: Animals (various); Animism (various); Cognitive Ethology, Social Morality, and Ethics; Earth Charter; Epic of Evolution; Environmental Ethics; Primate Spirituality; Tree Music; United Nations’ “Earth Summits”.

Gordon, Aharon David (1856–1922)

Aharon David Gordon was one of the leading ideological figures of the labor Zionist movement. Born in Troyanov, Russia in 1856, Gordon received a classical Orthodox Jewish education from private tutors, while studying secular subjects on his own. He found employment for 23 years helping to manage the estate of his celebrated relative, the great banker and philanthropist Baron Joseph Guenzberg. In 1903 ownership of the estate changed hands. Gordon, 48 years old and out of a job, made the remarkable decision to leave Russia in order to join the young *halutzim* (pioneers) who, through strenuous physical labor, were creating the material basis for the Jewish return to Palestine. He was to be joined by his wife and daughter only five years later. Working until cancer drained his physical strength, Gordon died in Kibbutz Deganyah in 1922.

Although Gordon never held any official posts in the Zionist movement, his ideas, writings, and personal example made a powerful impression which still continues to influence Israeli thinking. In his single systematic treatise, *Ha’Adam ve’HaTeva (The Human Being and Nature)* and many occasional essays and letters, he advanced a general philosophical anthropology, a critique of modernity and a theory of religion, which he constantly applied to the immediate challenges faced by the Zionist community in Palestine.

Gordon held that human beings relate to their world in two essentially different ways. Firstly, we experience the world through the intuitive, inclusive, and largely unconscious activity of *living* as integral components of the cosmos. Secondly, we critically inspect our lived experience in order to formulate limited, rational, and fully conscious *knowledge* of the world. The role of religion is to reintegrate us with the natural world, to re-establish the proper balance between life and knowledge. Agricultural work takes on tremendous religious importance. By physically working the land, people take their place as part of nature and make their uniquely human contribution to its creative organic processes. Gordon felt that the human connection to the cosmos must be mediated through membership in an ethnic national community whose culture and religion reflect the connection made to the cosmos through the experience of life in a particular geographical setting. This doctrine did not admit of any innate superiority of one group over another, but rather rejected universalistic systems (e.g., Marxism and Christianity) which eschew ethnic identity and call for individuals to see themselves purely as members of the human race.

Gordon’s program for Jewish renewal in Palestine was a direct application of his broader philosophy. Judaism and the Jewish people had both been alienated from nature during their 2000 years of exile from Palestine. The Jewish people had been cut off from the natural environment which constituted their original and particular link to the cosmos. In the Diaspora, Jews had been further alienated from nature by anti-Semitic restrictions on Jewish land ownership and Jewish employment in agriculture. By returning to Palestine and working the land, Gordon hoped that the Jewish people could be revitalized and even serve as a moral exemplar to other members of the human family of nations.

Berel Dov Lerner

Further Reading
Goshalas

The Hindi word goshala, literally “place for cows,” means cowshed, dairy, or pasture, but also specifically refers to institutions in India and Nepal which are homes for aged and non-productive cows.

Respect for animal life has deep roots in South Asian civilization. The doctrine of ahimsa, or non-injury to sentient creatures, first appears at the very end of the Vedic period (ca. sixth century B.C.E.) and in the following centuries becomes central to the philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The specific Hindu focus on the inviolability of the cow, however, does not emerge until the fourth century, and is not accepted by the general Hindu populace until much later. It is the Hindu concept of the cow’s sanctity that provides the rationale for the existence of goshalas.

Many scholars see the Hindu sacred cow concept as essentially religious in nature. W. Norman Brown, for example, cites as contributing factors ancient associations of the cow with the Mother Goddess and fertility; the role of the cow in Vedic ritual; the figurative use of words for cow in the Vedic literature and their subsequent literal interpretation; Vedic prohibitions against violations of a Brahman’s cow; and the ahimsa concept. Other theories of origin, however, involve a variety of political, economic and ecological factors. The most controversial of these, anthropologist Marvin Harris’ cultural ecological explanation put forward in the mid-1960s, initiated a spirited debate in the social sciences over the nature of India’s sacred cow concept. In Harris’ view, the sacred cow concept is not so much a religious phenomenon as a cultural mechanism that evolved to protect an important economic resource in the context of the Indian subcontinent’s specific ecologic and political setting. However, in challenging this interpretation, Frederick Simoons argues that religious factors play a significant, if not necessarily all-encompassing role, in explaining Hindu attitudes toward the cow.

Whatever the origins of India’s sacred cow concept, modern goshalas reflect the complexity of their origins. Thus, many temples dedicated to the Hindu god Krishna, for whom the cow is a favored animal, operate goshalas to provide milk for temple rituals. Before independence, Hindu rajas (kings) maintained goshalas at their courts as expressions of Hindu piety. But most numerous in number are the goshalas maintained by India’s business castes (vanias). These Hindu merchant communities (many of whom are Vaishnavas, followers of Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna) provide financial support for cows which are beyond milking age or are sick, lame, or ill. The reasons given for this support are service to the cow (go-seva) and cow protection and development (go-rakshan). The goshalas are also the locale of Hindu rituals such as cow worship and Krishna-related festivals such as Gopashtami and Goverdhan Puja.

Vania goshalas are concentrated in northwestern India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the Bombay region), where vania communities are concentrated. (Jains in this region also shelter cattle in animal refuges called pinjrapoles.) Wherever vanias have migrated in India, they have taken the institution of the goshala with them. Hence, goshalas may be found as far afield as Assam and Tamil Nadu.

Two modern forms of the goshala are the Gandhian goshala and the gosadan. Service to “Mother Cow” and cow protection were central to M.K. Gandhi’s (the Mahatma’s) philosophy and teaching, and ashrams founded in the Gandhian tradition often maintain goshalas. These serve both as refuges for “useless” cows as well as dairies providing milk for the ashram’s inhabitants. The most recent incarnation of the goshala is the gosadan, reserves for unproductive cattle established since the 1950s in remote rural areas as part of the Government of India’s Five Year Plans.

Goshalas were estimated to number around 3000 in the mid-twentieth century. Three decades later, this writer observed that the institutions were declining in numbers and importance as India modernized and became more secular in outlook (Lodrick 1981). However, recent events in India may require this view to be reevaluated. The emergence of Hindu revival movements (the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP], for instance, has incorporated support for goshalas into its political platform) has given goshalas increased significance as symbols of traditional Hindu religious values.

Further Reading

Graves, Robert von Ranke (1895–1985)

Robert Graves was an English poet, novelist and critic, author of about 140 works ranging from poetry to biography, anthropology, and mythology. His “grammar of poetic myth,” The White Goddess (1948) has been especially influential for nature religion in the twentieth century, and remains his most famous spiritual work.

Born in Wimbledon, South London, Graves was the son of the writer and folklorist A.P. Graves (with whom W.B. Yeats quarreled over his treatment of Irish folklore), and a descendant of the German historian, Leopold von Ranke. As a baby, he had his head patted by Algernon Swinburne, and in later life he joked that something of the poet’s unconventional spirituality was passed on to him at that moment. After service in the First World War, in which he was badly wounded and read his own obituary in The Times, Graves studied at Oxford University and was briefly Professor of English Literature at the University of Cairo before becoming a full-time writer. Accompanied by the American poet and critic Laura Riding (1901–1991), with whom he had a complex and often troubled relationship (1926–1940), he moved to Mallorca in 1929. This lifelong residency was broken only by a return to England during the Second World War. He was Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1961 to 1966.

Graves is known for his love poetry and his historical fiction, the latter of which is distinguished by its willingness to offer creative interpretations of myth and history. This is well illustrated in novels such as I, Claudius and Claudius the God (1934), The Golden Fleece (1944), King Jesus (1946) and Seven Days in New Crete (US title, Watch the North Wind Rise, 1949). Graves’ complex scholarly works such as The Nazarene Gospel Restored (co-authored with Joshua Podro, 1953), and his two-volume compendium The Greek Myths (1955) are similarly imaginative, with the latter restoring some of the violence and even barbarity of the original legends and perhaps encouraging modern Pagans to de-sentimentalize the ancient world. “Poetry is a condition, not a profession,” he was wont to remark, and throughout his life he emphasized the bardic, even sacred function of the poet, often linking the art of poetry with its pagan origins.

His famous investigation of poetic myth, The White Goddess, has proved extremely popular with practitioners of nature religions for a number of reasons, although it has also been challenged. Graves’ fondness for Celtic literature, especially ancient Irish and Welsh poetry, helped to generate contemporary interest in these literatures and the spiritual practices of their creators, while his central argument that the One Goddess is the great Muse of Western culture has won widespread support within nature religions. Building on the work of Jane Harrison, Graves linked the faces of the Goddess as Maiden, Mother, and Crone to the phases of the moon, and saw her as eternally contested by the God of the Waxing and of the Waning Year. For Graves, the Goddess and the poetry she inspires is a profound challenge to rationalist and patriarchal thought, epitomized by Christianity and the industrialized, war-torn Europe that so horrified him.

The book has been seen as eccentric in academic circles, where it has been challenged on historical, literary and political grounds, and it has also met with criticism in the wider world. Laura Riding was particularly critical, perhaps because many of Graves’ readers believed her to be the book’s inspiration. In 1975 she denounced Graves, claiming that he misappropriated her ideas about women and spirituality and served up “a foamy grandiose effusion of nothingish spiritualistics” rather than a work of genuine profundity and feminist consciousness. The essentialism of Graves’ thinking about gender, neatly expressed in the title of his poem, “Man Does, Woman Is” (1964), has also generated considerable debate. Graves himself was ambivalent about The White Goddess, perhaps because parts of it were, he felt, magically inspired rather than consciously researched and written. In 1955 he is said to have written to a stranger: “Some day scholars will sort out the White Goddess grain from the chaff. It’s a crazy book and I didn’t mean to write it” (Seymour-Smith 1982: 405).

Despite or even because of such criticism, the influence of The White Goddess continues to be far-reaching. Its impact on Wicca, Paganism, Druidry and contemporary Celtic spiritualities has been especially profound. Graves’ biographer Martin Seymour-Smith has called him “a kind of prophet of ‘the Return of the Goddess.’”

Nick Freeman

Further Reading

Greco–Roman World

The notion of nature was used in several different ways in the history of the Greco–Roman world. This had much to do with the semantic range of the original terms themselves. The Greek term *physis* comes from the verb *physein/*phyein*, which means “originate,” “spring from”; the Roman term *natura* is semantically equivalent to the Greek, which it probably translates, as it derives from the verb *nasci*, meaning “give birth, origin.” The Greek term in particular was used in at least five senses in antiquity; first, to indicate the origin of plants (*phyton*), which literally spring from the Earth (*phyton < phyein*), and in this sense it contrasts what comes into being otherwise, which is indicated by the verb *gignesthai (= come into being, be born). Secondly, the term is used more generally as a noun to indicate the origin of everything (i.e., like *gignesthai*) and also the principle that gives rise to everything. Thirdly, the term is used, especially by early Greek philosophers, to indicate the process of becoming, growth, and differentiation of things. Fourthly, the term is used to indicate the result of this process of differentiation; that is, the essence of a thing, its special constitution, which makes it the particular kind of thing it is. In this sense the term is used in expressions such as “the nature of man,” “the nature of trees,” and so on, and involves a contrast between the essential characteristics of a thing and its acquired or imposed ones. Used in this sense, nature is contrasted with artifacts and conventions, and natural entities are distinguished from what man creates, such as tables and statues, but also laws, constitutions, the principles of economy and trade. Finally, the term “nature” is used to indicate the natural condition of a thing (i.e., the condition which is determined by its essence).

This conception of nature determined the attitude that ancient man took toward nature. On the one hand he respected nature and its powers, toward which he felt fear and anxiety, and this combination of respect and anxiety led the ancient man to assign divine qualities to natural powers and personify them as gods. Yet on the other hand, the ancient man also felt the urge to inquire into nature. Such an inquiry was usually called *ta physika* or *physike* (i.e., *episteme = science*), and had a philosophical and religious dimension but also what we now call scientific character. It typically included an inquiry into the origins of the universe, the nature of man and all animal beings, the nature of heavens and the celestial bodies, the nature of gods and so on. This kind of inquiry had been fascinating Greek philosophers and scientists from a very early stage, that is, from the sixth century B.C.E. to the end of antiquity, and it progressively became quite elaborate, complex, and systematic.

**Archaic and Classical Age (Eighth–Fourth Century B.C.E.)**

**Literature**

In early Greece nature was a power that inspired awe, as it was beyond man’s control, and this awe often gave rise to a religious feeling. Traditional Greek gods were to some extent connected with natural powers, such as the sea, the heaven, the fire and so on. This belief in the divinity of natural powers can be found in the early Greek literature. In the Homeric poems some gods are presented as masters of specific natural elements (e.g., Poseidon is the god of the sea). Although Greek gods are not always identifiable with natural powers (e.g., Zeus), it is quite significant that natural elements such as rivers and springs are gods and nymphs respectively, while we also know that winds, Earth, sun, and the ocean enjoyed widespread cults. In the Homeric poems natural elements are often described, sometimes in quite some detail. Yet nature is never described for its own sake, but is almost always considered in connection with man’s activity. Natural scenes when introduced have a metaphorical value aiming to highlight certain qualities of a hero. We can discern a Homeric predilection for the wild side of nature, which serves comparisons pointing to a hero’s manliness or bravery. Nature is not depicted as sympathetic to man, but rather as having little influence on man’s mind. Nevertheless the Homeric man can look at nature as such and appreciate its beauty, especially of flowers, trees, rivers, but also of heavens and the stars, and this becomes particularly evident in the Odyssey.

We find a similar attitude to nature in the rest of early Greek literature and also in that of the classical age. Nature was still considered in connection with man’s activity, but now its beauty was more highlighted. We often find descriptions of the nature of spring, of the rising or setting sun, of the night with or without moon, of the sea, and animals. Tragic poets in particular often give expression to man’s dependence on nature and also to man’s feeling of belonging to nature. Further, nature is often personified and ascribed human emotions.

**Early Greek philosophers, sophists, and scientists (sixth–fifth century B.C.E.)**

Early Greek philosophers were engaged in giving a comprehensive and rationalistic explanation of the natural
world. This concern was so central to them that later generations used to call them *physiologoi* or *physikoi*, that is, natural philosophers, and invariably gave to their books the conventional title *On Nature*. They were characterized by their tendency to give rational explanations of natural phenomena instead of the traditional mythological ones by appealing to the nature of a thing, which they contrasted with what is fake or conventional. Heraclitus, for instance, talked about what is according to the nature of a thing, and also claimed that real nature loves to hide. The process of change in natural entities was central for those philosophers. Heraclitus stressed that change is inherent in all natural beings and at no point is a thing identical with itself. This was a starting point for Parmenides. He contrasted actual beings, which he considered as everlasting and unchangeable, from natural ones, which are always in a fluid state, and as such they cannot be thought of or expressed linguistically. In support of Parmenides’ views Zeno tried to show through a series of paradoxes that the world of nature (i.e., of change) is illusory and unreal. Anaxagoras came to suggest that everything is actually unborn and unchangeable, and change arises because of reappropriation of certain ingredient features. In a similar spirit Empedocles maintained that everything consists of four primordial, imperishable elements, which are blended in different portions due to the motive forces of Love and Strife, and change is to be reduced to the different allocations of these elements. The atomists like Democritus on the other hand suggested that all things consist of an infinite number of corpuscles, which are eternal and indivisible (atoms), and change is due to their motion and collision in the void.

In fifth-century Athens, sophists rejected religious explanations of natural phenomena and devoted themselves to educating young Athenians in how to give rational ones. The notion of nature plays an important role in their thought. They understood nature as a power that includes everything and recognized it as a source of value. Being concerned with the question of whether ethical and political norms exist by nature or by convention – that is, whether they are absolute or relative to the species or the individual – they argued that man must conform with nature rather than with the conventional law. This appeal to nature most of the time was specifically to human nature; in their view something is good if it advances human nature. But the sophists did not seem to have given clear answers to the question of what is nature’s way, if we are to judge from the extant fragments including sections from Plato’s *Gorgias*, *Republic I*, and the *Protagoras*, where the antithesis between nature and convention is discussed. Yet most sophists appear to have retained a place for convention and law; Protagoras apparently argued that man began in a natural state and proceeded to civilization in which law was necessary for the maintenance of the community. Other sophists also seem to have been concerned with substituting misplaced norms with more natural ones instead of rejecting them entirely.

The desire to inquire into nature in a more systematic and detailed way gave origin to scientific disciplines, most importantly to medicine, historiography, and geography. Early Greek medicine sought to investigate nature with a purely empirical method and explicitly opposed the speculative investigation of the natural philosophers (cf. the Hippocratic work *On the Art of Medicine*). The Hippocratic doctors understood nature as the original and normal state of a thing against which all divergences are to be measured. In the case of human health, they considered diseases as divergences from a model of a healthy living body by reference to which they can be assessed and eventually reversed, and yet these are neither sent by gods nor do they have causes other than natural ones which cannot be explained by scientific means (cf. the Hippocratic treatises *On the Sacred Disease, On Airs, Waters, Places*). Hippocratic doctors proposed a physiological theory according to which the well-being of the human body is determined by four humors that have to be in balance. They were the first to examine the role of climate on humans and also the first to investigate scientifically the female body and its particular functions (e.g., menstruation).

**Plato and Aristotle**

With Plato and Aristotle the inquiry into nature took a new turn. Plato elaborated on the thought of Parmenides and Heraclitus and was concerned with the question of what there is, and whether something that comes into being and changes, as happens with natural entities, is also a true being. In his mature period Plato suggested a distinction between sensible particulars in the world around us, which are subject to change, and their intelligible, eternal forms which constitute their essences. This view has much to do with Plato’s conception of matter, according to which matter is inherently chaotic and in need of taking shape. Most probably Plato studied nature systematically with his students in the Academy, but his conception of sensible reality as a realm of change which cannot be the subject of scientific, that is, secure knowledge, suggested to him that the results of such inquiry do not constitute science (*episteme*). This is why he considered the account of the origins and the nature of the world, which he set out to give in a late dialogue, the *Timaeus*, as merely a “likely one” (*Timaeus 29d*). According to this account, the world has come into being out of chaos by a divine intelligence, a creator God, who brings into being all sensible entities by imposing form onto matter. This process takes place in the receptacle, a peculiar Platonic notion, which constitutes a third kind of being next to the intelligible forms and the sensible particulars, where the forms are reflected and imprinted in
matter. According to the Timaeus, the world as such is a being with intellect, soul, and body. Noticeably Plato tried to explain the constitution of the world, which he considered as an harmoniously ordered whole, by means of mathematics and geometry, an idea which was favored by the Pythagoreans; the world's body is presented as consisting of four elements bound properly and as moving in circles. The Creator also brings into being four kinds of animals, the ones who live in heavens (i.e., the stars), in the air, in the sea, and in Earth. A special section of the Timaeus describes the creation and constitution of man; we are told that man has a soul with an immortal and a moral part which are located in specific bodily parts.

Plato's immediate successors did not seem to have shown much interest in natural science, and apparently suggested that the Timaeus was a fiction meant for pedagogical purposes (e.g., Xenocrates). Aristotle, however, showed much zeal in the study of nature (later generations called him "the student of nature"), and his efforts to cultivate natural science became evident in his many relevant writings. Aristotle distinguished sharply between natural science (i.e., physics) from theology and the science of abstract numbers (i.e., mathematics). For Aristotle, the inquiry into nature was the study of things which do not exist independently of matter; more specifically, it is the study of the entities which are self-caused and self-moved (i.e., have the cause of their existence in themselves). He was the first to write a work with the title Physics in which he discussed the first principles of the natural world, but also investigated the origins, behavior and interactions of the natural objects; Aristotle examined in detail the nature of physical existence, of weight, change, types of motion, and also time and space. He criticized all earlier attempts to explain change and substance; in his view each substance has an essence (i.e., a set of features that make it the thing it is). He agreed with Plato that the essence of a thing is its form. But the question is how Aristotle understood forms. He argued against Plato that there are no universal forms, but each substance is a composite of a particular form and matter, which the form actualizes. Yet this allows for the possibility that general forms as a theoretical abstraction may play an explanatory role, and this seems to be supported from parts of Aristotle's work. Aristotle's understanding of substance informed his conception of change; in his view, for a change to take place there has to be a change of something, which means that there exists a subject that in part changes but in part also persists. Besides, he argued that a thing changes according to its nature (i.e., its essence); if a man, for instance, becomes a musician, this does not mean that he has ceased to exist in his previous form, but rather that it is in his nature (i.e., his essence) to change thus. To understand why a thing is the way it is, Aristotle argued, there are four basic factors which play a causal role: the matter of a thing, its form, the agent or the agent's ability, and finally the reason for the sake of which the thing has come into being. The last factor is particularly crucial. For Aristotle something comes into being because it is motivated by a particular end, which determines its nature. But this also means that the features of a thing are to be explained in terms of its distinctive end; if a bird has a beak, this is not to be explained primarily as a feature which serves its feeding, but rather as a feature which determines the bird's distinctive essence. Aristotle considered this so-called teleological explanation (from the Greek telos=end) as the proper way to study nature. In these terms he tried to study natural kinds, especially animals, and to explain their basic features in his several zoological tracts such as his Researches about Animals, Parts of Animals, On the Movement of Animals, but the coherence of his theory is open to discussion. As regards the universe, Aristotle considered it as finite and without a beginning. In his view all things in the universe are moved, that is, come into being and change by something else. More specifically, all motions originate from the first heaven, which is placed in the outer sphere of his geocentric universe; this first heaven in turn is moved by the unmoved mover, which is the ultimate origin of all "motion" (i.e., change in the universe), which is identified by Aristotle with God. The heirs of Aristotle's school, most importantly Theophrastus and Strato, continued their teacher's studies into nature. Theophrastus made pioneering inquiries in botany, and his work Historia Plantarum is the first herbal manual in Greek to survive. He was the first to distinguish between monocious and dicotypes and to maintain that geography accounts for the differences in shapes and properties of plants.

Hellenistic Times (Third–First Century B.C.E.)

Hellenistic literature
Hellenistic poets showed much more attention to nature than their predecessors and described nature in a more detailed fashion. This time descriptions served as a means not only of illustrating man's emotions, but also of indicating man's desire to return to nature. In this period we have the origins of the bucolic poetry, which is set in the countryside and which has as its subject herdsmen, their animals, their loves, and their songs. The countryside is highly idealized: specific indications of places and times are avoided in favor of timeless scenes which emphasize the beauty of the countryside and the pleasures of its colors, smells, and sights. Poets like Moschus, Callimachus, and especially Theocritus, implicitly or explicitly contrast the world of nature (i.e., the countryside) with the world of civilization in which they live. Nature is often presented as animate and also sympathetic to man, especially to one's erotic adventures.
Philosophy – Stoics

The Stoic inquiry into nature was an essential part of their philosophical concern with the world and the place of man in it. For the Stoics the universe is a unity organized to the last detail by divine laws and is also maintained by divine providence. In their view there are two basic principles in the world which exist always joined, a passive one (i.e., matter) and an active one, which they called logos (reason) or nature. For the Stoics nature embodies reason and is present in the entire universe in a specific sense (i.e., as a power that gives form to things). In this sense nature exists everywhere and is both the created universe as a whole and the creative force behind it. Since nature is the ultimate rational force in the universe, the Stoics identified it with God, and, as a result, they held that natural philosophy promoted true piety. As regards the world as such, the Stoics confined existence solely to bodies and rejected the view taken by Plato and Aristotle that there exist incorporeal entities. Even their active, divine principle (i.e., nature) is material, and the Stoics identified it with a form of fire. This element transforms the other three (i.e., air, water, and Earth); more specifically, every single thing is constituted by fire and air in different proportions. The divine fire, known as pneuma, they argued, exists in all beings (even the human soul is part of the pneuma), and makes the world a coherent whole and also interacting. According to the Stoics, the world is a finite body surrounded by an infinite void and results from a series of transformations of the divine fire (i.e., various cosmic phases, in which the world contracts and expands). They contended that the world is perishable and will end in a total conflagration, but it will be reconstituted. As the world is ruled by reason, nothing in their view happens by chance. The Stoics held that there are causes for everything and, given these causes, nothing else could happen. In their view, everything is determined by the divine providence, that is, reason or nature. Yet in their view there is still quite some space for free human action; something may be triggered by a set of causes but is not necessitated, as man himself is one of the causes and actually the primary one, so whether something will happen or not is up to him/her. Given the Stoic conception of nature as a divine all-comprising power, Stoic philosophers had both philosophical and religious reasons for studying it closely. Posidonius (2nd c. B.C.E.) exemplified this tendency. He was an accomplished scientist whose interests ranged from geography to history and astronomy. Noticeably the Stoic conception of nature exercised much influence in contemporary and later philosophy and science.

Philosophy – Epicureans

Epicurus tried to return to the conception of nature of the early Greek philosophers, especially of the atomists like Democritus and Leucippus. He maintained that “nothing comes from nothing” (Letter to Herodotus 38, Lucretius, De Rerum Natura 1 152–3) and, like Parmenides, he contended that the sum of beings never changes, and yet, in his view, within the beings themselves change takes place. Epicurus denied Aristotle’s distinction between matter and form arguing that matter carries form in itself. He distinguished two aspects of natural reality, the body and the void. In his view, bodies consist of atoms which have size, form, and weight, yet in his view bodies also have features which the atoms do not have, such as color, temperature, etc. The atoms, he argued, move vertically in the void and sometimes clash; their unpredictable motion can explain all natural phenomena and there is no need to postulate the interference of the divine. Epicurus explained the creation of the world in terms of random collisions of atoms, while he explained sensation in terms of influxes or effluxes of atoms moving across the void, and this suggested to him that sense perception provides us with reliable knowledge; according to Epicurus even the soul consists of atoms which disperse at death. Yet Epicurus tried to avoid the risk of postulating a purely mechanistic universe like the Democritean one, in which everything is explained in terms of moving atoms, by introducing an uncaused swerve that some atoms make at random times. This would allow for the exercise of human free will, but how exactly this works in the Epicurean universe is a matter of debate.

Science

In the Hellenistic period scientists made remarkable steps toward understanding nature. Two Alexandrian doctors, Herophilus and Erasistratus (fl. early 3rd c. B.C.E.), were the first to perform systematic scientific dissections on human cadavers, and as a result they made numerous anatomical discoveries including the discovery of the nerves and a better understanding of the role of the pulse and the function of the heart. An expansion of geographical knowledge also took place, partly because of the expedition of Alexander the Great. Further, we witness the development of a tradition of writings on wonders of nature. In astronomy, noteworthy is the theory of Aristarchus of Samos of the heliocentric system, which was proposed in order to explain the variations in the apparent diameter of the sun and the brilliance of the heavenly bodies. Yet this theory was far less influential than the competing theory of Theon of Smyrna, according to which two planets, Mercury and Venus, orbit the Sun, while the latter orbits the Earth. Quite characteristic of astronomy at this age but also of the other sciences is the systematic observation of natural phenomena and the collection of data before the construction of any scientific theory.
Imperial Times (First Century B.C.E.–Second Century C.E.)

Literature
As in Hellenistic literature, in the imperial centuries nature continued to be a central theme and often is described in detail. Entire poems deal with nature, such as Meleager’s epigram. Life in the countryside is contrasted again with life in the city. Horatius for instance contrasted the peaceful life of the countryside with the noise of the city (Satire II.6), and elsewhere he asked what is more beautiful, the channels of the city or the murmur of the little rivers. This close attention to nature has much to do with the fact that Latin poets, who loom large in this period, imitated Hellenistic models such as Theocritus and Callimachus, as can be seen at best in the Elegies and the Georgica of Vergil. Some of them also expressed nostalgia for the time when men had been living closer to nature. Quite characteristic of Latin poets is their appreciation of beautiful landscapes conducive to a life of reflection. Notable as an exception is Lucan’s representation of nature in his Pharsalia as full of mysterious forces which can be manipulated by witches to terrifying effects.

Science
Natural science made significant progress in the imperial age. Particularly significant among the scientific treatises of this period is Pliny’s work Historia Naturalis (Natural Researches) in 37 books. The author wrote this comprehensive work being influenced by the Stoic conception of nature according to which nature is divine, and as such, rational, providential, and benign. The work contains material for many disciplines ranging from geography to botany and zoology. The structure of Pliny’s inquiries is dictated by that of the natural world, as viewed by man whose existence allegedly nature means to support; the work starts with the cosmos as a whole in book two and progresses through all its subdivisions, animal, vegetable, and mineral. Greek astronomy and geography reached their peak with Ptolemy (2nd c.); his Almagest discusses all known astronomical phenomena of the time, while his Planetary Hypotheses deal with the motions of the celestial bodies. In medicine Galen is an extremely prolific author who wrote on almost all medical questions. He made some steps of progress in several issues but he largely remained faithful to the Hippocratic tradition; his physiological theory, for instance, is an elaboration of the four-humor system of the Hippocratic doctors.

Philosophy
The Stoic view that man must live according to nature gained wide acceptance at this time, but was construed in different ways. Cicero argued for a theory of natural law, according to which legal rules are based on reason, which he, like the Stoics, considered as permeating nature. Several Platonists, like Antiochus of Ascalon, Taurus, Apuleius, and also Peripatetics like Xenarchus, Boethius, Aspasius, and Aristocles, endorsed the Stoic view of a life according to nature, and integrated it into the doctrinal system of their school-authority. Philosophers at this age showed much interest in Plato’s Timaeus. Platonists, but also Peripatetics (e.g., Adrastus) and also others (e.g., Galen), commented on it by writing commentaries or monographs on specific issues (e.g., Plutarch On the Creation of the Soul in the Timaeus). One of their prominent concerns was the sense in which the world is created according to Plato. Platonists tried to articulate an interpretation of the dialogue which would escape Aristotle’s criticism, according to which the world of the Timaeus cannot come into being and also be eternal, because, in Aristotle’s view, what comes into being also perishes. Some Platonists suggested as a solution that the world in Plato’s Timaeus is prevented from destruction through God’s will, while others argued that the world was not created in the sense of coming into being at a certain point in time out of nothing, but rather has always existed and is created only in the sense that a principle, namely God, accounts for it.

Late Antiqutiy (Second Century–Sixth Century)

Literature
The tendency to describe nature in detail, which, as has been mentioned, started with the Hellenistic poets, took on striking dimensions during this period. Authors of novels like Longus, Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus, or pseudo-Callisthenes described landscapes, especially exotic ones, in great detail; on the one hand they tend to give an idyllic character to their descriptions, and in this they were influenced by the Hellenistic bucolic poets, yet on the other their descriptions are quite realistic. Such realistic descriptions can be found also in the epic poems of Quintus Smyrnaeus and Nonnus. Further, rhetoricians, representatives of the so-called second sophistic, such as Themistius and Libanius, composed entire treatises in which they set out to describe or to praise nature or aspects of it.

Philosophy
Philosophers of this age are mostly Platonists who continued to show much interest in the cosmogonical account of the Timaeus. Their cosmological interests are tightly connected with metaphysical concerns, and as a result they examined the Timaeus in connection with the Politicus, Republic X, especially the myth of Er, and Laus X. They were concerned with the status of the creator of the Timaeus and his relation to the forms which he imposes on matter so that the world can come into being. Since Porphyry (3rd c.), Platonists paid considerable attention to Aristotelian works on natural science, and they wrote commentaries on Aristotle’s Physics, the De caelo, the
De anima. Yet Aristotle's science was also attacked vehemently by Philoponus (6th c.). His criticism first concerned Aristotle’s assumption of the eternity of the world. Philoponus argued for a Christian conception of creation according to which the universe had a beginning in time. He further criticized Aristotle’s doctrine that the celestial bodies are made of indestructible aether, making reference to astronomical observations which spoke against such a theory. Finally, he criticized Aristotle’s explanations of dynamics, arguing that the void is possible and that velocity in void does not have to be infinite. At this time we also find the culmination of a debate which had started already in classical times on the question of whether the world is mathematically describable. The Pythagoreans had always contended that the world is a harmonious whole that can be expressed in mathematical terms, a view which Plato largely shared. Pythagorean Platonists like Iamblichus (3rd c.–early 4th c.) and Proclus (5th c.) returned to this idea and tried to express the harmony of nature in mathematical terms by exploiting the mathematical parts of the Timaeus.

Christianity
Early Christians relied on the Bible for their views on nature and the universe. Since they believed that God created the world out of nothing, they considered the natural world as being sacred in some strong sense. They considered human nature even more sacred, as they believed that man is created in the image of God, and they agreed with the Stoics that man is the center of the universe. Early Christian thinkers like Clement, Eusebius, and Origen found the biblical account compatible with the Platonic conception of the world, and often argued for this quite explicitly. Christians agreed with Platonists that the world is essentially good, as it has been created by a benevolent God.

George Karamanolis

Further Reading
See also: Creation Myths of the Ancient World; Delphic Oracle; Greece – Classical; Greek Paganism; Ovid’s Metamorphoses; Roman Britain; Roman Natural Religion; Roman Religion and Empire.

Greece – Classical
The religion of classical Greece was based in reverence for various aspects of nature, and can provide many examples of how attitudes to nature affected treatment of the natural environment in positive and negative ways. The deities of the ancient polytheistic beliefs of the Greeks reflected the natural forces they experienced in the Earth, waters, atmosphere, and forms of life. They regarded certain features of the landscape as sacred, and established rituals associated with activities that involve human interaction with nature, such as agriculture, hunting, and consumption of food and drink. Their religious views and practices affected, if they did not always determine, the ways they used natural resources and reshaped their environment.

Greece is a mountainous country, both the mainland and the islands, with many high peaks culminating in Mount Olympus, almost 3000 meters (9600 feet) high. Only one-fifth of Greece’s territory consists of arable lowlands. Agriculture faces difficulties because rainfall is generally light. Athens, for example, averages about 380 mm (15 inches) of annual precipitation, and most falls in the winter. The climate, typical of the Mediterranean, has a dependably hot, arid summer extending from April to October and a cool, moist winter the rest of the year. The environment is everywhere affected by the presence of the sea; there is no place in Greece further than 110 kilometers (70 miles) from the nearest sea-coast.

The gods of the Greeks reflect the environment; Zeus, the chief god, personifies storms and rain and was worshipped on high mountain peaks. Poseidon, in early times an underworld god who shook the mountains with earthquakes, became the chief sea-god. Athena concerned herself with birds (the owl being only the most famous), snakes and olive trees. Her helmet, spear, and shield are later additions. Artemis frequented woods and mountaintops, which she protected along with wild animals, especially their young. She expected her worshippers to exercise care when they hunted, avoiding waste and impiety. The music of her twin brother Apollo, also called Smintheus, the mouse-god, charmed lions, lynxes, fawns, and other beasts, causing them to dance with delight. The fruitfulness of the fields was the grain-goddess Demeter’s work. Asclepius, the physician-god, healed through snakes and dogs. Indeed, all major gods had associations with nature, and many minor ones were spirits of natural features like winds, rivers, trees, and springs.

Two gods with paramount roles in nature are of special interest. The worship of Ge or Gaia, Earth herself, mother of gods, mortals, and every living thing, can be traced
from the Neolithic. The Greeks believed they were born from her, nourished by her, and returned to her at death. Her law was a natural law deeper than human enactments and impossible to repeal. As Xenophon put it, “Earth is a goddess and teaches justice to those who can learn, for the better she is served, the more good things she gives in return” (Economics 5.12). Those who treat her well receive blessings, but those who treat her badly suffer adversity. Gaia forgives, but only to a certain point, when the balance tips and it is too late: famine, disease, and death ensue.

As Greek religion developed, Pan became recognized as a universal god of nature. His name was partly responsible for this identification, since pan means “all” in Greek. Originally a god of herd animals and the environment of pastures, he became Great Pan, the all-god, nature personified, who ruled all things.

The Greeks felt that certain places in their surroundings were sacred landscapes hallowed by traditions. Usually these were localities of innate charm. Great gods and lesser spirits haunted wild, beautiful locations such as springs, caves, groves, and viewpoints. Each sanctuary had an orientation dictated by its natural setting. The oracular temple of Delphi, for example, was located in a spot commanding a spectacular scene, looking up at the shining cliffs of Mount Parnassus and down a deep gorge to the Gulf of Corinth. The healing shrine of Asclepius is set within a comforting natural amphitheater at Epidaurus. The sacredness of these places, the Greeks were sure, existed before they were dedicated or temples constructed, and anything built there would take cognizance of powers present in Earth, waters, and sky.

The Greeks knew wilderness as eremos, a place with few or no human inhabitants. But gods were present there. People erected altars on mountain summits for Zeus or other deities. Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece, was home to the gods of the upper world, but many other mountains had divine presences. Apollo haunted Parnassus, and mountain-born Dionysos roamed the forest on its flanks. Poseidon held forth with Athena on the high cape of Sunium. Mount Helicon sheltered the Muses, goddesses of the creative arts. Tortoises on Mount Parthenium might have been made into sounding boxes of lyres, but “the men on the mountain [were] always afraid to capture them, and [would] not allow strangers to do so either, thinking them to be sacred to Pan” (Pausanias, Description of Greece 8.54.6–7). Artemis outdid the others; when her father, Zeus, allowed her as a girl to choose her own presents, she asked for all the mountains in the world, and he gave them.

Many rituals involved the enactment of a connection between the participants and nature. The most renowned was celebrated every four years at Eleusis. There thousands saw and heard the enactment of the myth of Demeter, whose daughter Kore (or Persephone), had been seized by Pluto and carried off to his underworld kingdom. Desperately searching for her beloved child, Demeter stopped the crops from growing, threatening to destroy human life and thus end sacrifices to the gods. Zeus relented, ordering Kore to be restored to her mother as long as she had not eaten anything in the underworld. She had tasted only four pomegranate seeds, so the gods worked out a compromise: Kore would spend four months each year underground, when the crops would not grow, but for the other eight months she would live with her mother, seeds would sprout, and Earth would be clothed in living green. The myth signified the origin of the seasons, the four months underground being the dry season between the grain harvest and planting, when the winter wheat does not grow. These mysteries identified the life and death of humans with the dying and rising of vegetation and its goddesses in the cycle of being: people die and, like seeds, are buried in the Earth, but as seeds send forth shoots in response to the rains, the initiates of the mysteries would live a happy life in the other world.

Another nature initiation ritual was the Arkteia, an Athenian festival dedicated to Artemis at Brauron, a rural sanctuary. Little girls, and sometimes little boys as well, covered with bear skin robes and called “bears” (arktoi), performed a dance with slow, solemn steps imitating the movements of bears. Bears became rare in Attica by the fifth century B.C.E., and saffron-dyed linen replaced bear skins. The festival was appropriate for Artemis, since she cared for the young of humans and animals. Sculptures and vases show children affectionately holding small animals such as rabbits and doves, sometimes kissing them. These were not killed; the sacrifice was only a symbolic drop of blood from a small cut. This initiation inculcated respect and love for wild creatures. So Artemis might be seen as a patron of environmental education. A renewal of the festival was held on the Acropolis for young women of marriageable age.

In Greece from earliest times, sacred groves dotted the landscape. These outdoor sanctuaries were the first temples of the gods. In Greek, an alsos or grove consecrated to a deity was called a temenos, a demarcated place. They were used for worship and supervised by local authorities. As time went on they took on the aspect of parks, with planted or cultivated trees. On the island of Lesbos, for example, there was a grove of apple trees dedicated to Aphrodite.

Some tree species were considered sacred to individual deities. Oaks belonged to Zeus, willows to Hera, olives to Athena, the laurel to Apollo, pines to Pan, and so forth. But there was no automatic identification between the species in a grove and the deity to whom it was dedicated. The people of Colophon worshipped Apollo in an ash grove, while a grove of laurel, usually sacred to Apollo, was sacred to the Dioscuri at Pharae.
In the earliest period the grove itself was the temple, and sacrifices were offered without benefit of statues or buildings. Later, statues of gods or goddesses were erected in the groves, and then shelters were built over these images to protect them and to provide a place for votive offerings. This shelter, originally of wood but later of stone with fluted columns and carved reliefs, became the temple building. But the Greeks continued to conduct public rituals and sacrifices out-of-doors. The association of grove with temple was never lost. Every temple, it was felt, needed to have trees around it, and where there were none, they were planted. When the Athenians built the Acropolis, a barren limestone outcropping, as the site for the Parthenon, they excavated two rows of pits in the rock, filled them with soil, and planted cypresses. Similar holes have been found beside other temples.

The groves varied in size. Some were only a few trees, but the sacred land of Crisa near Delphi covered many square kilometers, and a grove near Lerna stretched down a mountainside to the sea. Since sacred groves numbered hundreds, the total area was considerable.

Laws forbade injuring sacred groves in any way. Specific rules varied in different places and times, but the pattern is consistent. There was a boundary and a prohibition against trespass. To step over the line was to pass from ordinary ground to holy ground, and was allowed only for those who would not pollute it. In a few, only priests could enter, but usually ordinary persons could do so if they were ritually clean. Sometimes women, or more rarely men, were forbidden to enter. A law found everywhere forbade felling trees or cutting branches. “Men call them the holy places of the immortals and never mortal lops them with the axe” (Homer Hymn to Aphrodite 257–72). Even the removal of dead, fallen timber was prohibited. Individual trees in them were often of remarkable dimensions. This resulted from the religious feeling that notable trees in the groves were uniquely cherished by the gods, and served as dwelling places for venerable tree spirits, or dryads. If a tree was felled, it was believed that its dryad died, and that the god might leave the sanctuary. These trees were allowed to live out their lifespans until wind or rot brought them down. At Pharae, the plane trees were hollow with age and big enough to sleep or picnic inside. The Maidens, cypress trees at Psophis, were said to overshadow a mountain.

The other living denizens of the groves were protected, and hunting was not allowed. Hunters could not take dogs into a sacred enclosure, and had to stay outside if their quarry fled into a grove. At Mt. Lycaeus, it was believed, a hunter who violated this rule would die within a year. Most groves contained springs, streams, or lakes. Pollution of these was strictly forbidden, and there was usually a ban on fishing. While wild animals were granted haven, domestic ones were excluded. Penalties were set for herdsmen who allowed cows, sheep, goats, swine, or horses to graze in the precincts. Other rules prevented plowing, sowing, or erection of unauthorized buildings. Setting fire to a sacred grove was a heinous crime, even in wartime, although it did happen. Human beings, even slaves, who sought shelter in a grove were granted sanctuary. Cleomenes, who burned five thousand Argives to death in a god’s forest, was driven mad by the thought of divine retribution.

Exceptions to rules were allowed under certain conditions. Sometimes wood might be taken for a sacrifice, or animals in the grove, such as goats and deer, might be captured and offered. At times trees in a grove were used in building a temple. The magistrates of Carpathos once ordered a tall cypress to be felled in the precinct of Apollo and sent to Athens for use in rebuilding the temple of Athena. The Athenians raised an inscription of thanks, recognizing that such use of a sacred tree was appropriate. Other buildings of religious and public character were erected in groves. Public meetings and elections were held there. If the amount of environmental damage done to sacred groves was limited, however, the same thing cannot be said of the land outside them, where a religious motive leading to practices of conservation did not operate to the same degree.

J. Donald Hughes

Further Reading
See also: Creation Myths of the Ancient World; Delphic Oracle; Egypt – Ancient; Egypt – Pre-Islamic; Greco-Roman World; Greek Paganism; Mesopotamia – Ancient; Roman Natural Religion; Roman Religion and Empire.
Greek Landscape

Greek landscape was and still is for the most part represented topographically, symbolically and institutionally by its religious features, the most salient of which are the ancient temples dedicated to one of the Olympian deities or the whitewashed churches of the Aegean islands. Such features, however, are not the physical expression of a deep-seated religiosity characterizing Greek people, but rather an indication that religion was and is pivotal to the Greeks’ perception of their identity in relation to outsiders. Indeed, religion is what still “exoticizes” Greece.

The natural landscape of ancient Greece had an ample mythical and religious structure. Mount Olympus, the highest Greek mountain, was considered to be the residence of the twelve predominant deities. Many of them were representing specific natural forces and elements – such as Zeus, the god of thunder and lightning; Poseidon, the god of the sea; or Dionysus, the god of vegetation and fertility in nature. Taking into account the characteristics of the Olympian deities, one may make a distinction between two types of landscape, the natural and the social. Thus, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, was associated with city life that provided the ordered landscape for social reproduction, while Artemis with wilderness and natural female reproduction. The population of each city usually honored a different tutelary divinity and certain patronal festivals were used to promote a feeling of community, thus forbidding non-citizens to participate. The temple of Parthenon, dedicated to Athena, still remains the most important centerpiece of Athens today.

Equally important religious markers of the landscape of ancient Greece, which were also Panhellenic in character, were the sanctuaries of Apollo at Delphi – the Earth’s ομανδός (navel) uniting the heavens with the underworld and the most famous oracular site – and that of Zeus at Olympia. It is worth noting here that the sanctity of such places and of others of lesser importance was preserved in Byzantine and modern times by building Christian churches on them. Apart, however, from the sacred places devoted to major divinities, the natural landscape of ancient Greece was believed to have been inhabited by other supernatural beings, such as Nymphs who were found and actually embodied the spirits of mountains, trees and rivers. The belief in such spirits still exists in many provincial places of modern Greece. The “wild” space outside human settlements, especially that near water, is considered to be the dwelling of dangerous and demonic female spirits called νεριάδες or ξωτικά.

As in Classical so in Christian Greece the landscape is given meaning in relation to what exists above and below it. The capricious ancient divinities were replaced by those of Orthodox Christianity: God, Jesus, the Mother of God, the saints and holy ascetics. As the religious landscape changed, so did the natural one. The marble Doric and Ionic temples were substituted first by basilicas and later on by the Orthodox domed churches. In Byzantine times the marvelous architectural constructions of the cenobitic monasteries gave the land an intense mystic atmosphere. Such constructions culminated in the great monasteries of Mount Athos resembling a medieval town with its fortress, towers and the domes of its main church and chapels. But while in the Byzantine era and under Ottoman rule, monasticism was very influential in the organization of the social landscape in Greece, today monasteries have largely lost this strong authority. Most of those existing in Greek cities became historical monuments, while the new ones built in remote rural areas provide basically an oasis of spirituality away from the profane urban environment.

The big voluminous domed churches, however, still occupy a central position in spatial organization. Every urban Greek belongs to a parish church, which is at the same time the center of neighborhood and a spiritual and social one. In rural areas, the village church is found at the center of the village and together with the square becomes the axis for the organization of social life. A characteristic feature of the rural landscape is also the εἰκονοστάσις (shrine). Shrines are usually found at the four edges of the village, marking its boundaries and protecting it from the demonic forces of the wilderness surrounding its space. Such shrines are also erected at the sides of roads as fulfillments of a vow by those who miraculously survived a serious car accident or in memory of those who died. Shrines are not the only material markers of death or of boundaries. Cemeteries with tall cypresses and pine trees surrounded by high walls are found at the outskirts of the cities or villages, marking a distant “other” world, the world of the dead, which should be kept separate from the world of the living. The cemetery is a miniature city symbolically reflecting the existing social structure as well as the different attitudes of modern Greek society toward death. In Greece the egalitarian structure of the village cemeteries strongly contrasts with the material display of wealth in the urban cemeteries, reflected in the elaborate graves and markers in the ossuaries. Finally, the institutionalized sacred space is not the only place where one comes into contact with the supernatural in Greece. Many sites exist in nature bearing the seal of apparitions by the Mother of God or various saints that sanctify wilderness and that one can visit and be filled with divine grace.

While markers of sanctity abound in the Greek landscape and many rituals exist in the Greek Orthodox religion that purify nature and encourage people to consider it as blessed, one can still observe many sets of practices within the Greek Orthodox Church that are at odds with environmental concerns to which the Church has devoted the first of September, namely the start of the ecclesiastical year. To mention but one example, this can be clearly seen at modern Greek burial practices. Greece is the only country in continental Europe that does not
allow cremation on religious grounds. Spurred on by an ever-increasing urban population, cemeteries no longer exist outside the city limits – a sound practice used in the past to save valuable space and to prevent the spread of diseases. Cremation, which may be considered as a “cleaner” practice than the decomposition of the body and more in line with the reasonable use of urban landscape, is seen by the Church as a violation of the natural order and its doctrine of the body. This ban on cremation results in overcrowded urban cemeteries, whose overworked soil is unable to properly decompose the corpses, making those who prefer cremation “migrants in death” by being cremated in another country. The Church’s uncompromising attitude on this issue indicates that protective environmental practices fostered by the Church on certain occasions come second when its own traditions are threatened.

Further Reading
See also: Christianity (6b1) – Christian Orthodoxy; Christianity (6b2) – Greek Orthodox; Delphic Oracle; Greco-Roman World; Greece – Classical; Greek Paganism.

Greek Paganism

Pagan (or neo-pagan) currents in contemporary Greece exhibit a unique characteristic, namely a close relation to the primordial and native faith of the ancient Hellenes. Hellenic paganism generally enjoys a prominent status within the international pagan scene, while Hellenic culture as a basic pillar of Western and world civilization continues to exercise major influences upon many domains. These facts bestowed special importance upon this revival in Greece, which has been initiated by ethnic Greeks proud of their ancestors. It claims allegiance to and continuity with the spiritual values bequeathed by the ancient forefathers. It opposes the established Orthodox Church and promotes a Hellenic understanding of nature as a sacred entity. This Earth and nature-based spirituality has not developed in Greece as a broader environmentalist countercultural movement, but rather within the specific context of Hellenic paganism.

Modern Greek paganism is not a mass and widespread phenomenon. Rather, it is represented by different groups and associations and has not yet overcome its social marginality. Up to today there has been no major organization to coordinate the varying pagan endeavors. This lack of institutionalization has caused the fragmentation of the entire movement and the dispersion of its potential. In addition, paganism has had to fight against the established official ideology of the country concerning the historical fusion between Hellenism and Christianity. This ideology has not left enough room for the flourishing of pagan endeavors, although there have been such isolated revivals in various contexts from the nineteenth century onwards (e.g., the “Delphic Feasts” organized by the poet Angelos Sikelianos in 1927 and 1930). Hellenic traditions and elements do survive today both explicitly and implicitly in popular customs, rituals and worship, even within a Christian framework. Some of these idiosyncratic trends are related to specific concepts of nature, and this is manifested in the flirtations of popular novelist A. Papadiamantis (1851–1911) with paganism and the continuing sanctity of place.

Within this loosely structured landscape of contemporary Greek paganism, a distinction must be made between pure pagan and broader Hellenic-oriented groups. It concerns related but differing trends. Both of them are concerned with the quest for pre-Christian national identity and roots. But the latter pertains more to a wider Hellenic revival, expressed in various non-homogeneous forms, with an emphasis on Greece’s indigenous heritage and usually at the expense of the Orthodox Christian tradition. The most characteristic current is centered around the monthly journal Δωμάτιος (Torch), published since 1982 and devoted to all aspects of Hellenic civilization. The promotion of the unique and unparalleled contributions of the Hellenes to universal civilization and the superiority of Hellenic race, spirit and culture worldwide are particularly stressed. The incorporation of esoteric trends, “New Age” spirituality, nationalistic ideas or anti-Semitic propaganda within a bricolage-context is not out of the ordinary. Nature and environmental issues are occasionally taken into account by attracting public attention to or by organizing protests against environmental degradation, while Christianity is held responsible for the desacralization and the devaluation of nature.

Yet, the above currents do not belong clearly to Greek paganism. Even the fundamental opposition to Christianity is in some cases blurred and room is left for a potential coexistence of Hellenism and Christianity. In addition, there is no systematic attempt to revive Hellenic religion and culture, including nature religion and an Earth-respecting spirituality. This is basically true for the pure pagan groups that accept the Earth as the primordial locus of reality and of the forces of life. A particular aspect of Greek paganism differentiating it from other forms of paganism worldwide is its predominant ethnic character. Further aspects include: worship of nature as a divine element in its entirety, because the divine dwells everywhere in nature; polytheism including many gods,
goddesses, myths, symbols and rites; lack of specific founders, because the native faith has evolved out of the natural beliefs of the indigenous people; and the importance of sacrifice as a gift to the gods, who are basically understood not literally but as archetypes. Based on their particular scope, sacrifices may be offered to some specific gods of the polytheistic pantheon and are accordingly structured (animal sacrifice, libation of wine and other products, etc). The term “[Neo]Pagans” is not usually accepted by the groups under discussion, for it is considered a negative and bigoted label on the part of their opponents. In turn, they prefer other terms such as Ελληνες Εθνικοι (Gentile Hellenes) or Αρχαιόθρησκοι/Αρχαιότροποι (followers of the ancestral Hellenic religion and way of life). They also prefer to use the term “Hellas” and its derivatives instead of “Greece.”

The bearers of such ideas are dispersed in various groups, which despite common orientations are not identical. One such group is Διαπετσές (Fallen from Zeus from heaven), which since 1991 has published a homonymous bi-monthly journal with the subtitle “In the Defense of the Ancient Psyche.” This is an organized effort to restore Hellenic religion, to de-Christianize and de-Byzantinize Greece, and to create modern Hellenes in the literal meaning of the word. Hellenic religion is not considered a “religion” in the Judeo-Christian view, but as something much broader; namely, as a comprehensive system, worldview and way of life aimed at providing humans with a serious religious-philosophical meaning of life. The ancient psyche is understood not as a dogmatic and authoritarian revealed religion, but as an internal fire existing in and leading every person. It signifies the possibility of deification of human nature, which in turn is seen as a consubstantial element of the Great Goddess or the Great Mother, the Nature of the Universe.

Nature (Gaia) is considered a giant living organism and interdependent unit (ecosphere), whose appropriate stewardship is necessary for enabling life to persist. Related modern theories (James Lovelock) are not usually drawn into the account, because emphasis is usually placed upon the ancient Hellenic background of such ideas. Thus, all nature has a great value and must be protected by humans, who must locate themselves properly within it. This entails an optimistic understanding of life, leading humans to enjoy every aspect of life and nature as a whole, broadening human perspectives and seeking inner peace and harmony. Christianity is held responsible for turning these ancient coordinates upside down by desacralizing and consequently degrading nature. The variety of species in nature is also seen as a model for sustaining a wealth of human cultural expressions and toleration. The need to worship nature is not only expressed theoretically. It has also been put into practice by following a Hellenic calendar with holidays and organizing meetings with appropriate outdoor rituals (libations, prayers, hymns, songs), usually in natural settings under sun or moon (mountains, forests, springs) to celebrate seasonal changes and astronomical rhythms (agrarian holidays, summer and winter solstices, spring and autumn equinoxes, full and new moons). There also are activities directed toward the location of ancient sacred places and monuments (groves, trees, stones, buildings, temples). This attests also to the strong environmentalist sensibilities of the movement, which remains in contact with analogous groups abroad (the World Congress of Ethnic Religions) and which occasionally organizes protests and campaigns to protect such places from the negative effects of the modern, desacralized, utilitarian and consumerist culture.

In addition, there exist other major or minor pagan groups such as the Ελληνική Εταιρεία Αρχαιοψίλων (Societas Hellenica Antiquariorum) devoted to the revival of the Hellenic religion of the twelve Olympian gods and the pantheon of demons and heroes. This nonprofit society offers quite a large variety of activities for its members including rituals and worship of the gods in the traditional manner, and the quarterly magazine Ελληνικόν Πάνθεον (Hellenic Pantheon) published on the solstices and equinoxes. Its cosmological views are derived from the Orphean theology and hymns, while the worshipping of nature as a whole occupies a central place in its cultic milieu. Further, in 1997 there was an attempt to create a higher coordinating body entitled Υπατο Συµβούλιο των Ελλήνων Εθνικών (Supreme Council of the Gentile Hellenes) for the preservation and restoration of the genuine Hellenic tradition, which has become publicly active in various domains since then. Yet, this forum lacks the necessary credentials to undertake this major task.

The problem of the dispersion of Greek paganism is accentuated by the fact that some groups are mainly the personal constructs of certain individuals. Such is the case with Tryphon Kostopoulos-Olympios, an economist, who back in 1987 was married according to the Hellenic ritual on Mount Olympus, causing a negative reaction from the Orthodox Church. Kostopoulos criticizes sharply the present socio-political and religious situation in Greece and intends to transform Greece into a sacred place and a model for the entire world. He also regularly organizes rituals and feasts in Hellenic style in his country-house situated near Litochoro at the foothills of Mount Olympus. Another person presently following an individually created path is the writer Vlasis Rassias. He has published a lot in recent years, criticizing the Christian attitudes toward the Hellenic spirit and intending to render the present, tormented Hellenic soul a new and promising way of life.

Despite the marginal character of Greek paganism, its limited activities have not escaped the attention of the Orthodox Church, which has on several occasions condemned the revival of Hellenic religion including the worship of nature as idolatrous (e.g., the aforementioned
festivities organized by Kostopoulos). In this context, there was also in 1995 an official condemnation of the Anastenaria, the fire-walking practices in Northern Greece, although these are practiced within a predominantly Christian framework. Generally, the Church fears that this revival could be detrimental to the established ideology concerning the harmonious fusion of Hellenism with Christianity throughout history, which is officially propagated in the modern Greek state. This fear among certain Orthodox circles is sometimes extreme, as they even condemn ceremonies like the lighting of the flame in ancient Olympia for the Olympic Games as a potentially dangerous pagan ritual.

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Further Reading
See also: Delphic Oracle; Gaia; Greco-Roman World; Greece – Classical; Paganism (various).

Green Death Movement

Perhaps one of the most evocative areas of “greening” ritual and ecospiritual practice today can be found in the greening of burial practices. In his comparative work on religious attitudes toward death, dying, and the afterlife, historian of religions Kenneth Kramer observes that dying is “the final ritual. The last opportunity we have to discover life’s ultimate meaning and purpose” (Kramer 1988: 1). For this reason, says Kramer, religious traditions ascribe acute importance to ritualizing the death process and teaching the faithful “how to die artfully.” For those who have spiritually and ethically committed their lives to environmental sustainability, ensuring a comparably “eco-friendly” death is increasingly becoming an art unto itself. In response, the so-called “Green Death Movement” or “Natural Death Movement” promotes low-impact, environmentally sound ways to recycle human remains back into the biosphere.

The catalysts for the growth of “green burial” have been primarily twofold. First, the environmental consequences of conventional burial have become untenable to those morally and ethically devoted to caring for the Earth. For green Christians, green Jews, and neo-pagans alike, among others, the ideal of a “dust-to-dust” death is a considerable challenge in an age of widespread use of formaldehyde and other toxic embalming fluids, steel-lined caskets, and concrete-lined vaults or graveboxes. More than 800,000 gallons of toxic embalming fluid and 30 million board feet of prime hardwoods are buried per year (Warchol 2002). The run-off of toxic chemicals into nearby rivers and streams, the use of particle board and plywood caskets laden with leaching chemical glues, the use of endangered hardwoods (like mahogany) for luxury caskets, and even the use of large volumes of pesticides and herbicides on cemetery lawns, all pose ethical difficulties for the environmentally conscious.

The second motivation for choosing a “green burial” is less tangible but no less compelling. It is about allowing for a spiritual corporeal connection to the ecosystem and to the natural cycles of decay and rebirth. In short, for some individuals, “getting back to nature” in death becomes just as important as “getting back to nature” in life (Albery, et al. 1997). The Green Death Movement has thus been nurtured by those who view “wallowing away” one’s remains from the reclaiming and recycling forces of water, soil, and worms as yet another manifestation (indeed a literal and perhaps ultimate manifestation) of modern humans’ problematic alienation from the rest of the Earth community.

There is clearly nothing “new” about natural burial. The fairly recent evolution of contemporary embalming methods in the U.S., for instance, can be traced back to the need to transport large numbers of dead bodies over long distances back to their home towns during the Civil War (Laderman 1996; Mitford 1963). In its most recent revival, natural or “green” burial has been particularly enthusiastically received within the United Kingdom. In 1991, “The Natural Death Centre” formed in London as an organization dedicated to providing guidance and resource assistance with planning inexpensive, do-it-yourself, environmentally friendly funerals. For instance, for families who do not wish to embalm with Earth-polluting chemicals but who would still like to conduct a traditional wake, the Centre provides suggestions for portable electric “cold plate” rental to preserve the body until burial and/or non-toxic saline solution embalming. The UK is now home to over 160 “natural” burial sites where unprepared bodies are wrapped in simple shrouds or put in biodegradable caskets (“ecopods” made of cardboard or 100 percent recycled hardened paper) that are then buried within wooded nature preserves where they can decompose naturally and “return to the Earth.”

The Green Death movement has been slower to gain momentum in the U.S., in part because of powerful funeral directors’ lobbying organizations. However, in 1996, a couple in Westminster, South Carolina, opened “Memorial Ecosystems,” a forested wildlife preserve where no toxic embalming fluids are permitted and only biodegradable caskets are allowed. Memorial Ecosystems’ literature speaks, for example, of one lifelong outdoorsman who was simply buried in his favorite hiking poncho. Graves are marked by natural rock cairns, flowering trees, gardens,
and eco-sculptures that also provide habitat for wildlife. Other states with wildlife preserves offering “natural” burial sites include Florida and New York, and there are similar movements afoot in California, Vermont, Utah, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Washington. The “rural cemetery movement” in the nineteenth century that gave rise to such famed parks as Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston (1838) and Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia (1836) sought to provide “cultural uplift” through the aesthetic beauty of a meditative landscape (McDannell 1995). These older “garden cemeteries” retain much more of a “natural” feel to the landscape than do their contemporary offspring. New “green burial” solutions certainly retain the Romantic sentiment toward nature so present in the early rural cemetery movement; however, they place a greater value on wildlife habitat conservation than on the manicured and manipulated landscapes of the conventional cemetery.

A Georgia-based company called “Eternal Reefs” has responded in a different way to the growing interest in “green burial.” The company provides a service that mixes the ashes of the cremated deceased with concrete and then casts the mixture into the form of an artificial reef that will create new habitat for threatened marine wildlife. The memorial concrete reefs are sunk to the bottom of the ocean in places where they are most needed, but each reef still bears a nameplate of the loved one so that family members can identify their relative on scuba diving visits.

Cremation, although it provides a “greener” solution for some because it avoids many of the problems of inefficient land use, deforestation, and groundwater pollution, is still an area of intense debate within the movement. The cremation process itself still releases dioxin, hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, sulfur dioxide, and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, although the pollution is worse if the body has been embalmed prior to cremation. Green Death advocates suggest that those who do choose cremation seek ovens with updated “air-scrubbing” capabilities to minimize air pollution (Albery, et al. 1997).

If Buddhist teacher Sogyal Rinpoche was right that “You die exactly the way you live,” then the growing number of those choosing “green burial” provides valuable insights into shifting trends in contemporary culture. One of the central themes of ecological spirituality today, as it had been historically within the Romantic movement and subsequently Transcendentalism, is the importance of healing the alienation of humans from the natural world. If steel-lined, durable caskets and concrete-lined graves signal a culture of death-denial, fear of nature, and the realities of mortality connected with it, then perhaps burying bodies in “ecopods” left to decay naturally in wooded wildlife preserves, or transforming bodies into coral reefs, signals an important countercultural response. If nothing else, it reveals the tensions between the consequences of modernity and the persistent appeal of “getting back to nature.”

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading


See also: Church of Euthanasia; Death and Afterlife in Robinson Jeffers and Edward Abbey.

Green Man

Green Man is the name given to the leaf- or vine-covered faces peering out from hundreds of medieval cathedrals scattered across Europe. Usually portrayed as a human face with skin blending into leaves or vines, Green Man is also shown disgorging vines or leaves out of his mouth and nose.

His face blurs the distinction between vegetation and human, hinting at an ancient closeness to nature, now lost. The leafy fertility of many portraits – the vines or leaves bearing fruit – shows the male figure as a protector/lover of the Earth goddess. This interpretation has made Green Man into a modern day patron saint of the men’s movement, which seeks to emulate his ecological intimacy and closeness to mother nature.

Literature as diverse as J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord Of The Rings, with its Ents and Entwives, and the anonymous Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with its Green Knight, play with these half-tree, half-human images.

It is surprising, given the number and geographical range of the faces, that their origin and identity remain a mystery. Folklorist Lady Raglan coined the name Green
Man, citing a similarity with folk traditions of Jack-in-the-Green, Robin Hood, the King of May, and the Garland, all of which perform in leafy dress costumes.

Later studies question Raglan’s association of the leafy folk characters with the leafy faces; nevertheless the name has stuck. Some of the folk traditions she cites are recent creations failing to explain the ancient history of the faces.

The overwhelming historical record of Green Man is the hundreds of foliate heads sculpted into stone or wood in European Christian architecture. None are named, except one leaf face on a fountain made in 1200 for the Abby of Saint-Denis, Paris, France. The face is named Silvanus, Roman god of the woods. However, nowhere is Silvanus depicted with the same leaf face in antiquity, and the portrait is considered mistakenly titled.

French stonemason, Villard de Honnecourt, drew up a book of architectural notes and drawings in 1236. He includes two leafy human faces that he simply labels Têtes de Feuilles, with no further indication as to any related tradition.

Foliate faces similar to those in European cathedrals are traced to Roman times, such as those found in friezes on the arches of Septimius Severus and Aurelian’s Temple of the Sun, both in Rome. The faces are found throughout the Roman empire, many in the context of Dionysian mysteries, and may represent the use of ivy leaf masks in Dionysian initiation ceremonies.

The earliest face found in a Christian setting is the Green Man face carved into the tomb of Sainte Abre, in the church of St-Hilaire-le-Grand, Poitiers, France. Usually dated to 400, the face disgorges vegetation, possibly representing a transitional stage from the leaf masks of earlier art. Pictures of dolphins on the tomb suggest a connection with Dionysus who is said to have disgorged ivy, thereby fouling the plans of pirates whom he turned into dolphins.

In Germany, when Bishop Nicetius rebuilt Trier’s cathedral in the mid-sixth century, he reused columns containing Green Men carvings on the capitals from a nearby Hadrianic temple, Am Herrenbrünchen. He set the columns up around the crossing of his cathedral, which may have housed Christ’s robe and nails from the crucifixion.

The important role of Trier’s cathedral in the spread of Christianity and the central display of its Green Man-topped capitals surrounding such sacred relics did more to integrate Green Man into Christian architecture than any other event. Green Man proliferated to such an extent in subsequent years that he may outnumber portrayals of Christ in some locations.

Gothic architecture’s use of a line of columns on either side of the nave to imitate a walk of trees leading up to the altar may have been inspired by Green Man topped capitals. Architectural details branch off from gothic column capitals to form treetops over the heads of worshippers recreating sacred patriarchal groves.

Many tie Green Man to various Mediterranean fertility deities, depicted with green skin or spouting leaves and responsible for renewing life each spring. Green-skinned goddesses like Neith and Isis, both mother gods, were responsible for creation and restoring life.

Male gods like Dionysus, Tammuz (Dumuzi) and Cernunnos, and others depicted like Green Man, use their vegetative virility to renew life. Dionysus is often entwined in ivy or grapevines, sometimes stealthily peer through the leaves. The Celtic god Cernunnos, usually portrayed with antlers springing from his brow or head, occasionally sprouts vegetation for hair or a beard.

These vegetative gods and goddesses share power over death: Isis pieces together her lover’s severed body; Osiris and Dionysus go into the underworld to rescue life. Their fertility and self-sacrifice for others is a strong parallel with Christian tradition.

Vegetative attributes of the Hebrew God are found throughout biblical books, most frequently in the prophets. God brings rain and wine as well as new life in spring. Prophets Elijah and Elisha call God down to bring the dead to life, and Ezekiel witnesses revivification of thousands of skeletons in the valley of dry bones.

The strongest biblical connection mixing vegetation with divinity comes from the prophet Ezekiel. He not only tells of trees that nurse famished Jews returning from Babylonian exile (Ezek. 34:25–27), but in his vision, God’s rebuilt temple is constructed increasingly of wood until one enters into the holy place – the heart of the sacred tree – a wood-paneled room containing a wooden box bearing the presence of God. From this tree/temple/god, water springs forth, bringing life to the land (Ezek. 41:15–26).

Revelation 22 picks up Ezekiel’s tree images, putting the Tree of Life – with a spring at its base – back in place, nourishing and sustaining God’s loyal followers. Christian imagery of Christ as the vine or Tree of Life builds on these images of a vegetative deity nourishing humanity.

To balance Green Man’s regenerative aspect, Kathleen Basford points out the pained and demonic look of many of the carvings. Like the leaves covering the sin of Adam and Eve, many faces grimace in pain or look to be wasting away their mortal existence. She also documents Green Man’s portrayal as a Satan figure, one opposed to life, and points to depictions of Satan disgorging leaves like Green Man in many cathedrals. For Basford, Green Man’s pain warns us of the fragileness of nature, both human and vegetative.

Matt Wiebe

Further Reading
See also: Christianity (5) – Medieval Period; Men’s Movement.

**Green Politics**

As Green Politics has emerged around the world it has often been intertwined with religion and spirituality. This has been especially true in the United States where discussion and debate over spiritual matters played a central role.

In many countries, proportional voting systems granted fledgling Green Parties early access to seats in parliament, focusing internal discussions on the details of party-building, legislation, and policy. But in the U.S., where electoral margins of twenty-five and even forty percent can yield little in the way of tangible results, Greens spent the better part of the 1980s debating values and principles, including the role of spirituality in the development of the movement. This was not entirely unprecedented; for example, after several years as a political prisoner in East Germany the Green Party pioneer Rudolph Bahro arrived in West Germany in the early 1980s, and soon became a prominent voice for an ecological, cultural, and spiritual revolution. His writing decried the degradation of personality and ethics under industrial capitalism, and heralded what he viewed as an inevitable, ecologically-driven economic contraction as a grand opportunity to assert spiritual values over mere “necessity.” During the mid-1980s, as his disillusionment with the increasing pragmatism of the German Greens grew, Bahro advocated the development of rural communes that would offer a spiritual foundation for a new biophilic culture and sustain progressive cultural values in the midst of declining empires. His primary inspiration was the role of the Benedictines in preserving culture following the collapse of the Roman Empire.

From the outset, U.S. Greens distinguished themselves by placing discussions of values at the center of their work, articulating “Ten Key Values” of Ecological Wisdom: Grassroots Democracy, Personal and Social Responsibility, Nonviolence, Decentralization, Community-based Economics, Postpatriarchal Values, Respect for Diversity, Global Responsibility and Future Focus. With immediate electoral success a distant prospect, most early U.S. Greens embraced a movement-building and culture-transforming role, highlighting local and bioregional campaigns and focusing on ecological and social issues rather than pursuing electoral success. Thoughtful and idealistic people from many walks of life embraced the idea of an American Green movement as a symbol of hope and renewal, and the focus of a new kind of political community, even as the conservative trend epitomized by the Presidency of Ronald Reagan dominated politics in Washington.

Charlene Spretnak’s popular booklet, *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics* (1986), sought to place a distinctly Christian spirituality at the center of the emerging Green political movement in the U.S. Other early U.S. Greens advocated a wider-ranging spiritual diversity, inviting speakers such as Anishinabe (Chippewa) elder Walt Bressette to keynote numerous local, regional, and national Green gatherings. Ecofeminist-inspired rituals – both the neo-pagan and more eclectic varieties – were a feature of many Green events. Meanwhile, more secular Greens voiced an increasing discomfort with all the talk about spirituality in the movement, viewing it as exclusionary and, at worst, coercive. Spirituality is a personal matter, they suggested, asserting that neither overt religiosity or quasi-religious ritualizing should be brought into the public sphere. The contemporaneous rise of the Christian Right was cited by both camps: for some as a mandate for the Greens to contribute to filling the spiritual void in American life; for others a harbinger of the inherent authoritarianism of any overtly spiritual politics.

The first national gathering of the U.S. Greens, in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1987, brought a heated debate around these issues. Social ecologist Murray Bookchin presented a strong polemic, widely reprinted as “Social Ecology vs. Deep Ecology,” in which he denounced the increasingly misanthropic outlook of several leading Earth First!ers as well as the “New Age” spiritual leanings of many Greens. Charlene Spretnak and other spiritual Greens voiced dismay over the stridency of Bookchin’s attack. In the years that followed, social ecologists in the Greens became the main voice for a radically decentralist political strategy, in which emerging Green locals would seek to become an incipient counter-power to the centralized nation-state, while sustaining their involvement in a wide array of local eco-political struggles.

When the Greens in the United States adopted their first national program in 1991, both outlooks on Green spirituality were represented. The Spirituality statement in the Green Program advocated freedom of worship and the removal of religious practices from governance – the classic separation of church and state – but also affirmed spirituality as “a way of being in the world that acknowledges and celebrates our connectedness to the Earth, to each other, and to all life.” Within a few years, as U.S. Greens aimed to follow their European counterparts into the electoral realm, both spiritual and social-ecological Greens tended to drift away. As the particulars of policy,
Green Sisters Movement

Historically, when orphanages were needed in North America, Roman Catholic religious sisters’ communities built orphanages. When hospitals were needed, sisters built hospitals and staffed them. When schools were needed, sisters built schools and taught in them. When peace and social justice concerns intensified, especially in the context of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the violence in Central and South America, and the widening economic disparities between wealthier countries and the world’s poor, sisters formed ministries to respond, including commissions on peace and justice that took sisters’ lobbying efforts to Congress and to the United Nations. Now, in today’s times, an increasing number of religious sisters are hearing and answering a call from the planet founded a loose, decentralized network called “Sisters of Earth.” Sisters of Earth co-founders stress the “informal nature” of the network and their aim to provide support and informational resources for ecologically concerned sisters (and some lay women) without becoming a centralized hierarchical institution. There is no headquarters for Sisters of Earth, no president, and no central leader. Although there is a rotating conference planning committee, this committee issues no policy statements and does not require that members adhere to any tenets. Although many Sisters of Earth have been inspired into Earth activism by their encounter with the work of Passionist priest and “geologian” Thomas Berry, members are affiliated with a wide variety of women’s religious congregations and espouse a diversity of thought. Sisters of Earth’s biennial conferences serve, in particular, as gathering sites for sisters involved in many different forms of Earth activism – organic farming, land trusts, anti-toxics work, eco-justice, farmland renewal, food safety, heritage seed conservation, Earth literacy education, ecospirituality, and so forth.

Not all “green sisters” are members of Sisters of Earth, but many of them are, and the network itself is one of the more visible manifestations of the larger movement of ecologically active religious sisters. Green sisters – many of them athletic, Levi-clad, sun-tanned, out digging vegetable beds, pruning fruit trees, building “ecovillages,” launching clean-water campaigns, and celebrating planetary seasons and cycles – defy popular media stereotypes of the pinched, priggish, and passive nun. In the process of finding new ways to “reinhabit” their community lands, sisters are also creating more sustainable ways to “reinhabit” the spiritual landscapes of Catholic tradition and vowed religious life. For centuries, religious women have periodically created movements to reinvent and reinvigorate religious life; the culture of green sisters is arguably one of these movements.

Sarah McFarland Taylor
Further Reading
See also: Bioregionalism (various); Community Supported Agriculture; Genesis Farm; Roman Catholic Religious Orders.

Greenpeace

Greenpeace is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the global environment and promoting peace worldwide. Founded in 1972 by a small group of peace activists in Vancouver, Canada, it has since grown to become one of the most recognized activist organizations throughout the world. In 2003, Greenpeace drew members from 101 nations and maintained an active presence in over 40 countries. It is known for, among other things, its confrontational style of nonviolent, direct-action campaigning, built on the Quaker tradition of bearing witness and the Gandhian and King traditions of resistance.

Greenpeace grew out of the Don’t Make a Wave Committee (DMWC), a group of peace-oriented journalists and media people, committed to stopping the United States from testing nuclear weapons under the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. The group feared that the tests would create great tidal waves or an earthquake since the Islands sit near a fault line that runs from Vancouver and emerges as the San Andreas Fault in California. After failing to dissuade the U.S. through traditional forms of protest, the group decided to sail a ship to the testing zone in an attempt to disrupt the detonations or, failing this, to draw widespread attention to the environmental, health and security dangers involved. This strategy was not an entirely novel one: it had been used twice before by Quaker groups but, because the operators of the two previous ships were Americans, the ships were vulnerable to arrests by U.S. officials. DMWC sent a Canadian-registered ship staffed by mostly Canadians and this allowed it to proceed as long as it stayed in international waters. The ship, *Phyllis Cormack*, never made it to the site and neither did a second, *Edgewater Fortune*, but the actions enjoyed so much media attention that they galvanized citizens in both Canada and United States against nuclear weapons testing and created enough public pressure to convince the U.S. to cancel future, previously planned tests. Aiming to expand their activities, DMWC formally dissolved in 1972 and became Greenpeace.

This initial victory prompted Greenpeace to undertake similar protests throughout the 1970s against French nuclear testing in the Pacific and, in time, against a range of threats to the planetary ecosystem. The hallmark of Greenpeace is its dramatic exploits: Greenpeace has become expert at grabbing media attention through the use of creative, nonviolent, visually spectacular campaigning. Greenpeace action teams have, for example, scaled buildings and smokestacks to drape accusatory banners, sailed hot-air balloons into nuclear test sites, plugged-up industrial discharge pipes, and situated themselves in small craft between whaling ships and their targets. The media attention afforded to these daring displays has been central to Greenpeace’s success in mobilizing public opinion against environmentally harmful activities and raising awareness about threats to peace.

While Greenpeace has no explicit religious affiliations, three of its founding members were Quakers and its style of protest drew inspiration from the Quaker philosophy of “bearing witness.” Bearing witness requires that, when someone observes a morally objectionable act, he or she cannot turn away in ignorance but must take action to prevent further injustice or stand by to attest to its occurrence. Greenpeace bears witness by trying nonviolently to disrupt environmentally unjust behavior and by broadcasting its actions worldwide through various forms of media. Greenpeace ships, for instance, have satellite hook-ups that allow video footage to be sent instantaneously to media outlets throughout the world and almost all its actions take place in front of photo-journalists. A guiding intention of Greenpeace’s actions is to bring previously hidden activities into public view and enable as many people as possible to know about and become outraged at environmentally unjust activities.

A central principle behind Greenpeace’s work is a commitment to nonviolence. Drawing on the traditions of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as the Quakers, Greenpeace seeks to prevent wrongs without harming the perpetrators. Greenpeace acts in ways that prefigure the more peaceful world it works to bring about. This unwavering commitment to nonviolence has at times created rifts within the organization. Most notably, Paul Watson, an early Greenpeace member, advocated and at times practiced aggressive tactics considered violent by some – most notably against baby harp seal hunters.
After being voted off Greenpeace’s Board of Directors for various reasons and intent on fostering a more radical type of environmental activism, Watson broke with the group and founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Over the years, the society quarreled with Greenpeace over how aggressive tactics should be and what counts as violence. This led them to take different approaches to similar issues. In the 1980s, for example, Greenpeace organized a boycott of fish products from Iceland to protest Icelandic whaling policies. In contrast, the Society sank half of the Icelandic whaling fleet.

Greenpeace’s executive board is based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and oversees an extensive network of members and offices. Greenpeace has an international membership of some 2.8 million people and an annual budget of close to US$160 million. A notable feature of Greenpeace is that its entire international budget comes from voluntary donations (rather than funding from governments or industry), with over 90 percent of total funds coming as contributions from individuals. From its original focus on nuclear disarmament, Greenpeace has gradually expanded its areas of concern. Greenpeace’s activities are presently organized around six primary issues or campaign areas: 1) global warming; 2) ancient forests; 3) oceans; 4) global production of persistent organic pollutants (POPS) and other toxic chemicals; 5) nuclear materials and other dangers of the nuclear age; and 6) genetic engineering of food.

Many of Greenpeace’s international protest activities in these areas are supported by one of the four ships in its “eco-navy.” The flagship of the Greenpeace fleet is the Rainbow Warrior II. This ship was commissioned to replace the original Rainbow Warrior after the French government bombed and sunk the vessel in 1985 in an attempt to prevent Greenpeace actions against its nuclear tests in the South Pacific. The name of Greenpeace’s flagship vessel, and a fair amount of the inspiration for Greenpeace, comes from a 200-year-old Native American prophecy. A Cree grandmother, named Eyes of Fire, foretold that the greed of the white man would lead to a time when birds would fall from the sky, fish would die in the streams, and the seas and forest would become blackened. The legend suggests that such destruction could only be reversed by a rediscovery of a widespread reverence for the Earth. With a renewed Earth-based spirituality, the various peoples of the Earth could unite under one banner, becoming “Warriors of the Rainbow.”

At a general level, Greenpeace is concerned with changing the way people around the world think about and act in relationship to the environment. Greenpeace, through its literature and activities, promotes the idea that every person on the planet must bear some personal responsibility for the environment’s well-being. By promoting this “ecological sensibility” – the heightening of a worldwide concern for the environment – Greenpeace works to alter the social practices that support environmental harm. Greenpeace is in the business of consciousness-shaping: by changing people’s attitudes, Greenpeace hopes to affect their actions.

Greenpeace is also concerned with changing the behavior of governments. When Greenpeace participates in meetings involving world governments or otherwise lobbies government officials, the organization’s wide constituency base, knowledgeable experts and a history of effective action lend its views significant legitimacy. Greenpeace has played a central role in securing international legal agreements concerning such issues as whaling and ocean fishing, burning and dumping hazardous substances at sea, international trade in toxic waste and POPS. In recent times its campaigns have been credited with bringing about a moratorium on the planting of genetically engineered crops in Europe, promoting an international ban on the trade in so-called “conflict-timber” from West Africa, and encouraging a European phase-out of soft PVC.

While not a religiously based organization, Greenpeace draws direct inspiration from various spiritual traditions. Its Quaker roots and ongoing commitment to Quaker principles like bearing witness, its unwavering dedication to nonviolence in the Gandhian and King traditions and its connection to Native American religiosity make it a curious blend of spirituality and progressive politics. It recognizes that, while science and reason can provide invaluable information about the world we live in, deeper principles, orientations and values must frame our understanding of such information and require us to act in the service of human and ecological well-being.

Paul Wapner

Further Reading

See also: Biocentric Religion – A Call for; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Friends-Religious Society of (Quakers); Gandhi, Mohandas; Green Politics; Radical Environmentalism; Watson, Paul – and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.
Griffin, Susan (1943–)

With her imaginative prose and poetry, Susan Griffin characterizes the dominant mythos of Western civilization as separation from and control over the Earth. This dominant mythos is informed by Judeo-Christian theology and creation narratives. She attempts to disrupt this mythos, by articulating a different vision of embeddedness in the Earth.

Griffin’s work links ecological destruction and gender oppression. Her observation that the burdens of “cleaning up” the ecological crisis have been unduly placed upon women inspired her most influential work, *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978). In this book, she experiments with two voices: one the “objective, detached, and bodiless” voice of Western patriarchal logic, and the other an embodied and impassioned voice of women (1978: xv). The dialogue of these two voices traces the historical association of men with eternal reason and divine soul and women with earthly sin, corruption, and death. Out of this dialogue emerges a perspective that Griffin describes as a women’s “consciousness” of earthly connection (1978: xvi). It is this consciousness that we are “made from this Earth,” which Griffin’s later essays and poems affirm (1987: 223).

In *The Eros of Everyday Life: Essays on Ecology, Gender, and Society* (1995), Griffin suggests that a consciousness of earthly connection has implications for epistemology and psychology as well as gender and ecological relations. She refers to a “commingling” of the abstract and concrete in thought and claims that identity is an experience of interdependence rather than an assertion of independence (1995: 81, 91). In contrast to the distorted knowledge and divided self of the dominant Western mythos of separation from nature, Griffin insists that “[e]very movement, every breath, every response, the least thought” depends on the Earth (1995: 75).

Molly Jensen

Further Reading

See also: Daly, Mary; Ecofeminism (various); Feminist Spirituality Movement; Gimbutas, Marija; Merchant, Carolyn; Paganism – Contemporary; Sexuality and Green Consciousness.

Grim, John – See Religious Studies and Environmental Concern.

Grof, Christina and Stanislov – See Breathwork; Re-earthing.

Gulen, Fethullah (1938–)

Fetullah Gulen was born in 1938 in Erzurum, in eastern Anatolia. In the region of his birth, near the mountains of Ararat and the Aras River, Gulen was surrounded by the beauty of nature. He completed his formal education in Erzurum in his early twenties, and then began to educate himself in the Islamic sciences and in Eastern and Western classics, from Sa’di of Persia to Dante of Italy. Today he is considered a prominent intellectual, religious, and spiritual leader in Turkey and is known worldwide. He is the author of dozens of books and articles and writes editorials for several journals. In 2001, he went to the United States for medical treatment for his heart problem. He has remained there since then.

Gulen’s view of nature developed during the course of his education. In his early life, Gulen tried to instill in his students an appreciation of nature. He took his pupils on lengthy camping trips in which he encouraged them to be in harmony with nature by exposing themselves to the natural world and removing themselves from the conveniences of the modern world for a time.

Gulen’s ethic of nature is different from both anthropocentric and biocentric views. Gulen once wrote,

“This miraculous art of nature shows something more subtle, something beyond its own beauty, something that points to the One who created it so beautifully, who wants to be felt through His art, yet not felt thoroughly because of His majesty (Gulen 1991: 110–14).

Here Gulen focuses on the two aspects of nature: nature as a veil and nature as a revelation. It is a veil, because it veils the majesty of God. We do not see God himself, but only the natural world of cause and effect, which he has created. However, nature is also revealing, as it reveals the art of God in the most beautiful manner, reflecting the majesty of God.”
In Gulen’s understanding there is a triangle, composed of God, the Creator; nature, the book; and humans, the contemplators. Gulen once wrote, “We read [nature] as a book, we feel it, and we watch it, alive with its color and beauty” (1991: 110). Gulen refers to al-Ghazzali’s (d. 1111) statement: “In the realm of possibility there is no better form than that which God has created,” saying that “it is as if every form of nature is competing to demonstrate its beauty” (1991: 112).

Gulen writes not only of the amazing beauty of nature, but also of “pure-hearts,” those who are capable of contemplating nature. The result of this contemplation is an understanding of God. This view is derived from a Qur’anic verse: “Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the Earth and (in) the difference of night and day are signs (of His sovereignty) for men of understanding . . .” (3:190). The “men of understanding” referred to in this verse are the “pure-hearts” of which Gulen writes. According to Gulen, humans finally realize that the beauty of nature is not the eternal beauty, but an indication of the eternal beauty of God. The life of a human is not long enough to experience all the beauty that nature holds. Therefore, the “awakened hearts” turn to the eternal beauty of God. In Gulen’s understanding, “The spirits who are aware of this beauty see the creation in a deeper manner, listen to the music of every creature, a music beyond imagination . . .” (1991: 112). To Gulen, in the sight of these “awakened hearts,” “all trees say ‘Hu!’ [The Qur’anic pronoun used for God, which means ‘He’] Roses, flowers, in their own languages declare the Most Holy Creator” (1991: 112).

Similarly, Gulen writes, “The rivers run, saying, ‘Wahdet, Wahdet’ [‘You are the One’; can also be translated as ‘Oneness’]” (1991: 111). Thus, as the rivers run they express the oneness of God.

Gulen expresses his regret toward today’s civilized society’s behavior toward nature, writing,

Nature which is given to humanity by the Most Merciful One, for contemplation, as a mighty book, how it is painful that it is not cared for as much as a can of trash . . . Not only is nature not cared for, it is attacked on all sides, by deserting, and by trashings. Therefore, it is battered and bruised (1991: 113).

Gulen believes that because of humanity’s behavior, air is polluted, water is contaminated and alarming, and the soil is losing its fertility. If the appropriate steps are not taken soon, the ecological balance will collapse and the Earth will become “the land of death.” Gulen, then calls upon humanity, Muslims in particular, to be more responsible, saying, “the protection of nature is among the duties of every Muslim” (Gulen 1997: 239). Gulen refers to the Prophet of Islam’s declaration, after his immigration from Mecca, that Medina was to be a “Haram,” which in modern terms can be translated as a National Park, in which “grass is not to be taken, animals are not to be killed, and trees are not to be cut.” Gulen warns again, saying, “If we do not take lessons from what we have done, our beautiful world will be an amount of debris after disasters as destructive as the floods of Noah” (1991: 113).

Zeki Saritoprak

Further Reading


See also: Gardens in Islam; Islam.

Gurdjieff, Georges Ivanovitch (1866?–1949)

The notion of the “biosphere” – the thin organic film that covers the surface of our planet not only as a single integrated unit but also as one that has been the greatest force shaping our planet – coined by the Russian geochemist V.I. Vernadsky in 1926, is arguably the most significant idea that modern Russian thought has contributed to the ongoing interpenetration of the ecological and the religious.

Vernadsky’s intellectual ambition, though, ranged wider. As a “cosmicist” within the historical ambit of Russian mystical philosophy, like that of many of his scientific and artistic contemporaries, far from being simply a precursor to James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis or an influence upon the likes of Lynn Margulis, Vernadsky was at pains to emphasize that the “biosphere” was in some important way involved in the transformation of cosmic energy pouring forth from the Sun, which was also in some way its source.

It is unlikely to be simply a coincidence that in 1916, a decade before Vernadsky published his revolutionary work, G.I. Gurdjieff, a Russian who began his mystical career in the West as a refugee from the Bolshevik revolution formulation, also saw organic life, nature as a whole, as forming “something like a sensitive film which covers the whole of the Earth’s globe” which serves as a “transmitting station of forces” (Ouspensky 1949: 138) and which also “began in the sun” (Ouspensky 1949: 139).

Despite little verifiable information about Gurdjieff until his arrival in Moscow in 1911, at the very least this similarity suggests the ubiquity of “cosmicism” in the Russia of the time. As a “key ancestor” (Heelas 1996: 48) to the New Age, Gurdjieff’s “cosmicism” has achieved a widespread if diffuse influence. For example, the author of the environmental classic Small is Beautiful,
E.F. Schumacher, was a friend of one of Gurdjieff’s English disciples, John G. Bennett, and many of Gurdjieff’s ideas came to influence him deeply.

Emigrating to Western Europe via Istanbul in 1920, in 1922 Gurdjieff and his followers moved to Fontainebleau, south of Paris, where he operated the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man into the late 1930s. He visited the United States in 1924, where he also found followers, and again in 1930. From the early 1930s until his death in 1949 Gurdjieff lived in Paris with occasional trips to America. The Work, as the spiritual movement initiated by Gurdjieff has come to be known, continues to this day.

It is Gurdjieff’s compatriot P.D. Ouspensky, one of his most dedicated but wayward followers, to whom we owe almost our entire knowledge of Gurdjieff’s teaching in Russia. It is in Ouspensky’s record of this form of the teaching, In Search of the Miraculous (1949), that we find Gurdjieff’s earliest formulation of his ideas about the function and source of organic life as a planetary whole. While on the one hand superficially resembling a “proto-ecological” stance in arguing that humanity “like the rest of organic life, exists on Earth for the needs and purposes of the Earth” (Ouspensky 1949: 57–8) which is itself a “living being” (Ouspensky 1949: 25), Gurdjieff makes it clear that soteriologically his teaching is also “against nature, against God” (Ouspensky 1949: 47).

Gurdjieff’s seemingly contradictory positions are reconciled in his idea of the “Ray of Creation,” the backbone of his early cosmology which later became a staple of the Work. Like many exemplars of Western mysticism before him, Gurdjieff held a broadly post-Neoplatonic emanationist schema in which the manifold emerges and descends hierarchically from a unitary source and through to which it can once again ascend – which he termed “involution” and “evolution” respectively. This process unfolds through the actions of two fundamental principles: the “Law of Three,” which determines all manifest relationship, and the “Law of Seven,” which determines all manifest transformations, which Gurdjieff at this time also referred to as the “Law of Octaves.”

The “Ray of Creation” is our own particular “involutionary” octave or “cosmological sofeggio” “in which Do is God or the Absolute, Si is the universe, La is our own constellation, Sol is our Sun, Fa the sun’s planets, Mi the Earth and Re the moon” (Moore 1991: 45). As “there is nothing dead or inanimate in nature” (Ouspensky 1949: 317) that meant that, like a branch from a tree-trunk, the Ray of Creation was also alive and growing. The Earth for example, is growing “not in the sense of size but in the sense of greater consciousness, greater receptivity” (Ouspensky 1949: 305). This growth was a direct effect of organic life which Gurdjieff described as “the Earth’s organ of perception” (Ouspensky 1949: 138).

However, unlike the classical emanationist pattern, the transition from unitary source to the manifold and back is not a smooth one. Rather, the “Ray of Creation,” like all processes under the Law of Octaves and also like the musical scale after which it is named, is discontinuous between the notes Do (in this instance, God) and Si (the universe), and the notes Fa (the planets) and Mi (the Earth) (Ouspensky 1949: 137).

It is at these points that the development of processes can be retarded. To overcome these junctures, a “shock” or additional force must be applied. The juncture between God and the universe was filled by the will of the Absolute (Ouspensky 1949: 132). In order to fill the juncture between the planets and the Earth, continuing the descent of energies along our Ray of Creation to the Moon undeflected, “a special apparatus” – i.e. Life – “is created for receiving and transmitting” (Ouspensky 1949: 132). This lead to one of Gurdjieff’s more startling claims that the “moon is a huge living being feeding upon all that lives and grows on the Earth” (Ouspensky 1949: 85), receiving a particular energy or “soul” stored in every plant, animal and person upon its death.

While the deterministic effects of descending energies is indeed pessimistic for the majority, life’s higher origins in the Sun also constitute the beginning of the evolutionary ascension back toward the Absolute for the few. Here Gurdjieff’s cosmology dovetails into his soteriology, for liberation “from the mechanical part of our life” is “liberation from the moon” (Ouspensky 149: 85). Involutionary processes, conscious in their origins in the Absolute, become more mechanical the further they travel from the Absolute. As the “evolving part of organic life” (Ouspensky 1949: 306), only human beings can struggle against the general downward flow. As a microcosm of the universe, having “in us the matter of all other worlds” (Ouspensky 1949: 88) which “undergo the same transformation . . . on the same plan and in accordance to the same laws” (Ouspensky 1949: 191), we have the possibility, only with the expenditure of constant self-initiated effort, of increasing the production of the more refined matters within us, which Gurdjieff associated with greater consciousness and a conditional immortality.

Nature or organic life as a whole “transmits to us through our impressions the energy by which we live and move and have our being” (Ouspensky 1949: 181). While it is all for her own involutionary purposes, we could also use that energy to participate in the evolutionary flow back to the Absolute.

Gurdjieff later mitigated this severity somewhat in his own posthumous opus Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson. Though it recontextualized the core of his earlier cosmological ideas, more importantly it introduced a complex cosmogonical theodicy entirely absent from his previous formulations. He ended this book with the image of life as a river dividing in two: one stream terminates in the
crevices of the Earth and is lost forever, while the other stream empties into the boundless ocean. Here Gurdjieff argued that so

long as we remain passive, not only shall we have inevitably to serve solely as a means for Nature's "involutionary construction," but for the rest of our lives we shall have to submit slavishly to every caprice of all sorts of blind events . . . [but] even for you, it is not too late . . . The foresight of Just Mother Nature consists . . . in this, that the possibility is given us, in certain inner and outer conditions, to cross over from one stream into the other (Gurdjieff 1950: 1231–2).

For Gurdjieff this could only be achieved by "honorably fulfilling my duty to Great Nature" (1950: 39). This obligation to nature is carried out within a complex mythological narrative in which the chains of worlds were created to provide God with a means whereby he could escape the action of time through "the exchange of substances or the Reciprocal-feeding of everything that exists" (1950: 136–7). For Gurdjieff, everything is "eating" something lower and "feeding" something higher in the circulation of an open living system.

Moreover, only in a certain class of beings, humans among them, can the necessary "transmutation of cosmic substances" (1950: 140) take place. This effort not only will "pay for their arising" (1950: 386) but also allows them to absorb some of these substances themselves to create "higher-being-bodies" which survive the death of the "planetary body" we are born with (1950: 775). Such beings become "free to lighten as much as possible the sorrow of our COMMON FATHER" (1950: 386) in his struggle against time and to be his "helpers in the ruling of the enlarged World" (1950: 792) which continues to grow and "feed" him.

In Gurdjieff's estimation, it is only because we do not conform to this cosmic purpose that Mother Nature, the consciousness of our planet, is then further constrained to implement the process of "reciprocal destruction" of human beings in the forms of epidemics and more terrifyingly through war in order to make up for the energetic imbalance in the context of universal interdependence (1950: 959–60).

More recently, this obligation, coupled with his notion that if "by a certain time, what ought to be done has not been done, the Earth may perish without having attained what it could have attained" (Ouspensky 1949: 25), which ties into contemporary ecological concerns, has led some in "the Work," such as James George in *Asking for the Earth* (1995), to see the evolution of humankind, as a road whereby the Earth might be saved.

**Further Reading**


See also: Bennett, John G.; Gaia; Lovelock, James; New Age; Ouspensky, Pyotr Demianovich; Russian Mystical Philosophy; Schumacher, Ernst Friedrich.

**Gush Emunim**

Gush Emunim, “the Bloc of the Faithful,” led the pioneering Jewish movement to settle the West Bank in the wake of the Israeli victory in the Six Day War in 1967. The organization was not in fact named until a meeting in February 1974 at Kfar Etzion, although settlement undertaken by founding Gush personalities Rabbi Moshe Levinger and Hanan Porat began in 1967 when Levinger and Porat “settled” the Park Hotel in Hebron by checking in disguised as intrepid Swiss tourists who oddly spoke only Hebrew shortly after the conclusion of the War.

For Gush Emunim, the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) occupies the central concern of the movement, and in the view of its adherents, the Land is the key to messianic redemption, not only for the Jewish people, but for the entire world. Gush Emunim’s “religion of nature” should therefore be understood through two facets of the organization’s teaching. First, the Land itself is sensible, ensouled, and capable of feeling pain when hurt or joy when united as God intended with the Jewish people. The Land in this sense is numinous and imbued with inherent sacrality. Second, and of greater importance, Gush theology proposes an almost mathematical formula by which the unfolding process of messianic redemption can be
measured, centimeter by centimeter, as the Jewish people slowly reacquire control of the full biblical patrimony of Eretz Israel as promised to them by God in the Hebrew Bible.

The Sacrality of the Land
The numinous character of Eretz Yisrael is perhaps best expressed by Rabbi Yochanan Fried, a senior Gush personality:

[The] significance of the holiness of the Land is indeed the concept of sanctity in the Jewish world... the Land cannot suffer bad deeds, since its very essence is holy. Therefore, whoever does not adjust to its (the Land’s) character, is pushed away from before it (Y. Shilhav in Newman 1985: 122).

The basis for Gush Emunim’s focus on the Land is a reductionist or fundamentalist application of the complex theology of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the first rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, as filtered through the fundamentalist teachings of his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982), who from his yeshiva, Mercaz Harav, would become the spiritual mentor – and indeed, a prophetic figure – to the founding members of Gush Emunim, many of whom were Mercaz Harav graduates.

For the elder Kook – a man learned in Kabbalah as well as Talmud – every Jew, however secular, has within himself “the sacred spark,” a link with God as one of God’s covenanted people. Rabbi Kook explicitly linked this teaching with the view that the bond between the Jewish people and the Land was uniquely different from what binds all of the other world’s peoples to their lands. The holiness of the Land of Israel calls out to the holiness of the Jewish people, linking them forever as one. Zvi Yehuda, carried on the elder Kook’s teaching, but with a particular focus on the Land as the key to messianic redemption. The 1967 war, giving Israel control of vast tracks of the biblical patrimony which had been under the control of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, created the conditions under which the Land could be reunited with its people, thus paving the way for the emergence of the settlement movement.

The Full Biblical Patrimony
In 1967, only weeks before the outbreak of hostilities, at the annual reunion of Mercaz Harav graduates held on Israel’s national day, R. Zvi Yehuda Kook rose to give a speech on the topic of Psalm 19. Suddenly, in the midst of his oration, the rabbi began loudly to lament the loss of the biblical patrimony of Israel, torn from the “living body” of Eretz Yisrael:

“They divided up my land.” Yes – this is true. Where is our Hebron? Do we let it be forgotten? And where are our Shechem [Nablus] and our Jericho? Can we ever forsake them? All of Transjordan – it is ours. Every single inch, every square foot... belongs to the Land of Israel. Do we have the right to give up one millimeter? (Aran 1988: 265)

The unexpected onset, and surprising success, of the Six Day War was interpreted by Rabbi Kook’s students as nothing less than miraculous, and the words of Rabbi Kook quoted above were thus rendered prophetic.

The first, and still most important, Gush Emunim settlement is Kiryat Arba in Hebron, which grew out of an Israeli government compromise with Levinger and Porat aimed at getting them to leave the Park Hotel, where they had long outstayed their welcome (and never actually paid their bills). It remains at this writing (2003) the focus of the most militant settlement activities in the West Bank, and Rabbi Levinger remains there as the settlement’s most important rabbinical authority.

The “earthquake” was the term many Israelis use to describe the elections of 1977 when the Labor Party – the party of government since independence in 1948 – was swept aside and the right-wing Likud coalition led by Menachem Begin came to power. Under Begin, settlement was for the first time encouraged. Under government sponsorship, a ring of settlements – in reality vast apartment blocks – were created around Jerusalem on formerly Palestinian-owned land. Financial incentives brought Israelis of every religious and political hue to live in these suburban “settlements,” while Begin in private urged Gush Emunim to continue its settlement activities in the West Bank and the Sinai. Gush Emunim sources quote Begin as saying, following a lecture on the sort of domestic and international pressure he was under with regard to the Occupied Territories:

Do it [found settlements] clandestinely, and get organized once you’re there. Then, after the fact, it will be easy for me to say “They got the better of me!” After all, nobody would imagine that I, Menachem Begin, would drive Jews off of Jewish land (Segal 1988: 37).

The theological dilemma which would grow with the passing years was starkly illustrated on 7 September 1978 when the same Prime Minister Begin who had encouraged Gush Emunim settlement signed the Camp David Accords. The agreement returned the Sinai to Egypt, and necessitated the dismantling of the settlements which had sprung up there after 1967. Gush activists made a symbolic stand against the Israeli Army at the Sinai settlement of Yamit, but this was soon abandoned and, from the perspective of Gush Emunim’s theology of the Land as the measure of messianic redemption, the redemptive process had for the first time in a generation suffered a dramatic reversal. The
disastrous 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon further demoralized the Gush faithful, as did two waves of the Intifada, the uprising against Israeli occupation (in 1987 and 2003). The Israeli withdrawal from its self-imposed Security Zone in southern Lebanon on 24 May 2000 made the sound of the footsteps of the messiah yet more faint to ears of the Gush faithful.

These reverses have served to obscure an ongoing, but vitally important, internal hermeneutical debate among senior Gush personalities. The question that had to be answered if Gush Emunim’s theology of the Land was ever to be realized was: what exactly constitutes the full biblical patrimony of Eretz Yisra’el? The key text upon which the imagined map of Eretz Yisra’el is drawn is far from clear. According to Exodus 23:31, “I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River.” The Red Sea is clear enough, and archeological evidence could be marshaled to make a case for locating “the sea of the Philistines,” but which desert (the Sinai in present-day Egypt, the Empty Quarter in contemporary Saudi Arabia, the Mojave in present-day New Mexico?), and what river (the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Mississippi?) is far from clear.

The argument however, is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the face of events in the Middle East. The idealistic young founders of Gush Emunim are, today, neither idealistic nor young. The organization has declined considerably in recent years, supplanted by a more militant generation of settlers for whom the teachings of the Rabbis Kook hold little allure. These sons and daughters of the original wave of settlement have come to be known as the “Hilltop Youth” in the Israeli press, and are famed for their zeal at establishing illegal and military indefensible settlements, as well as for their physical violence directed at Palestinians and their property, secular Israelis, the Israeli press, and are famed for their zeal at establishing illegal and military indefensible settlements, as well as for their physical violence directed at Palestinians and their property, secular Israelis, the Israeli press, and most strikingly, their fellow settlers who voice disapproval of their behavior. The Hilltop Youth retain the original Gush Emunim’s messianic zeal, but have little interest in the Kookist ideology of the sacred spark as being inherent in even the most secular of Jews. In ecological terms, the violence associated with these young settlers has resulted in significant damage to the Land through the uprooting of olive branches and orchards belonging to Palestinian families – actions that the first generation of Gush adherents would never have countenanced.

In terms of Gush Emunim’s theology of redemption through reconstituting Eretz Yisra’el, however, all this means little. Israel’s borders show little sign of again expanding, so for the remaining adherents of Gush Emunim’s unique “theology of the Land,” the messiah yet tarries.