**Tantra**

Tantra, a current of religious doctrine and practice found mainly within Hinduism and Buddhism, emerged in India in about the sixth century. It evolved greatly over the subsequent one thousand years, changing in form and content as it spread outward into every Asian region into which Buddhism was practiced including China, Japan, Tibet, Nepal, and Indonesia. While later forms of Tantra tend to be abstract soteriologies (understandings regarding salvation) grounded in internal, meditative identification of the self with some form of the absolute, Tantra emerged in India out of the worship cults of local deities often identified with natural phenomena and the forces of nature. In India, these Tantric deities were very often (but not exclusively) female spirits of the land – mountains, forests, rivers, and pools – and were often identified with or depicted as wild animals, birds, trees, and flowers. Furthermore, when Tantra was exported into other parts of Asia, local deities of those countries were often transformed into the guardians of the mandalas of the Tantric high gods, and into semi-divine intermediaries between the worshipper and those gods. In Japan, for example, the sanrinjin (literally, “three bodies with discs”) theory, which divided the Buddha’s appearances in the phenomenal world into three types, allowed for the transformation and appropriation of the indigenous Japanese kami deities into so many “propagators of Buddhism.” In this way, deified aspects of the Japanese natural landscape became both Buddhist and Tantric, even as they remained Japanese. Parallel to this was the “translation” of certain Indian Tantric deities into their foreign homologues. So, for example, the dakinis of Indian Buddhist Tantra – who were at once semi-divine female intermediaries and human “witches,” and who were sometimes identified in India with jackals – were qualified as “fox spirits” in Chinese and Japanese Tantric traditions.

Natural vegetation plays a prominent role in Tantra, beginning with the use of the term “seed” (bijā in Sanskrit) for the most powerful class of mantras, the sound formulas used in Tantric ritual: the practitioner actually generates the divinity with which he will identify himself by “planting” its seed through his mantric utterance. This image is expanded in the circa tenth-century Kaulajñananiraya, a foundational Hindu Tantric text, in which Siva, the supreme deity and creator god states that “Just as there is in an individual seed the origins of a tree possessed of flowers, roots, fruit, leaves, and branches, so it is as well with the other beings that are generated within my body” (16:42). The coeval Netra Tantra (12:11–12) assigns this role to a class of female deities called the Mothers, who hold the world inside of themselves, in the form of seeds that they will sow again at the beginning of a new world age, in order that creatures might reappear. Vindhyavasini, the “Goddess Who Dwells in the Vindhyā Mountains,” one of the earliest and most important Hindu Tantric goddesses, is described in terms of her habitat, which is an extension of herself: a vast forest teeming with plant and animal life. Similarly, the energy of the Hindu goddess Kubjika is described in a twelfth-century Tantric text as flowing outward through the transmission of her teachings, whose conduits are represented as living plants: trees, creepers, roots and vines. A number of later Kubjika texts depict her as a tree with orange or red-colored blossoms – either a tamarind (citāca), a kimsuka, or a kadamba. This identification, of the female principal, with a flower, is extended to the female consort in numerous Tantric sexual rites, in which she is often called “Lotus Maiden,” and whose vulva is called “lotus” (padma).

It would be a mistake, however, to qualify the Tantric view of nature, or indeed of the feminine, as a static and passive source of life. In the early medieval Indian context, wild nature was, like feminine sexuality, threatening and antinomian, the polar opposite of the security and order of male-dominated human society. Here, nature was not a peaceable kingdom, but rather an alien wilderness, a place of savage energy, at once alluring and terrifying, nurturing and deadly to anyone who would venture into it, and populated by ravening female entities in the form of predatory animals and rapacious or carrion-feeding birds. In this context, the male practitioner of Tantra par excellence was termed a “hero” (vīra), because he alone dared to confront and master wild feminine nature, energy, and sexuality. So it was that on specific nights of the lunar month, male Tantric practitioners would assemble on lonely mountaintops (pithas) or in forest clearings (ksetras) to await the coming of Tantric yoginis or dakinis, who would descend on them in the form of lionesses, she-jackals, she-wolves, vultures, crows, cobras, etc. The initiates who stumbled into these gatherings (melakas) faced certain death: they would be torn apart by these Tantric animal-goddesses or their human counterparts. The Tantric hero, however, empowered by his controlling mantras and ritual knowledge, could control these dread feminine entities and, more than this, actually appropriate their multiple energies – the forces of nature – for himself,
Tantrism in the West

Since at least the second half of the twentieth century, the Asian tradition known as Tantra or Tantrism has had a powerful impact on Western spirituality and on the relationship between religion and nature in the West. A vast and complex body of traditions that spread throughout the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions since at least the fifth century, Tantrism has long held a profoundly ambivalent place in the Western imagination. When it was first discovered by European orientalist scholars in the nineteenth century, Tantrism was typically singled out as the very worst example of all the licentiousness and idolatry believed to have corrupted Indian religions in modern times. Yet in our own generation, Tantrism has often been celebrated as a much-needed affirmation of the human body, sexuality and the sacrality of the natural environment itself.

Although it has been defined in a wide variety of different ways, Tantrism might be said to center first and foremost around the concept of Shakti – the divine “power” or “energy” that circulates through all levels of the universe, from the individual human body, to the social body, to the vast body of the cosmos itself. Typically identified with the great Goddess in her most aggressive forms, such as Kali or Durga, Shakti is the divine feminine power that creates, sustains and destroys all things. In practice, Tantrism is essentially a complex body of spiritual techniques that aim to harness and direct this power, both toward this-worldly goals of material enjoyment and toward the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation. In their spiritual practice, Tantrikas seek to awaken this power as it lies concealed in the most seemingly mundane, even profane, natural acts and physical objects – including normally impure substances and forbidden acts, such as meat, wine and sexual intercourse in violation of class laws.

Not surprisingly, the first Christian missionaries and European scholars to come upon Tantrism during the colonial era were quite horrified at this seeming confusion of religion and sensuality. As the Baptist missionary William Ward described it, Tantrism is “a most shocking mode of worship” involving rites “too abominable to enter the ears of man and impossible to be revealed to a Christian public.” However, toward the end of the nineteenth century, a few more courageous scholars such as Sir John Woodroffe made a bold attempt to rescue and defend the Tantric tradition. In Woodroffe’s view, Tantrism is not only a sophisticated philosophical tradition, but also a profound vision of the physical cosmos that is basically in agreement with the findings of modern Western science. While modern science had only recently discovered that all matter is simply a form of energy, the Tantrikas had long known that the natural universe is simply a manifestation of Shakti, the Goddess as power.

But it was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that Tantrism began to enter the Western consciousness. In the West, Tantrism is typically pictured as the very worst example of all the licentiousness and idolatry believed to have corrupted Indian religions in modern times. Yet in our own generation, Tantrism has often been celebrated as a much-needed affirmation of the human body, sexuality and the sacrality of the natural environment itself.

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century that Tantrism began to enter the Western world in a significant way, with the foundation of the first “Tantrik Order in America” in New York City by Dr. Pierre Arnold Bernard in 1906. A contemporary of Sigmund Freud, Bernard saw modern Western society as terribly repressed in its attitudes toward the human body, sexuality and the natural environment. Tantrism, he believed, offered the most effective means to liberate these oppressed powers of sexuality and nature.

Beginning in the 1960s, Tantrism entered in full force into Western popular culture, first with the early Beat movement, and then finding a welcome home among the sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. In the words of Alan Watts – the ex-Anglican priest turned Zen master and psychedelic guru of the Beat generation – Tantrism is “a marvelous and welcome corrective to certain excesses of Western civilization.” In contrast to Western society, with its patriarchal domination of nature and its separation of spirit from matter, Tantrism can bring us an understanding of the creative power of the female and an appreciation of the inherent goodness of the natural world. Perhaps the first great high priest of “Neo-Tantrism” was the infamous “Sex Guru” known in his early years as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and in his later life as “Osho.” Redefining Tantra as a kind of “religionless religion” based on the rejection of all fixed institutions and the celebration of sexuality and material nature, Rajneesh offered a new ideal for human existence – the ideal of “Zorba the Buddha,” who combines the sensuality of Zorba the Greek with the spiritual insight of the Buddha.

By the 1980s and 1990s, Tantrism had become a basic part of the amorphous movement known as the “New Age,” and increasingly identified with a wide variety of religious traditions believed to honor the forces of nature, sexuality and femininity. Thus, as Tantra: The Magazine defines it, Tantrism is no longer a tradition confined to certain forms of Hinduism and Buddhism in Asia, but is in fact a universal tradition of nature-, goddess-, and sex-worship followed by peoples of all cultures, from pre-historic shamans to modern neo-pagans:

Tantra is life in balance ... Tantra is practiced by Native Peoples the world over, through profound respect for All that Is. It is also practiced through the respect of the divine feminine worshipped in her physical form through attending the needs of Mother Earth as our own body (1991: 3).

Now reconceived as an ancient global tradition centering on the reverence of nature and sexuality, Tantrism has been increasingly embraced by many of the various “green” movements and other environmentalist groups that have emerged in the last three decades. As we see in a wide array of movements such as GreenSpirit, Creation Spirituality, and various Wiccan and Pagan groups, Tantrism is welcomed as a unifying vision that brings together spirituality and physical nature. In contrast to the life-denying, other-worldly and male-dominated Abrahamic traditions, Tantrism represents for many a positive expression of human sexuality and spirituality, with the power to unite people to the sacred energies of the Earth, even empowering them for her defense. According to one popular Australian website,

TANTRA is part of a broad evolutionary process in consciousness, which is moving toward an integration with the Natural World, the physical body and the many sexual expressions of human behavior. All of Nature is then perceived as a sacred manifestation of the Divine, where there is no separation between Spirit and Nature (www.tantra.co.nz).

For many neo-pagans, this discovery of Tantra by the West is really only a rediscovery of the long-forgotten divinity of nature that lies at the core of Western traditions, as well. In the words of the one of the most prominent figures in the early Wiccan revival, Doreen Valiente, it is only fitting that modern Western witches should rediscover Eastern Tantric techniques; this is simply the great spiral dance of Shakti, the Great Goddess Earth herself, coming round full circle. It follows naturally,

in accordance with the evolving trends of the Aquarian Age, that modern witches should adapt the Tantric sexual magic for use in their own magic circles . . . Everything in this world is flowing. Nothing stands still, nor does time go back upon itself; but it proceeds in a spiral . . . The spiral has come round again, to its ancient place (Valiente 1988: 151).

In the course of its transmission to the modern West, Tantrism has undergone a profound transformation and reinterpretation. Once a highly esoteric tradition focused on secret ritual and acquisition of power, Tantrism has today become a popular form of spirituality focused on the celebration of nature and the liberation of sensual pleasure. There are various conflicting opinions as to how we ought to judge this transformation. More skeptical critics tend to view it as a tragic misinterpretation of an ancient religious tradition, which has been mistakenly appropriated for modern Western interests and hopelessly confused with Western sexual obsessions. More sympathetic observers, conversely, see this as just one more example of the changing nature of religious traditions in new historical contexts, as a much-needed corrective to the destructive attitudes of modern Western society, and as a powerful affirmation of the inherent sacredness of the natural environment.

Hugh B. Urban
Further Reading
See also: Hinduism; India; New Age; Sexuality and Eco-spirituality; Sexuality and Green Consciousness; Tantra; Yoga and Ecology.

Taoism – See Chinese Traditional Concepts of Nature; Daoism.

Target Earth
Target Earth is an international Christian Environmental organization founded in 1986 by Roy and D’Aun Goble, who were inspired to begin a retreat center after taking a course together at Westmont College, a small Christian College located in Santa Barbara, California. Target Earth started simply as the Hidden Lakes Retreat Center in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California and it remained the Goble’s sole project for many years. In 1992 the Gobles encountered a writer from Christianity Today magazine and the result of that meeting and collaboration was Target Earth International, and the beginning of a global outreach program.

Target Earth is a response to the biblical mandate found in Genesis, which states that humans have dominion over the Earth. Target Earth sees this not as encouragement to plunder the Earth, but as a call to be caring stewards of God’s creation. It is a partner of the Evangelical Environmental Network and offers a Campus Programs Division, including 45 campus chapters across the United States, which assists students with lobby training, student conferences and alternative spring breaks. It also publishes a Magazine entitled Target Earth.

In addition to maintaining the Hidden Lakes Retreat Center, Target Earth offers numerous international educational opportunities. Students can participate in short seven- to fourteen-day missions or eight-week internships in Belize, Honduras, Mexico, Russia, and South Africa. Target Earth offers a Global Stewardship Study Program at its Environmental Research and Education Center at Jaguar Creek in Belize. It also works with conservation groups to select areas of the rainforest for preservation. One such property is the 8000-acre area of Jaguar Creek in Belize. Target Earth also maintains the Lasting Impressions Wilderness in Zimbabwe, Africa; and in North America, it has focused on preserving land in the Soda Mountain Wilderness in Oregon.

The Target Earth website expresses the mission of “Serving the Earth, Serving the Poor.” In this sense, Target Earth is like many other Christian environmental organizations with a presence on the internet, which indicate that they are involved in human rights advocacy, spreading of the gospel, and preservation the environment. Such a multiple mission avoids elevating the Earth to a position of importance above humanity. The Earth is not preserved for the Earth’s sake alone, but because it is God’s creation.

While sharing these views and attributes, Target Earth International is noteworthy in part because, unlike some other Christian environmental organizations, it is attractive to students and others who may not otherwise join a Christian group. Target Earth maintains a liberal and educational approach, offering a resources page outlining environmental justice, recycling, simple lifestyles and biblical references supporting each activity. This combination
of practical projects and faith-based environmentalism makes Target Earth appealing to a wide variety of people.

Andrea A. Kresge

See also: Evangelical Environmental Network; Restoring Eden; Sierra Treks.

Tattoos

Tattooing (from the Tahitian word tatau) is an art form of body modification that has been practiced throughout history in many regions of the world. Modifying the body, according to some anthropologists, is one of the simplest ways that human beings become social beings. The human body is the place where the natural world, social worlds, and personal experiences join. The practice of tattooing and body modification, which often has strict, gender-dependent rules, thus situates the human body within a particular visible context for community members.

Tattoos have often been used to construct identity: by marking criminals, denoting social status and rank, symbolizing fighting ability, showing community membership, and as symbols of successful initiation. Initiation tattoos symbolize the wearer's willingness and ability to accept social responsibility and established socio-cultural values. Other, more voluntary, tattooing practices mark the body for aesthetic or erotic purposes, in rebellion against societal norms, or as medical therapy. Tattoos have also been used as symbols of religious affiliation and community membership. Many Coptic, Syrian, and Russian Christians returning from the Holy Land often acquired “cross” tattoos on their hands, and even though proscribed in the Qur'an, many Turkish Muslims returning from the hajj to Mecca have received tattoos to commemorate their completed pilgrimage.

In societies where spiritual forces are understood to be present in the natural world, objects, and living creatures, the human body becomes an avenue for relations between the spiritual and physical realms; the blood of the tattooing process symbolizes manipulation of the life-force. For example, tattooing was performed to bring prosperity and fertility to the wearer among many traditional African communities. Thus the physical body, having more than functional meaning, can become a unique magical talisman that integrates the spiritual, physical, and social aspects of life. For example, the North American Cree not only had tattoos for luck, beauty, and protection of health, but men also received tattoos, derived from dream-images, to help them communicate with nature spirits. Also, the complex designs found among Polynesian tattoos represented aspects of their lives within the natural world (e.g., centipedes and water symbols), tribal status, strength of character, and esoteric religious teachings.

In Middle Kingdom Egypt the tattoo functioned as a bridge between the physical body and the afterworld. In order to activate their procreative powers after death and assure their immortal salvation and resurrection into the realm of Osiris, some women were incised with special lines and dots related to the Goddess Hathor. Also, Native American Eskimo women traditionally tattooed their faces and breasts in order to assure a happy afterlife.

Tattoos as marks of protection from evil forces and chaos were believed to make the wearer invisible or unrecognizable to malignant spirits or forces (e.g., among the African Nuba and Butwa). Nineteenth-century Alaskans utilized tattoos as protection from the spirits of animals and people that they had killed. Additionally, Thai Buddhist monks inscribe Buddhist sayings and symbols onto the bodies of male lay practitioners for protection purposes and to create embodied mantras.

The Edo period in Japan saw a rise in the practice of tattooing (called horimono – dug things) among urban lower-class social groups such as firemen and theater workers. Japanese tattooing utilizes figures from Buddhism, mythology, and literature (such as the Suikoden, a translation of the fourteenth-century Chinese classic about tattooed bandits that fought against injustice). Additionally, many of the most important Japanese tattoo motifs are based on folk beliefs about the powers of flora and fauna of the Earth and sea. These motifs are important because of the belief that tattoos are able to transfer to the wearer the power inherent in the meaning of the symbol. Personality traits such as loyalty and fierceness are embodied in the symbol of the lion-dog, strength and restraint (the dragon); religious elements such as devotion (Buddha, Kannon, and Fudo the Guardian), a Buddhist-inspired understanding of impermanence (cherry blossoms); as well as material aims such as longevity (the tortoise) are common themes among Japanese tattoos.

Almost all societies have seen traditional forms of body modification disappear. Only the West, especially in America where tattoos often function as markers for ideals of individualism, is witnessing a growth in tattooing practices at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Tattoos in America have begun to symbolize the ideals of self-actualization, spiritual growth, social and personal transformation, and ecological awareness. The New Age Movement, Women's and Men's movements, the ecology movement, and the Paganism and Goddess movements of the late twentieth century have promoted an understanding of the body as sacred. Individuals within these movements often understand tattooing as a means of decorating the sacred temple of their body.

For some wearers, tattoos symbolize spiritual ideals, for others the process itself is considered a spiritual transformation. For example, common tattoo narratives of women relate themes of self-healing, empowerment, and reclaiming control of their lives and bodies. Additionally,
an emergent sub-set of Americans practice tattooing and body modification as a means of reconnecting their minds with their physical bodies and the natural world while aligning themselves with non-Western religious ideals thought to be more spiritually and ecologically aware than those provided by the consumer-driven Western society (e.g., idealized visions of Irish Celtic Pagan and Native American relationships with the spirits of nature, or Buddhist and Daoist notions of the interconnectedness of all life). Valorizing non-Western ideals, these “modern primitives” not only work to provide ecologically oriented ethics but they also promote awareness of the spiritual aspects of traditional forms of body modification and their potential value in modern contexts.

Shawn Arthur

Further Reading
See also: Feminist Spirituality Movement; Men’s Movement; New Age; Polynesian Traditional Religions.

Tawhid (Oneness of God)

Tawhid literally means “making one” or “unifying,” and generally refers to the Islamic doctrine of the oneness of God. In the Qur’an, Tawhid implies both belief in God’s unity as well as the corresponding conduct demanded by such belief. Tawhid therefore has a doctrinal as well as an ethical dimension.

As the most basic premise of Islam, Tawhid finds its expression in the first half of the testimony of faith: “There is no god but God.” The meanings and implications of this deceptively simple statement are far-reaching and manifold. Tawhid can be seen as the very life-force of Islam, for all aspects of Islamic belief, thought, and practice are rooted in its unifying and integrating vision. In any epistemology based on Tawhid, for instance, knowledge of nature cannot be divorced from knowledge of God’s oneness.

Lynn White’s critique of Christianity has been taken as an indictment of the entire Abrahamic tradition, including monotheism’s Islamic manifestation in Tawhid. A single transcendent God is necessarily outside of nature, making the latter appear as a profane object, fit for human manipulation and domination. The description of God in the Qur’an and its reception and development in the subsequent Islamic tradition present a more complex picture. To begin with, the God of the Qur’an is both transcendent and immanent. In the Islamic tradition, the proponents of classical theology and jurisprudence typically emphasized the former aspects of the divine due to their reliance on discursive reason and concern with the maintenance of social order. The proponents of the sapiential and mystical traditions, on the other hand, often emphasized the latter aspects of the divine because of their interest in inculcating a close personal relationship between God and the human individual.

In short, Tawhid embraces divine transcendence from and incomparability with creation (tanzih), as well as divine immanence in and similarity to creation (tashbih). Consequently, the God of the Qur’an, while not identical with nature in any simplistic or pantheistic way, is not far removed or separate from it either. While the former perspective opens up the possibility of legitimately making use of nature, the latter perspective sets ethical limits on such use. In the vision of Tawhid, nature is anything but a profane object.

The key Qur’anic term that must be emphasized in order to apprehend the relationship between God and nature is ayah, or sign. The word appears in the Qur’an as referring to miracles of prophets, to the beings and phenomena of nature, to the realities found in the human soul, to major historical events, and to the verses of the Qur’an itself – all of these are signs of God. The Qur’anic position seems to be that even though there may not be any adequate rational proof for the existence of God, there are more than enough signs that point or allude to the Ultimate Reality. According to the vision of Tawhid, everything other than God is a portent or pointer that signifies God. In this context, the Qur’an puts particular emphasis on directing the reader’s attention to the innumerable and easily accessible beings and phenomena of nature as so many signs through which God may be known.

By positing all existing things as signs of God, the Qur’an brings sacredness back into nature. By using the same word for the verses of the scripture and the beings and phenomena of nature, the Qur’an indicates that the book of nature is as sacred as the scripture itself, each representing a modality of divine speech. For those who forget God, both the Qur’an and nature can serve as reminders. The supernatural revelation of the Qur’an and the natural phenomena of the universe disclose and unveil the same truth, indicating the unity of Ultimate Reality. The ordinary distinction between natural and supernatural becomes irrelevant in this context.

How is the relationship between the signs and the Sig-
nified understood? From one perspective, the beings and phenomena of nature point toward God just as a work of music or painting indicates the qualities of the artist who created it. From another perspective, God’s being forms the very essence or reality of everything that exists. According to Indian philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the universe does not confront God as its other; time, space, and matter are not independent realities but only interpretations or intellectual modes for apprehending the creative energy or life of God. What mind perceives as a plurality of things in nature is actually one continuous and dynamic divine act. Nature, in Qur’anic parlance, is the habit of God. By observing nature in the Tawhidic frame of mind, human beings come in close contact with the behavior of Ultimate Reality, thereby sharpening their inner perception for its more direct and deeper vision.

The ethical attitude demanded by Tawhid may be understood in terms of cibadah and khilafah, two central Qur’anic terms that define the consequences of accepting the oneness of God. The first can be translated as servant-hood, or the attitude of loving obedience and humility that human beings ought to display toward God. The second may be translated as vicegerency, or the privileged capacity for exercising God-like authority with respect to the world. In the Tawhidic framework, vicegerency presupposes servanthood; human beings cannot become partners in God’s creative work without first humbling themselves before their Creator-Lord. While the ethic of dominion is inherent in the notion of vicegerency, the Qur’an views the exercise of human powers without genuine servanthood toward God as illegitimate. The Qur’anic notion of vicegerency includes the understanding that human powers are not their own but have been delegated to them from a higher authority, for a limited time and for a specific purpose. Human beings must exercise these powers within the limits set by the Real Sovereign, or they will be seen as criminals and rebels (taghut), no longer acting in accordance with the demands of Tawhid.

Tawhid implies that everything in the universe belongs to God – a frequently repeated Qur’anic theme. Consequently, the idea of material possessions and natural resources as constituting a sacred trust (amanah) from God is also built into the notion of vicegerency. Human beings have been temporarily bestowed with certain “possessions” through which they are being tested; this is true of individuals as well as communities and humankind as a whole. Ultimately, there is no such thing as human property. This understanding calls for an attitude of careful and vigilant restraint (taqwa) on the part of human beings vis-à-vis nature, which is divine property under temporary, partial, and conditional human stewardship.

These ethical implications of Tawhid are not limited to individual morality but extend to the dynamics of the collective order as well. In addition to religious beliefs and ethical norms, the Qur’an provides the outlines of a social order through which these beliefs and norms can be actualized in concrete human reality; the social order established by the Prophet Muhammad in seventh-century Arabia constitutes a paradigmatic model for Muslims in this regard. The Qur’an recognizes that human beings are rarely able to act in accordance with their professed beliefs and norms if these are not simultaneously supported by social structures and institutions. Consequently, the actualization of Tawhid in a given community remains incomplete and precarious if it is confined to the individual’s consciousness as a doctrine but does not shape the collective order.

The present-day ecological situation in the Muslim world is a forceful reminder that the chasm between ideal and reality will exist whenever professed beliefs and norms are not embodied in the collective order. Tawhid is no longer the central principle in the various social orders prevailing in the Muslim world, where the role of Islam in shaping public policy is itself a fiercely contested area. Moreover, any secularizing trend in the Muslim world further weakens Islam’s ability to be ecologically relevant at a collective level. It is hardly surprising that the ecologically beneficial imperatives of Tawhid have only a limited impact in everyday reality. Tawhid’s great potential in this regard, however, may be tapped through Islam-based environmental movements at the grassroots level.

Ahmed Afzaal

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Technological Immortality

Suffering death is the price that humans pay for their intelligence, yet through intelligence humans have long sought to overcome death, by means either of religion or technology. A single-celled animal such as the amoeba is in a
sense immortal. While it can die, every living amoeba is many millions of years old, because it reproduces by splitting, whereas multi-celled creatures such as ourselves die of old age after a short life. Many animals suffer when they die, but probably only humans are fully aware of the meaning of death and know from early childhood that they are mortal. From the time of the ancient Egyptians, some cultures and individuals have sought partially technological solutions, but only in recent decades have fully non-supernatural alternatives become plausible.

Cryonics

Probably inspired by science-fiction stories and the success of the frozen food industry, in the 1960s, Robert C.W. Ettinger launched the cryonics movement to freeze dying human beings. The original idea was that cryopreservation could halt death for years until medical science had developed a remedy for the individual's fatal illness, at which point he or she would be thawed out, cured, and restored to a normal life.

A number of organizations set up laboratories to develop methods of cryopreservation, and a few dozen bodies were actually frozen. Ettinger and some other members of his movement began to think that future technologies could not only restore life but also improve it, giving people saved by cryonics a chance to become superhuman and even possibly god-like. A number of technical problems would need to be overcome, however, especially the extensive chemical and mechanical damage caused to large, slow-cooling human bodies by the freezing process itself.

More recently, rapid progress in gene analysis and genetic engineering has led to the idea that much of an individual's character might be preserved in a sample of DNA. For example, the Center for Reproduction of Endangered Species at the San Diego Zoo has established a collection of cryopreserved animal cells. The Coriell Institute for Medical Research has established a research repository of cells from human beings with inherited diseases, and a sufficient sample is four teaspoons of blood.

Frozen DNA samples can be stored indefinitely without deterioration, and in future centuries they might be used to create a clone of the deceased individual, or the individual's genetic code could be employed in some other method of technological resurrection. However, DNA does not contain information about anything the person experienced or learned, so this approach would have to be combined with some method to preserve the individual's personality and memories.

Cybersurvival

In his 1953 novel, The City and the Stars, Arthur C. Clarke imagined that people could be archived inside an advanced computer, for technological resurrection thousands of years after their deaths. Many recent developments in computation, information storage, and cognitive science have provided both hope that this dream actually could be realized and some hint of how this could be done.

In his influential book, The Age of Spiritual Machines, computer entrepreneur Ray Kurzweil predicted that human beings and their computers will gradually merge over the next century, and that we will thereby become god-like spirits inhabiting cyberspace as well as the material universe. Specifically, Kurzweil suggests that magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or some even more advanced technique could be used to read out the neural structure of a person's brain, which then could be simulated inside a computer.

A second approach is to videotape extensive interviews, then use computer graphics and artificial intelligence technology to create a virtual human. A virtual copy of a person is called an avatar. This term traditionally refers to a manifestation of a Hindu deity, including incarnation in human form. But it is used currently in computer engineering to refer to a software embodiment of a human personality.

The most impressive project to preserve interviews digitally is Steven Spielberg’s Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation which has recorded interviews with over 52,000 survivors of the European Holocaust at a cost of $175,000,000. The same effort devoted to a single individual could preserve enough to make a convincing avatar, and the needed digital library and graphics technology is progressing rapidly.

A third approach is to employ the full range of psychological tests and sociological questionnaires to archive opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and other aspects of a personality. Even a relatively simple computerized database permits a kind of conversation with such a corpus of personal data, querying it for information in the form of questions and answers. Existing scientific measures of personality are designed to compare individuals along a few standard dimensions. Researchers working on personality preservation have recognized the need to develop new approaches designed to capture an individual's unique characteristics.

Thus, several rapidly developing technologies are making it possible to record aspects of a person, and it seems likely that the technology will permit recordings of increasingly higher fidelity over the coming decades. The problem then becomes how to integrate the different kinds of data (genetic, neuro-structural, audio-visual, linguistic, and social-psychological), and there is much room for debate whether even a highly advanced computer system could accomplish this.

Conclusion

Death is a natural phase of human existence, but it is also part of our nature to seek solutions to problems, even the most challenging ones. For thousands of years, the preferred responses to mortality depended upon belief in a
supernatural realm that transcended the limitations of material existence. Science, the systematic quest for the secrets of nature, now offers the possibility of technical solutions that conceivably could obviate the need for religion.

It may prove difficult to develop the technology, either requiring many decades or ultimately succeeding only partially. If science can preserve and reanimate only portions of the human personality, then future centuries may develop a hybrid approach to death that blends the technical with the sacramental, thereby building a bridge between the natural and the supernatural.

William Sims Bainbridge

Further Reading


See also: Paganism and Technology.

Tehri Dam

Tehri Dam, a hydro-electric power project on the principal upper tributary of the Ganges River, will, if completed, be the fifth highest in the world, and the highest in Asia. Located just below the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Bhilangana Rivers in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the Earth and rockfill dam of 260.5 meters will flood 45 kilometers of the Bhagirathi Valley and 35 kilometers of the Bhilangana Valley, impounding 3.22 million cubic meters of water spread over 42.5 square kilometers. The reservoir will submerge the town of Tehri, and 5200 hectares of land. It will displace an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 people. Promising 2400 megawatts of electric power to such cities as Allahabad and Kanpur, it is expected to irrigate 270,000 hectares in the western districts of Uttar Pradesh, providing 500 cubic feet per second of drinking water to Delhi.

Since its inauguration, public protest against the project has centered upon the interrelated issues of ecology, economic and environmental justice, and religion. At a meeting in Brazil in 1997, J.P. Raturi, the representative of the Tehri Dam Resistance Struggle Committee (Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti), stated Indian culture sees divinity in nature. He observes that to the rulers, the Ganges is megawatts of power and hectares of irrigated land. To the local people, she is a life-giving goddess. Sunderlal Bahuguna, one of the most visible leaders of the movement against the dam, recalls that the goddess Ganga (the Ganges river) answered the prayers of King Bagirathi to descend to the Earth only after Lord Shiva permitted her to descend into his matted locks, preventing her from becoming a destructive torrent. Bahuguna states that the locks of Shiva are the natural forests of the Himalayas which protect the land from floods. But the catchment area of the Bhagirathi River is the victim of massive deforestation by commercial forestry, and has turned the Ganges into the destructive force of which the ancient story told. For him, the dam is a further desecration of a sacred environment.

The religious significance of the Bhagirathi and Ganges rivers pertains to objections raised on grounds of ecology and environmental justice. The Himalayan region is seismically active, and the dam site is located only 15 kilometers from the boundary of two plates of the Earth’s crust. Local people, however, have worked this land productively for many generations. Upstream from the dam site is a scenic valley, the heart of an ancient village culture. The proposed reservoir will fill this valley, with its 23 villages, and their terraced fields, sculpted over centuries of painstaking work. In 1978, when officers of the Uttar Pradesh government arrived to inaugurate construction on the first diversion tunnel for the dam, thousands of men, women, and children blocked their way and shouted: “You love electricity, we love our soil.” J.P. Raturi has argued that while the project will provide electric power and irrigation to the affluent, to the local people it will bring displacement and disaster. Bahuguna states that when the Ganges flows in her natural course she benefits all, irrespective of caste, creed, color, poverty or wealth. When she is dammed, she becomes the possession of the privileged and powerful who can dispense her blessings on a partisan basis.

Bahuguna argues that religion traditionally played a vital role in the regulation of natural resource use. As the industrial revolution began to see nature as a commodity, this crucial feature of religion came to be covered over with rituals. When development was identified with economic growth, a new religion was born: the temple of this religion is the market, technocrats and experts are its priests, and the dollar is the new god. Our political leaders, he says, are prepared to make the highest sacrifices to this god to bring it home. With his frail body, his white beard, and his simple Kadi apparel, Bahuguna appears as a prophet standing against an idolatrous faith. The dam, he argues, is a project to realize a false hope. It is based on a view of reality that equates progress with the affluence of
the few. We should not kill our sacred river, he says, on the promises of a false vision of reality.

Bahuguna’s idiom of resistance supports his credibility. Personifying the traditional ideals of nonviolence (ahimsa), renunciation of possessions (aparigraha), and devotion to God (Ishvar-pranidhana), Bahuguna states that the method of satyagraha, or standing courageously for the truth, is the only form of protest that can be effective. In the course of this struggle, Bahuguna has undertaken several fasts that have received much media attention. Ranging from 11 to 74 days, they have repeatedly brought him close to death. Early in 1996 the Tehri Hydroelectric Development Corporation ordered the people and businesses to vacate the town of Tehri and move to the New Tehri town located on a hillside above the dam site. The town was to be submerged by the end of June 1996. Local activists argued that the call was intended to convince the people that a review of the project was no longer possible. Again in June of 1999 all government offices, educational institutions and businesses were asked to vacate the town by the end of the month, but the plan was again postponed. If this plan is finally undertaken, the Ganga Kuta, or hut, on the bank of the river in which Sunderlal Bahuguna has been residing in satyagraha for the past twenty years will be the first dwelling to be submerged.

George A. James

Further Reading
See also: Ahimsa; Bahuguna, Sunderlal; Hinduism; Hinduism and Pollution (and adjacent, River Ganga and the Clean Ganga Campaign; Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sri Lanka).

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre (1881–1955)

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born on 1 May 1881 to Emmanuel and Berthe-Adele Teilhard de Chardin. His birthplace in Auvergne in southern France had a lasting effect on his experiences of love for the natural world. In 1899 he entered the Jesuit order where he launched into his lifelong effort to unify science and religion through the study of evolution and the role of the human as part of evolutionary processes. Three years later the novitiate was moved to the island of Jersey in England due to anticlericalism in France. It was also at this time that his eldest brother died, his younger sister became seriously ill and two years later another sister passed away. These experiences had a profound effect on Teilhard who considered engaging only in theological studies and turning away from science.

Instead he was sent to teach at the Jesuit College in Cairo from 1905–1908. It was here that he developed his naturalist’s inclinations by studying Egypt’s flora and fauna as well as the fossil record. Teilhard spent from 1908–1912 in Hastings, England, where he continued his theological studies but also pursued his interest in evolution. He encountered Henri Bergson’s newly published Creative Evolution. This had a profound effect on his ideas regarding the spirit and direction of the evolving universe. It was also during this period that the attack on modernism and evolution arose under the papacy of Pius X. From 1912–1915 Teilhard studied geology and paleontology in Paris eventually earning his doctorate in 1922 from the Sorbonne.

The war years interrupted his studies as Europe was plunged into bloody trench warfare. Teilhard served as a stretcher bearer and was awarded the Legion of Honor for his heroic service. The experience of war had a profound effect on him as he wrote of his growing sense that even in the midst of such turmoil there emerges a feeling for a purpose and direction to life more hidden and mysterious than history generally reveals. It was shortly after the war when he was recuperating in Jersey that he wrote his essay on “The Spiritual Power of Matter.” For Teilhard all of matter has a psychic/spiritual component and it is this interiority of matter that helps to move evolution toward greater complexity and consciousness.

In 1923, at the invitation of the Jesuit Emile Licent, Teilhard sailed for China to undertake paleontological research. Together they traveled numerous times to the Ordos desert on the border with Inner Mongolia to study Paleolithic remains as well as the natural terrain. Teilhard returned to France a year later to resume teaching at the Institute Catholique, but the conservative climate perpetuated by the Vatican created a difficult atmosphere for him to develop his thinking on evolution. This conservative climate was due in part to the anti-modernist movement spearheaded by the Vatican before World War I. Rome sought to thwart the efforts of Catholic intellectuals who were interested in introducing broader elements of biblical criticism as well as reconciling aspects of religion and science, especially around the theory of evolution. In response, Rome tried to preserve orthodox Catholic teaching by requiring all clerics to take an anti-modernist oath.

His return to the Institute also brought him into contact with philosopher Henri Bergson and biologist Jacques van Uitert, who helped him to understand the concepts of life. In 1927 Teilhard left the Institute Catholique and moved to the University of Paris, where he became a professor of paleontology. Teilhard’s research soon brought him to the center of the scientific community in Paris, and he was quickly recognized as a leading expert on paleontology.

While teaching and conducting research, Teilhard continued to explore the relationship between science and religion. He believed that science and religion were not in conflict, but rather complementary, and that the two disciplines could work together to understand the mysteries of the universe. Teilhard’s ideas were controversial, and he was often criticized for his views on evolution and the role of the human in the universe.

In 1934, Teilhard was appointed to the Sorbonne, the most prestigious university in France. He continued to teach and conduct research there until his death in 1955. Despite the controversy surrounding his work, Teilhard’s ideas continue to influence both science and religion today.
Teilhard returned to China and settled in Beijing where he continued his scientific studies, interacted with a broad circle of intellectuals, and wrote *The Divine Milieu*. This work eventually caused his Jesuit Superior General to insist that Teilhard confine himself to his scientific work and not publish any of his theological writings. This was in large part because his vision of an immanent evolving cosmos appeared to more conservative minds to have pantheistic elements not in line with strict interpretations of the doctrine of creation. There were some who were concerned about Teilhard’s profound immanent sensibilities regarding the infusion of the divine in nature. This was seen to be in contrast to the more orthodox position that God was transcendent or beyond nature. Teilhard was thus encouraged to stay in China where he remained until after World War II except for brief visits to France.

Teilhard engaged in several key research projects including the discovery of Peking Man in 1929–1930, the Mongolian Expedition sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History, the Yellow Expedition sponsored by Citroen, as well as expeditions to India, Burma, and Java. In 1931 he traveled across the United States, which inspired him to write *The Spirit of the Earth*. This work situates the human within evolutionary emergence and suggests that recognizing our deep embeddedness in nature is crucial to the future of all life. Teilhard voices his concern that humans embrace their common destiny as members of the Earth community and help to create a viable future by activating, not stifling, the larger spirit of the Earth within each human.

It was in 1940 that he completed his most important work, *The Human Phenomenon* (originally translated as *The Phenomenon of Man*). After the war when he was able to return to France his Jesuit superior would still not allow this work to be published. He spent the last years of his life in New York City with a research position at the Wenner-Gren Foundation. *The Human Phenomenon* was not published until after his death in 1955. It was first translated into English in 1960 and a new, more accurate translation by Sarah Weber was published in 1999.

In *The Human Phenomenon* Teilhard outlined the four-fold sequence of the evolution of galaxies, Earth, life, and consciousness. Teilhard presented his vision of the emergence of the human as the unifying dimension of the evolutionary process. For Teilhard the awakening of humans to the idea of evolution since Darwin is unique in history and he likens this to the moment when a child becomes aware of perspective. He felt that for humans to realize that they participate in cosmogenesis, namely that they are part of evolutionary developmental time, results in a major change in knowledge and beliefs. Absorbing this perspective, he felt, was a critical juncture for the growth of human awareness.

Teilhard sees consciousness as intrinsic to the process of evolution, not as an extrinsic addition to matter. For him all reality consists of simultaneously a within and a without. Matter and spirit are thus joined in this vast evolutionary unfolding toward a final Omega Point. The universe in this context is a *divine milieu*, a center that has the possibilities of uniting and drawing all things to itself. For Teilhard the evolutionary process is characterized by increasing complexity and consciousness and the divine is seen as part of the process, not simply transcendent to it.

Humans are the self-conscious mode of the universe in whom complexity and consciousness has come to its fullest expression. One of Teilhard’s greatest hopes was that this large perspective of a purposeful universe would help to inspire human action for building the human community. In contrast to a resigned or fatalistic perspective, he spoke of the need to reignite in the human community a joy for action and a zest for life. Human suffering he saw not as due to original sin but as a form of potential energy which if transformed could change the face of the Earth in positive ways.

Teilhard’s optimistic perspective has led to critiques from theologians who grapple with the problem of evil and feel that Teilhard may gloss over this pervasive reality in the human community. It has also resulted in criticisms from deep ecologists who view him as highly anthropocentric and his vision of “building the Earth” as lacking in awareness of the need for environmental restraints. Many are thus wary of Teilhard’s apparent faith in technology and in progress. Moreover, Teilhard was a product of his times in having a rather limited understanding of religions outside of Christianity. His strong Christocentric approach and language infuse his writings.

Nonetheless, conscious of these critiques and aware of Teilhard’s limitations, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme have drawn on Teilhard’s evolutionary perspective in developing their idea of *The Universe Story* as a comprehensive context for an expanded ecological sensibility. Like Teilhard, they see cosmogenesis as critical to understanding the role of humans as intrinsic to evolution and as responsible for its continuity. Teilhard’s ideas continue to inspire appreciation and critique in the search for sustaining human–Earth relations.

Mary Evelyn Tucker

Further Reading


Thai Buddhist Monks

In 1986, the ecclesiastical council of the Thai Sangha, the order of Buddhist monks, recommended to the Thai government that the Departments of Forestry and Religious Affairs work together on conservation and rural development projects. This recommendation foreshadowed the currently popular environmental movement in Thailand and the growing number of projects throughout the nation involving monks and the use of Buddhism in development and conservation. In the face of severe problems of deforestation and damaged watersheds across Thailand, several monks are advocating forest conservation, along with rural development schemes, based on their interpretations of Buddhist notions of respect for and balance with nature.

The work of these self-proclaimed “environmentalist monks” (Thai, phra nak anuraksa thammachaat) raises controversial issues concerning the relationship between Buddhism and environmentalism. The debate goes beyond equating the religion with nature, a simplistic interpretation often made by both these activist monks and environmentalists throughout the Buddhist world. (For example, the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, teaching and death all occurred in forests, providing evidence in this line of thinking for the importance of the forest for spiritual development and environmental conservation.) The Buddhist environmental movement, amorphous as it is in Thailand, raises questions about both the appropriateness of monks’ involvement in such “this-worldly” affairs as environmentalism and the philosophical grounding of their interpretations of Theravada scriptures and ritual practices.

Although making up only a small percentage of the total Sangha in Thailand, environmentalist monks became prominent in the 1990s. Controversies involving some well-known monks, such as the arrest of Phra Prajak Khutitajito for allegedly trespassing in a national park while documenting illegal logging, and a sex scandal surrounding the environmental activist Phra Yantra (in which he was accused of fathering a child with one of his followers), heightened the debate and put all activist monks under increased public scrutiny. The controversies and public image of environmentalist monks also tend to keep most “forest monks” – meditation masters who remove themselves from society to emphasize religious practice and asceticism – away from involvement in environmental activities.

Nevertheless, environmentalist monks maintain that their actions follow the Buddhist invocation to end suffering (Pali, dukkha). They are critical of changes wrought in Thai society as a result of the capitalist economic development promoted by the government since the 1950s. The consumerism that has swept across the nation and the accompanying debt and environmental degradation, these monks argue, are based on greed, one of the three root causes of suffering in Buddhist thought. They see it as their responsibility as monks, therefore, to engage in changing people’s attitudes and behavior toward the natural environment and the economy. By promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development (by which they primarily mean growing one’s own food through organic agriculture), they aim to help people recognize their responsibilities toward nature and avoid the desire that underlies capitalist development. Environmental degradation, economic development, and the abandonment of religious principles and practice are all intertwined in environmentalist monks’ assessments of the major problems Thailand faces today.

In their efforts to deal with these problems, environmentalist monks focus on three main types of activities: reinterpreting traditional rituals, education, and activism. The interplay between these approaches highlights the cultural creativity of these monks as they draw on local, national and Theravada Buddhist beliefs and practices in response to the environmental crisis in Thailand. Their more activist approach is supported by teachings of prominent scholar monks such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Phra Prayudh Payutto (current monastic title, Dhammapitaka).

Environmentalist monks reinterpret a range of traditional rituals to promote conservation and engender laypeople’s participation in conservation projects. These rites include symbolically ordaining trees in endangered forests, drawing people’s attention to their mutual dependence on the forest. They also incorporate tree seedlings for reforestation with the traditional lay donations of robes to monks. Some monks perform “long-life” ceremonies for bodies of water, such as rivers and reservoirs, to highlight the urgency of protecting water supplies from drought (often caused by deforestation) and pollution. One monk even modified the monks’ daily practice of alms-rounds to ask people in his village to donate land to the temple, thereby gaining religious merit, to use in a model integrated agriculture farm. Through reinterpreting a familiar practice, the monk aimed to get villagers to rethink how they lived from the land.

Education is a major component of environmentalist monks’ activities. They teach both laity and the larger Sangha about ecology, appropriate technology and organic agriculture to provide tools to live in an ecologically sensitive manner. The monks emphasize meditation and Buddhist teachings, seeing the religion as the basis for...
positive change in society. They use principles such as dependent origination or the interdependence of all things (Pali, patīca-sam uppada) to teach people responsibility toward the natural environment.

The most controversial activity of some environmentalist monks is their activism. Many of these monks have initiated local conservation projects or protested ecologically harmful policies and actions by the government, military and big business. Together with local people and non-governmental organizations, monks have protested both the construction of a dam in northeast Thailand and a natural gas pipeline coming from Burma through a Thai national park for both their negative ecological effects and their impact on the livelihoods of local people. Monks have established sanctified, protected community forests and fish, bird and wildlife sanctuaries, and organized Dhamma walks in which monks, environmentalists and other lay people walk and meditate mindfully for several days or weeks, engaging with local people to draw attention to endangered areas such as lakes and forests (see Bhikku 2000). In northern Thailand, one young monk runs a model organic farm and provides seeds, seedlings and knowledge to farmers as they shift from cash cropping to integrated, organic agricultural techniques.

The actions and religious interpretations by environmentalist monks are diverse and controversial. They are also genuine efforts to make Buddhism relevant in a changing society. Despite – or perhaps because of – the debates surrounding these monks, they are contributing to rethinking the religion and religious practice in light of the urgency of the environmental crisis. The result is a form of cultural creativity that, while grounded in an ancient tradition, has the potential radically to change the way Thai Buddhists think about their religion and their natural environment.

Susan M. Darlington

Further Reading


See also: Buddhism – Engaged; Nhat Hanh, Thich; Payutto, Phra Dhammapitaka; Siam’s Forest Monasteries; Southeast Asia; Sivaraksa, Sulak.

Theme Parks

The term “Theme Park” has been used to describe everything from small amusement attractions, such as family entertainment centers with a few rides, to the massive Walt Disney World entertainment complex outside Orlando, Florida. Theme parks are not to be confused with fairs, carnivals, or amusement parks. The relationship between theme parks and their predecessors – both medieval carnivals, festivals and fairs, and nineteenth-century amusement parks and World’s Fairs – is well documented. What is of interest here is the way the more than 225 major theme parks in the United States (as at the turn of the 21st century), and unknown numbers of others around the world, have evolved to present a new cultural intersection of religion and nature. We can identify several prominent religious possibilities for presentations of nature in contemporary theme parks.

In the 1950s, theme parks began to embody what has been called “civil religion” (Bellah 1967), central tenets of which were: capitalism, nuclear family and domesticity, scientific and technological progress (leading to utopian community living), wealth and leisure provided through national supremacy, and triumph over nature.

Themes of progress and domination of all things natural have also been prominent in a “frontier religion” common in theme parks, including such places as Disneyland and Disney World, Southern California’s Knott’s Berry Farm, and Silver Dollar City in the Missouri Ozarks. A prominent narrative in such locales is Disney’s Frontierland, Knott’s Berry’s Ghost Town, and Silver Dollar City in its entirety is the rejuvenating value of an anti-modern experience with a romanticized, simpler period of American exploration, conquest, and new settlement.

Finally, what can be called a religion of “nature celebration” has been made possible by the more recent, steady increase in the use of natural themes in park design. What Disneyland started with exotic recreations of flora and
fauna has increasingly developed into a more overt role at such parks as Busch Gardens: Africa: The Dark Continent, the Sea World parks, and Disney’s Animal Kingdom. Now nature is no longer presented as mere backdrop for entertainment and practical landscape manipulation. It is the point (and source) of the experience.

Critics have called these parks to task in recent years for encouraging visitors to feel that their attendance amounts to environmental action since their messages are often intensely scientific and environmentally sound, focusing upon the veterinary and conservationist activities that may go on there. The parks are often built on fragile habitats and clearly encourage unsustainable consumption.

Some critical scholars portray the success of nature-focused theme parks as especially problematic for their influence on American tourist culture in general. There is concern that zoos, museums, and even national parks will be remodeled to mimic theme parks (Davis 1997; Wilson 1991).

It is one thing to say that theme parks present visitors with a particular view of nature, to worry, for instance, that Sea World’s oceans, Busch Garden’s African landscape, and Disney’s multiple geographies narrate a particular version of nature as exhibited by each corporate interest. It is quite another thing to consider what people are doing with those presentations of nature. Scholars need to ask why Sea World attendees have been known to strip off their clothes and jump into the dolphin tank (an unsanctioned activity). Do they seek only to cool off? Do they simply find swimming with dolphins entertaining? Or is there a more fundamental desire for an authentic experience that has a religious dimension?

Some have argued that theme park visitors desire a particular set of experiences that in many ways can be considered sacred. Margaret J. King (1981) joined a growing scholarly focus on Disney parks, calling them the “popular culture capitals” of the country, noting that more so than Washington, D.C., families are motivated to go on a double pilgrimage to Disneyland and Walt Disney World – first as children and later with children. For King, this notion evokes community, communal experience, shared values, ritual motion, and perhaps additional traditionally religious language and imagery. This is not to say that theme parks have become traditionally religious for their visitors. Instead, visitors value community and the feeling of shared, ritual experience on a broad cultural level – rituals of a civil religion (King 1981).

Anthropologist Alexander Moore (1980) compared theme parks with traditional baroque pilgrimage centers. Though he argues that Walt Disney World’s form replicates that of a pilgrimage center, behavior in the Magic Kingdom, he says, is not traditionally religious. Instead, ritualized play seems to be gaining importance over both organized religion and obligatory rituals. Theme parks are isolated and enclosed. There are ritualized barriers separating them from the outside world (e.g., private highways, toll booths, parking lots, and ticket counters). Like traditional pilgrimage centers, theme parks evoke the supernatural (with its emphasis on magic, fantasy and make-believe), or at least a mytho-heroic past. Moore discusses the cultic and symbolic dimensions of the park, arguing that going to theme parks is not only about playing but bearing witness to the metaphors they evoke and pay homage to. Increasingly, those metaphors highlight nature and its religious significance. He concludes that the social and spatial order of a place like Disney World is the genuflection – ritual motion – of mass industrial society.

Much more research is needed to explore the roles of religious experience of nature presentations in theme parks, but that audiences have transcendent experiences in theme parks is unquestioned. For example, a 33-year-old father in New Hampshire wrote to The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World,

> It was on this trip that I experienced what can only be described as... an epiphany. I was on the ferry boat that runs between the Magic Kingdom and the TTC, waiting for it to fill up and cast off. The rain had cooled things off comfortably, and a rainbow had formed behind the Contemporary Resort, disappearing over the rooftops of the Wilderness Lodge that poked from behind the treeline. It was beautiful, and I just felt so relaxed, peaceful and happy. I also felt a little silly – here I am, a 33-year-old guy, alone in Walt Disney World, and I’m feeling like there’s not a problem in the world. But that’s the effect this place can have on you. Sure it can be hot, crowded, muggy, and it’ll suck your wallet dry... but that’s a small price to pay for those moments when the “Disney Magic” takes over and all seems right with the world.

In the passage we see references to human creation: the ferry boat, the Magic Kingdom, the crowds, etc. But we see references to nature: the rain, a rainbow, the treeline. As Van Maanen (1992) pointed out, there are important cultural contrasts that intensify the meaning potential of theme park nature. Mugginess, crowds, waiting, and spending money are offset by beauty, relaxation, peace, happiness, and contentment. Religion sociologist Wade Clark Roof (1993) has argued that, increasingly, late modern Americans engage in similar quests to seek new symbols and meanings – incorporating such experiences with prior beliefs to cobble together their own belief systems. Is it possible that such popular cultural (and for profit!) corporate creations as theme parks provide at least some of the meaningful material? Are the creators and operators of these parks able successfully to present a crafted “nature” that transforms their commercial endeavors into profoundly moving, even religious, experiences for paying
customers? And is it worth the cost? By positioning theme park nature as entertainment, information, and even transcendent inspiration, are we denying our own threat to its authenticity?

We can only be certain that theme parks will continue to draw visitors, providing an experience that will undoubtedly carry on a contribution to the ongoing evolution of the story of transcendent nature.

Joseph G. Champ
Rebecca Self Hill

Further Reading
See also: Disney; Disney Worlds at War.

Theosophy

The modern Theosophical movement, which commenced in 1875 with the founding of the Theosophical Society by Helena P. Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and others, has had a role in the emergence of recent spiritualities of nature and ecology. The new movement was viewed by its founders as a middle way between what they perceived as the twin dogmatisms of the nineteenth century, science and theology. Theosophy represented, they believed, a path based on the profound perspective of the “ancient wisdom,” the vision of nature and humanity held by premoderns who, to judge from those most often cited in the literature, tended broadly to be in the tradition of Vedantins, Mahayana Buddhists, and Platonists together with their neo-Platonic, Gnostic and Cabalistic progeny.

In respect to nature, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Theosophy has contributed to nature spirituality insofar as it: a) presented quasi-religious images and concepts to embody the romantic view of nature as vibrant with life and meaning, both visible and invisible; b) popularized in the West monistic and pantheistic Eastern experiences of nature, humanity, and the divine; and c) expanded evolution (known best in its controversial Darwinian form at the time of the Society’s founding) to embrace all of nature, together with humanity, in immense cosmic evolutionary schemes. Such ideas are certainly not unique to Theosophy, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Theosophists were pioneers in presenting them in popular as well as academic and literary venues. In lodge meetings, publications, and such centers as the Pt. Loma community in San Diego, started by Katherine Tingley in 1897, or Krotona, established in Hollywood in 1912 and moved to Ojai, California, in 1924, the idea of evolutionary kinship with nature deeply felt by many Theosophists took such concrete forms as vegetarianism, humanitarianism toward animals, progressive farming, and appreciation of the salutary spiritual effect of an inspiring natural environment.

The core Theosophical idea is usually said to be oneness: that the unity of all being is more fundamental than any apparent separateness and diversity. Oneness therefore overrides all dualism, whether of the One and the many, the human and the divine, consciousness and matter, or humanity and nature. A corollary of this perspective is the assumption that consciousness, though perhaps in rudimentary or radically nonhuman form, is found consistently throughout all levels of the universe. Some modern Theosophists (as well as some scientists) have seen evidence of universal consciousness underlying matter in the phenomena described in quantum theory.

Recent Theosophical writers and teachers like Joy Mills, Shirley Nicholson, Amit Goswami, and Ravi Ravindra have emphasized the congruity of the Theosophical worldview with what seems to be emerging on the frontiers of physics and cosmology, especially as interpreted by such sympathetic writers as David Bohm, Rupert Sheldrake, Ken Wilber, and Gary Zukov. The Theosophical stress on oneness, the consistent interaction of consciousness and matter, and the coexistence of many planes or dimensions are particularly mentioned. Out of such conceptions has come a recent Theosophical environmental ethic like that of Shirley Nicholson in Ancient Wisdom, Modern Insight, particularly Chapter 3, “Holism and
Hierarchy.” Nicholson here views nature as a series of increasingly large “interlocking wholes,” in which a prime imperative in any ethical choice involving nature – as do nearly all choices, ultimately – is taking into account its “reverberations” up and down the interlinked system.

Theosophy regards nature as alive, conscious on various levels, continuous with humanity both immanently and in evolutionary process, and so legitimately entitled to personification. Theosophical writers like Blavatsky, Annie Besant, C.W. Leadbeater, and Geoffrey Hodson, have not hesitated to personify powers of nature with names generally derived from venerable mythologies regarded as vehicles of the Ancient Wisdom. Out of theosophy’s classic texts emerge creative Dhyan Chohans (cosmic buddhas or, in Western parlance, archangels), Sanat Kumara the world-spirit and Kwanyin or Mary as world-mother, devas who serve as guardians of particular places or phenomena of nature, on down to “elementals” and the elves or dryads of garden and field. Some of these identifications have become more and more commonplace as part of the New Age attempt at reenchantment of the world through recovery of enlivening perceptions of nature recalled from childhood or folklore. As Leadbeater put it, “It is one of the most beautiful characteristics of Theosophy that it gives back to people in a more rational form everything which was really useful and helpful to them in the religions which they have outgrown” (Leadbeater 1928: 1).

In both the personification of natural entities and its efforts toward reconciling science and spirituality, Theosophy’s distinctive attitude toward nature has had an impact on recent nature spirituality generally.

Robert Ellwood

Further Reading

See also: Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna; Bohm, David; Hinduism; Krishnamurti, Jiddu; Sheldrake, Rupert; Swimme, Brian; Theosophy and Ecofeminism; Wilber, Ken.

Theosophy and Ecofeminism

The international Theosophical movement founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the 1870s has kept alive in the West the ancient belief that meaningful relationships can occur between human beings and other animals and plants. Some ecofeminisms posit a special bond between women and nature other than that based on shared or interdependent patriarchal oppression; while many ecofeminists celebrate the special connections between women and nonhuman nature. Ecofeminism and feminist spirituality have, however, lacked compelling cosmologies, whereas the core Theosophical idea is of a cosmos permeated by energetic relations that manifest themselves as different forms of consciousness. Theosophy, on the other hand, has not been interested in the question of under what conditions one gender is better able than another to have special relationships with animals or plants or places. Ecofeminism and feminist spirituality, however, have had this concern.

Connecting Theosophy and ecofeminism is the pioneering work done by women Theosophical leaders to restore ecological health to the movement’s various communities. Madame Blavatsky’s famous garden in England; what historian Emmett Greenwalt has called Katherine Tingley’s “agricultural Eden” at Point Loma, California; and the grounds at the Theosophical Society’s international headquarters at Adyar, India in which Annie Besant took considerable interest, were all early twentieth-century efforts to infuse ecology with concepts from Theosophy’s cosmology. Findhorn, Scotland, and Perelandra, Virginia, are related recent examples of communities sustained largely, although not exclusively, by communication between women and nonhuman nature (by Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean and by Machaelle Small Wright, respectively).

Jan C. Dawson

Further Reading

See also: Ecofeminism (various); Findhorn Foundation/Community (Scotland); Krishnamurti, Jiddu; Theosophy.
Thoreau, Henry David (1817–1862)

Henry David Thoreau was an author, naturalist and leading member of the nineteenth-century literary, social and religious movement that came to be known as Transcendentalism. Thoreau is best remembered for his two-year venture in “living deliberately” on the shores of Walden Pond in his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts from 4 July 1845 to 6 September 1847, an experiment which led to the publication of *Walden* in 1854. Though few of his writings were widely known at mid-century, his work became increasingly sought after in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His other well-known published writings include: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), *Cape Cod* (1865) and *The Maine Woods* (1864).

Even in his own time, local responses to Thoreau’s experiment at Walden helped to shape two competing portraits of Thoreau that have persisted into the present: Thoreau as “wilderness man” *par excellence*, living self-sufficiently in the wild woods and, to a lesser extent, Thoreau as hypocritical crank, grinding his literary ax to chop at society and its conventions, while regularly going into town and dipping into the maternal cookie jar. While both of these portraits contain some truths, they are caricatures of a man and his work that often miss the complexity of his vision and the multifaceted dimensions of his legacy.

Thoreau’s sojourn at Walden was never intended to be an attempt at perfect self-sufficiency or wilderness living. In terms of setting alone, Thoreau’s retreat to Walden cannot be considered a wilderness venture, as Concord in the mid-nineteenth century had been a settled village for two centuries. Thoreau’s purpose in going to Walden should be understood as practical, spiritual and symbolic, none of which demanded a lifelong retreat to the woods or absolute purity in his practice of self-reliance.

Practically, Thoreau sought a means of making a living which would preserve the time he desired in order to cultivate his craft as a writer, while maintaining a mode of life that permitted generous swaths of time for outdoor walks, leisure and meticulous nature study. The retreat to Walden was, at a fundamental level, a first step in solving the practical problem of livelihood that all writers face.

The spiritual dimensions of Thoreau’s decision were tied to the practical impetus behind his choice, but also went beyond them. While Thoreau sought to reduce his needs (of food, clothing, shelter and leisure) to a minimum in order to maximize time to write, this pursuit of simplicity was itself a form of spiritual practice. With Emerson and other New England Transcendentalists, Thoreau subscribed to principles of plain living: a simple, often vegetarian diet; avoidance of tea, coffee and alcohol; regular excursions in the fresh air, frequent intellectual interchange and a complementary pursuit of solitary contemplation. All of these practices were understood to be means of cultivating the self and, more particularly, "Reason" (knowledge through intuition) and imagination. In addition, Thoreau (like other Transcendentalists) assumed that nature had particular lessons to teach and that simple, "natural" ways of living would help to cultivate his moral sense. The spiritual practice of "self-culture" (which began when the young Thoreau changed his name from David Henry to Henry David) was an essential aspect of the retreat to Walden.

The experiment at Walden was also intended to resonate symbolically, both in Concord and beyond. While living at Walden enabled Thoreau to develop inwardly (to learn about himself in a natural context, to practice his craft as a writer, and also to grieve the early death of his brother), his life at Walden was also intended to be an outwardly directed comment about (and against) prevailing social norms. While he farmed beans for part of his livelihood, he denigrated the commercial aspects of farming and praised instead the educational and spiritual benefits of tilling the soil. While he made trips to the village almost daily, Thoreau constantly criticized village life, particularly the idle conversation and status-seeking mores he felt dominated the town.

Although he cultivated a sometimes biting and misanthropic persona in his texts, Thoreau’s reputation as a misanthrope is inaccurate. Thoreau was no hermit. He enjoyed frequent visitors from among family, friends and laborers near the pond and went into town frequently, especially in the winter months when he supported himself with odd jobs as a handyman and surveyor. During his time at Walden, he maintained an active correspondence, regularly attended lectures and often appeared at gatherings at the homes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott and other Concord friends. Through the symbolic act of withdrawing to the woods, Thoreau intended not to recommend such a withdrawal for everyone, but rather to symbolize through deed (and then word) the virtues of independent thought and action, rather than behaving in line with social convention.

*Walden* (1854) is Thoreau’s most celebrated text, a carefully crafted manuscript that went through eight drafts before publication. Thoreau’s ambitious reworking of the material from his journals included the adoption of a seasonal structure (summer to spring) and the collapsing of two actual years into a single narrative one, a model nature writers have followed to this day. The text stands as the most complex fusion of his post-Christian, Transcendentalist religious orientation with his detailed and scientifically informed observation of a particular natural surround. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), which preceded Walden (and was a publishing failure) is more obviously metaphorical. While a travel narrative in some respects, it is interspersed with philosophical departures, essays, poems and fragments from
Thoreau’s reading, while also intending to serve as an elegy to his brother, John. Throughout the text, attention to natural detail appears and recedes, but ultimately takes a back seat to Transcendentalist philosophy and the workings of Thoreau’s young literary and religious imagination. Thoreau’s late writings lean in the other direction, his unpublished manuscripts on seed dispersion and the development of flora in Concord (recently collected and published posthumously as *Concord*. *Faith in a Seed* [1993] and *Wild Fruits* [1999]) contain still accurate and scientific useful documentation of the growth, development and distribution of plants in New England.

When traced through the corpus of his writing, Thoreau’s view of nature is clearly a dynamic one, shifting and changing in response to Thoreau’s own growth as a writer and his synthesis of naturalistic observations accumulated over the years. In general terms, Thoreau’s interpretive stance toward nature is a view shaped by his European and New England, Protestant heritage, yet defying easy categorization. It is neither Christian, nor secular; neither wholly scientific, nor traditionally religious. With the European Romantics, and older Transcendentalists, Thoreau saw nature as something other than simply God’s creation (the traditional Christian view and one that was itself comparatively neglected by Christians of his day, who placed more emphasis on personal salvation).

Thoreau was a lifelong critic of the Church, even the liberal Unitarian church attended by the majority of his family. His vision of nature was pursued outside the boundaries of both Christian orthodoxy and liberalism and his contemporaries therefore often criticized his writing (or expurgated it) because of its “paganistic” tendencies. Even Thoreau’s Aunt Maria worried that portions of *A Week* sounded like “blasphemy” both because of Thoreau’s approving nods toward Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as his claims that the divine could be found within both nature and humanity. While *Walden* was a comparative success, the same kinds of criticisms came from more theologically conservative circles, who praised the examples of detailed “nature study” in the text, but not the more radical philosophical and religious themes.

Thoreau’s approach to the natural world was particularly informed by his reading of the Romantics, who saw nature as the ultimate source of insight and a means of return to childhood innocence untainted by “civilization’s” expectations and failings. Thoreau’s sense of ethics and aesthetics emerged from the Romantic (and later, Transcendentalist) presumption that nature is the ideal teacher. His purpose was to cultivate himself, in return, as an ideal pupil. Yet such an embrace of nature was not wholly positive, nor was his construction of nature exclusively beneficial, though it was prevailing so. The “Higher Laws” section of *Walden* show a Thoreau who is sometimes ill at ease with the unseemly, violent, or lowly aspects of nature (including his own body) and reveal a typical Transcendentalist and post-Christian preoccupation with purity: nature in her ideal, good and “higher” aspect. His writings of travels in the Maine woods also display an unexpected fear of the wilderness in its most rugged form. Overall, however, nature is a source of goodness and a model for humanity in Thoreau’s view.

Nature occupied a space in Thoreau’s imagination that his Christian neighbors reserved for God. Thoreau enjoyed needling others with this unorthodox, but increasingly popular, approach, commenting toward the end of his life that “a snowstorm was more to him than Christ” (Harding 1965: 464). Thoreau was also influenced by the newly (and sometimes inaccurately) translated Eastern religious and philosophical texts becoming available in America, which gave testimony to the sacredness of particular aspects of the physical world (mountains, rivers, etc.) Thoreau welcomed the Vedas, *The Laws of Manu* and purported say- ings of the Buddha into his literary repertoire (using them often to support his own Transcendentalist assertions) and argued for the equal legitimacy of the religions of the world. In addition, he drew deeply – though perhaps less consciously – on a broader legacy of Christian and especially Protestant, New England interpretations of nature as a book to be read, the so-called “Book of Nature.” While leaving Christian theology behind, Thoreau retained the Christian – and particularly, American – legacy of finding in nature lessons and morals for leading an ethical life. While rejecting traditional Christian typology, Thoreau maintained a “typological stance” toward nature, seeing lessons for humanity in battles between ants, the lure of the woodchuck and the play of the loon.

Thoreau’s daily practice of attentiveness toward nature, however, enabled him to go beyond a “reading” of nature only for moral and spiritual guidance. His daily walks became a means for gathering precise naturalistic data within the limited boundaries of a particular watershed over several decades, an invaluable contribution – before its time – that leaves us with a thick ecological portrait of a particular bioregion. His “amateur” conclusions regarding the succession of trees, his identification of rare plants and his innovations in everything from pencil-making to predicting ways to lengthen the cranberry harvest were all discoveries that were independently supported or produced by professionals in later years.

While Thoreau’s Transcendentalism always led him to see “more” in nature than a scientist would discern, his unflagging curiosity and rigorous record-keeping also helped him to become a self-taught naturalist and to establish literary naturalism as an American genre. More than any other Transcendentalist, Thoreau wove together contemporary scientific knowledge and liberal, post-Christian interpretations of nature’s symbolic capacity. On the other hand, Thoreau’s criticism of Christian institutions, his insistence on seeing the divine in nature (and in the self) and his respect for other religious traditions of the world
opened his writing up to charges of paganism and pantheism that persist in conservative, evangelical circles. Yet a close reading of Thoreau’s work clearly reveals its intellectual and spiritual debt to New England Protestantism. His thinking and writing is “post-Christian” more than it is anti-Christian, pantheistic or pagan. Like Emerson, but going beyond him, Thoreau knitted together a Protestant heritage, a philosophical interest in idealism and a passion for observation and study of natural phenomena in the field.

Today, Thoreau’s legacy is less felt in religious circles than it is in environmental ones. Hand in hand with the growth of the environmental movement from the 1960s forward has been an ever-increasing enthusiasm for Thoreau’s work, though few read more than portions of Walden. Thoreau’s relative self-sufficiency, his concerns about the marketplace and emerging capitalism, and his view of nature as a beneficent source of spiritual transformation all contributed to the dominant themes of contemporary environmentalism: a growing interest in simple, sustainable living, a critique of consumer culture and a view of nature as the source for personal (often spiritual) renewal.

Though prone to misrepresentation, Thoreau’s writing and his example continue to speak to both religious and non-religious audiences, to scientists and to humanists, to those who read nature symbolically and to those who simply admire the vast records of this “self-appointed inspector” of snowstorms.

Rebecca Kneale Gould

**Further Reading**


See also: Back to the Land Movements; Book of Nature; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Radical Environmentalism; Transcendentalism; Unitarianism.

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**Tibet and Central Asia**

The Tibetan form of Buddhism is the dominant religious system throughout the Tibetan plateau, and is also widespread in surrounding areas, particularly Mongolia, northern Nepal, Bhutan, areas of Central Asia and Russia, and the northern Indian regions of Sikkim and Ladakh. Buddhism was first introduced to Tibet during the early dynastic period from the seventh to ninth centuries. Following the demise of the Yarlung dynasty (so called because its power base was the Yarlung Valley of central Tibet), Buddhism’s influence declined until it was reintroduced in the twelfth century. In the following centuries it became increasingly popular throughout the Tibetan plateau as well as neighboring states.

The main sources of Tibetan Buddhism were the great north Indian monastic universities and charismatic Tantric lineages that were centered in Bengal and Bihar. The Buddhism of the monastic universities emphasized scholasticism along with meditative practice, and the Tantric lineages taught a more meditation-oriented form of practice based on visualization and ritual practices. The present-day forms of Tibetan Buddhism are mainly derived from these two sources.

From the mid-seventeenth century until 1959, Tibet was ruled by the Dalai Lamas or their regents. The Dalai Lamas are believed to be physical manifestations of the Buddha Avalokiteśvara (Tibetan: Chenrezig), and the present one, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), is the fourteenth incarnation. In 1950 China invaded and annexed Tibet, and in 1959, following an abortive popular uprising against Chinese rule, he fled to India, where he established a government-in-exile headquartered in Dharamsala in the north Indian state of Himachal Predesh.

In many ways, Buddhism might seem to be an unpromising religion for someone seeking conceptual resources for an environmental ethic. According to Buddhist doctrine, all sentient beings are reborn over and over as a result of their actions (*karma*), and the world is conceived as a place of suffering. The ultimate goal of Buddhist practice is liberation from the world and the cycle of rebirth, and cyclic existence is conceived as irredeemably unsatisfactory. There is no way to fix it up and make it bearable, but despite these attitudes, Buddhists have traditionally asserted the importance of avoiding harm to the environment. In the Indian text Dhammapada, for example, one of the distinguishing features of an awakened being (buddha) is that he or she avoids harming plants and animals and lives in harmony with the surrounding environment.

In recent decades, a number of Tibetan Buddhist thinkers have developed a Buddhist approach to environmentalism based on the doctrine of interdependence (*pratitya-samutpada*), which holds that all things come into being in dependence upon causes and conditions and
change in every moment as a result of causes and conditions. The world is conceived as an infinitely complex causal network in which each individual part acts on all other parts while simultaneously being influenced by its surrounding environment. These notions are connected with the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (anatman), which holds that there is no enduring “self” or “soul” and that living beings are instead individual continuums composed of various constituent elements that are changing with every moment. This process operates in intimate connection with the surrounding environment, and there is said to be no real dividing line between oneself and the world. Thus, concern for oneself naturally extends to concern for the environment. The fourteenth Dalai Lama has become one of the leading proponents of this idea, and he claims that prior to the Chinese invasion Tibetans did in fact live in harmony with the environment.

Some contemporary commentators dismiss this idea, claiming that prior to the mid-twentieth century Tibet was an agrarian society in which most people subsisted on low-technology agriculture and animal husbandry. Prior to the Chinese invasion, the utilization of biomass was closely related to the physical conditions of Tibet, which had a stable population and little change in agricultural or animal husbandry techniques for centuries. Furthermore, in vast areas of the Tibetan plateau the poor soil and sparse vegetation required that people avoid overgrazing and overfarming. Most of what people consumed came directly from the Earth, and their waste products were mainly biodegradable and were returned to the environment. Thus the fact that they maintained a sustainable approach to the environment was non-reflective and merely a direct result of their technological backwardness and the physical limitations of their environment.

There is some merit to this idea, and it is doubtful that most Tibetans had (or have) a consciously articulated environmental ethic that guided their approach to the environment, but there were also significant conceptual factors influencing the Tibetan approach to the natural world. In addition to Buddhist doctrines of nonviolence and interdependence, there were also pre-Buddhist animistic ideas about the Tibetan plateau, which was seen as the abode of innumerable forces that owned the land. Among these were the sadak (“lords of the Earth”), and lu (water spirits), which respectively guarded the soil and water. Ethnographic studies of contemporary Tibetans have demonstrated that belief in these natural forces is widespread and that Tibetans commonly assert that people who cause harm to the environment draw the wrath of these beings, who can cause great harm to humans. Any building or construction is commonly preceded by a ceremony that asks their permission, and great care is taken to avoid angering them by causing unnecessary damage to the Earth. In addition, mining was almost unknown in Tibet, because it was thought that digging up the Earth to extract resources was effectively robbing the “lords of the Earth,” who would inflict punishment on the offenders.

Similarly, polluting water causes the lu to harm offenders, and prior to the Chinese takeover, Tibet’s rivers and lakes had some of the most unpolluted water in the world. In addition, exile Tibetans often point with pride to the fact that hunting was outlawed by the fifth Dalai Lama in 1642. According to his official decree, all birds, fish, and non-predatory animals were protected by law. Since at least that time, Tibetans have generally avoided killing wild animals and fishing for sport, and travelers in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion often remarked at the large herds of grazing antelopes, wild ass, and deer that were found throughout the region. Moreover, because Tibetans generally avoided cutting down trees there were extensive old-growth forests in the lower regions of the Tibetan plateau.

Although environmental concern has become an important theme in publications by the Tibetan government-in-exile, there is little evidence of this concern prior to the mid-1980s, when the Dalai Lama first began articulating the notion that Tibetans have for centuries consciously protected the environment. The first exile government statements on the environment followed the publication of reports of widespread environmental damage to the Tibetan plateau by the Chinese, and the exiles’ environmental awakening was at least partly reflexive and political. Particularly during the chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when marginal land was taken over for agriculture and forests were clear-cut, many animal species were hunted to extinction, and significant – and in many cases probably irreversible – damage was done to Tibet’s fragile ecosystem. Thus the exile government’s newly pro-environment stance was part of a larger polemical attack on China’s annexation of their country and its subsequent record in administering it.

Several commentators have also noted that even the language used in Tibetan publications on the environment indicates that conscious concern with environmental issues is part of the discourse of modernism, in which Tibetans and other indigenous people have been constructed as “naturally green” by Westerners seeking to construct an idealized primitive “other” whose practices implicitly critique those of technologically advanced societies. It should also be noted that much of the vocabulary used in Tibetan exile publications on the environment is derived not from Buddhist doctrine but instead employs contemporary Western notions and language. The “greening” of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism is also connected with the discourse of Buddhist modernism, which portrays Buddhism as essentially “rational” and “scientific” and represents Buddhism as the conceptual basis of social movements like environmentalism, human rights activism, social reform, and feminism.

There is no reason to believe that the widespread
influence of Buddhism contributed significantly to the general practice of sustainable agriculture and animal husbandry in Tibet, nor that the exile government’s pronouncements and publications on the environment have significantly affected either attitudes or practices toward the environment. These publications are the work of a small, educated elite, and the massive accumulation of garbage along the roadsways of Dharamsala – along with the common practices of spitting, urinating, and defecating into public water supplies – is ample demonstration of this. It should be noted, however, that although Tibetans have only recently begun to articulate environmental concerns, and the leading figures are a small elite group, there is some evidence that their message is gaining ground at least among the Tibetan exile community, and there have been several grassroots campaigns to clean up their environment in recent years.

John Powers

Further Reading
See also: Bon (Tibet); Buddhism – Tibetan; Dalai Lama; Nepal; Sacred Mountains; Yunnan Region (Southwest China and Montane Mainland Southeast Asia).
solely to consider how we can stop being such a wasteful society.

We should make tikkun olam a major focus of our synagogues, Jewish schools, and other Jewish groups and institutions in order to help move our precious planet to a path that is more just, humane, and sustainable. Changing will not be easy, since our society and economy are based on consumption and convenience, using and discarding. But it is essential that we make supreme efforts, for the survival of humanity may be at stake.

Richard Schwartz

Further Reading


See also: Eco-kabbalah; Hasidism and Nature Mysticism; Hebrew Bible; Israel and Environmentalism; Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Judaism; Kabbalah and Eco-theology; Vegetarianism and Judaism; Waskow, Rabbi Arthur.

Toland, John (1670–1722)

Historians describe John Toland as a multifaceted man – a philosopher, a writer, a linguist, a polemicist, a diplomat, a biblical scholar, a deist, and ultimately a proponent of pantheism. Lexicographers credit Toland with the first English-language usage of the term pantheist.

Born near Londonderry, Ireland on 30 November 1670, and christened in the Catholic Church, Toland converted to Protestantism around age 15. Subsequent higher education and an inquiring mind led him to extensive questioning of accepted religious doctrines. Toland acquired a degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1690, and studied further in England, Germany, and Holland.

A friend described Toland as “a free-spirited, ingenious man” (in Berman 1997: 223). But his unorthodox views forced him to move from place to place to avoid prosecu-

Toland, John 1639

tion, and made it hard to earn a living. Toland penned political pamphlets and biographies for aristocratic patrons. He wrote prolifically on a wide range of subjects, including religious tolerance and civil liberty.

A large bibliography lists almost two hundred works authored or ascribed to him. He claimed to know ten languages and often published anonymously or in a foreign tongue to keep critics at bay. An important early book, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, provoked controversy because it claimed that human reason could explain biblical mysteries. Clerics burned the book and one official requested, “that Mr. Toland himself should be burnt” (in Berman 1997: 226). But Toland’s work garnered fame as well as fusillades. He discussed philosophy with notables like the German thinker Wilhelm von Leibniz, and the Queen of Prussia, Sophia Charlotte.

Despite ill health and financial woes, Toland remained productive to the end of his life. He wrote *Physic without Physicians* shortly before he died, decrying his doctor’s inept treatment: “They learn their Art at the hazard of our lives, and make experiments by our deaths” (Toland in Mossner 1967: 141). Toland’s self-written epitaph concluded, “If you would know more of him Search his Writings” (in Berman 1997: 229).

A book Toland wrote in 1705 entitled *Socinianism truly stated . . . recommended by a Pantheist to an orthodox friend* contains the first known use of the term “pantheist” in an English-language publication. (Earlier, in 1697, Cambridge mathematician Joseph Raphson coined the words “pantheist” and “pantheism” in a theological work written in Latin; Toland had read and commented upon Raphson’s book). In 1709, a Toland critic named J. Fay used the term “pantheism” in English, and both terms quickly became common. Toland’s use of the term appears to derive from the pantheization of his religious outlook, as reflected in his later works, although some scholars question his committal to any particular religion.

Toland had previously expressed pantheistic theory in *Clito* (1700) and in *Letters to Serena* (1704), but had not employed the term. He thought “All things were full of God,” and pronounced that “The sun is my father, the Earth my mother, the world is my brother and all men are my family” (members.aol.com/pantheism0/toland.htm).

The Roman materialist Lucretius and especially the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (martyred for his pantheistic beliefs in 1600) greatly influenced Toland’s perspective.

Toland detailed his own pantheism in *Pantheisticon*: *sive Formula celebrandae Sodalitatis Socraticae/ Pantheisticon: or, the Form of Celebrating the Socratic Society* (1720, anonymous English translation, 1751). He believed in a boundless universe. He visualized the unity of all matter and the ceaseless motion of atoms. He spurned personal immortality yet averred that “Nothing dies totally, the death of one thing brings the birth of
another, by a universally reciprocal exchange, and everything contributes necessarily to the preservation and welfare of the Whole” (members.aol.com/pantheism0/toland.htm).

John Toland had a significant impact on his generation during the Age of Enlightenment. And he brought the concept of pantheism as well as the word “pantheist” into wider circulation, a term now commonly used by philosophers, theologians, and nature religionists throughout the world.

Further Reading
(Most of John Toland’s works remain out of print and are available only in rare library collections.)
See also: Corrington, Robert S.; Pantheism; Raphson, Joseph; Spinoza, Baruch.

Tolstoy Farm

Huw “Piper” Williams was a peace activist who founded an open-land community on some of his family’s farm property in eastern Washington State in 1963, seeking to promote a Christian lifestyle of simplicity, self-reliance, and cooperation. His inspiration came from some of the religious essays of Tolstoy and from the nonviolent philosophy and activism of Gandhi. Friends from the peace movement and the Catholic Worker movement soon joined him. The sole rule at Tolstoy Farm was that no one could be asked to leave, which meant that all differences would have to be worked out directly and peacefully.

The poverty at Tolstoy in its early years was striking, with dozens of residents trying to eke out survival with antiquated farm equipment and a cash income of only a few dollars per person per month. Over time, however, the community managed to acquire 240 acres of land in two tracts and, as the counterculture became more popular and Tolstoy’s reputation spread, it attracted large numbers of visitors, some of whom stayed and built their own houses. The farm’s lack of rules meant that social life tended to consist of a rather freewheeling anarchy. Williams, who eventually married and had children, finally left and later founded another organic, self-sufficient farming community, Earth Cycle Farm, 25 miles away. Tolstoy endured, however, becoming more stable as the permanent residents improved their homes (some have installed off-the-grid power systems) and continued to strive for rural self-sufficiency. In recent years, many members have embraced Earth-centered religions, holding an annual all-night Corn Dance, full moon rituals, and community sweats. In 2000, Tolstoy reported about fifty members.

Further Reading
See also: Anarchism; Back to the Land Movements; Hippies; New Religious Movements.

Torres Strait Islanders (Australia)

Torres Strait Islanders, who are, with Aborigines, one of two peoples indigenous to Australia, are grounded in continuous exchanges between people, kin groups, and the natural and numinous worlds. Of the 100 or so islands strewn over the 150km-wide, 10–15-meter-deep seas that lie between the Western Province of Papua New Guinea and the Cape York tip of the Australian mainland, 16 support communities. The current geography of Torres Strait has been in existence since approximately 6500 BP. Islander society is generally regarded as Melanesian, particularly on the northern islands, although those living in the southwest of the Strait share cultural characteristics with Cape York Aborigines. While Torres Strait Islanders originate in the Strait, over 80 percent of people who identify as Islanders in Australia (around 29,000), are resident on the Australian mainland where they cherish their island of origin, family history, totemic, wind and star affiliations. The enduring attachment of Islanders to their land was made evident in the historical Murray Island Land Case of 1992, the most significant legal acknowledgement
of indigenous rights and interests in Australia. The High Court of Australia recognized the Meriam peoples ownership, occupation and possession of their Mer (Murray Island) land, overturning the concept of terra nullius (land belonging to no one) that had guided Australian courts and governments on questions of indigenous rights to their lands since settlement in 1788.

Torres Strait Islanders were traditionally a maritime people who combined small-scale agriculture (growing yams, taro, cassava, sweet potato, bananas and coconuts) with marine and land foraging to meet their subsistence needs. By the turn of the twentieth century colonization had impacted on the elaborate horticultural and marine rituals that ensured the continuation of the seasonal calendar and increased the produce of the sea and land. Despite colonization a great deal of the worldview that encompassed these rituals continues to inform the experience of Islanders today. Religious rituals were transitional points that substantiated relations of responsibility and care between Islanders, the natural and the numinous. Thus, the ceremonial display and feastings of harvested yams publicly expressed appropriate uses of land through an exchange of energies between gardeners and soil resulting in the yield and the recognition of various social relationships by sharing the produce through a feast. The numinous dimension resided in a complex interaction between moral behavior, environmental care, and environmental behavior. In a worldview that understands the environment to express the actions of the people to which it is related, including Ancestors, uses of land through gardening and the sea through fishing or marine hunting (turtle and dugong [sea cow]) are relationships of nurturance and responsibility.

On the island of Mabuiag, it is said that a person is constantly connected to key sites in their family and clan lands through an imperceptible umbilical link. The smell of a person who has tended a food garden is recognized by plants in that garden and quickens their growth. Prosperous gardeners, healthy bodies and the plentiful provision of foodstuffs reflect a mutually constituting exchange and resource ceremonies gave regular public expression to these relationships. In contrast a person who does not care for the places they attain responsibility for, which can simultaneously include reefs, foreshores, cays, rivers, waterholes, stars, winds and lands, either through lack of visitation and resource use or morally objectionable behavior, can have an adverse effect on these locations and social relationships that are integral to relationships of place.

While colonialism has had great impact on Islander society, the rich cultural meanings and beliefs that inspired lapsed horticultural and marine ceremonies continued or transformed to emerge in new forms. The display of garden produce found a place in the church calendar of the Anglican (Episcopal) church for roughly the first half of the twentieth century as Torres Strait Islanders gathered harvests and piled them for show on important days of yearly church commemoration. Harvests are no longer publicly displayed through the religious calendar, but prestige is still accorded to men who provide turtle, dugong and ceremonial yams of long length and succulence, and to women who provide crabs and fish for church-based feasts. Also, the migration of many Islanders away from their traditional places of residence in the last half-century has led to the development of new relationships of care that transcend the inability to be present and active at particular places. Islanders maintain these connections by reciting memories, creating songs and dances that evoke significant associations to land and sea, and writing genealogies, seasonal and cosmological information, and agricultural and marine practices in family-owned manuscripts. These compositions sustain relationships to place by recording and making available the intricate connections between people, place and the numinous to family members physically separated from their terrestrial and marine territories.

The sea and landscapes of Torres Strait are permeated with individual, collective and cosmological histories in which personal experience and movement has constant reference to Ancestral activities and totemic affiliations. The mythical narratives in which Ancestral Beings construct the sacred geography of the region (adhiad) provide an important schema for relating individual identity, relationships to place and relationships between peoples and groups. Alongside mythical narratives of Ancestors who rarely participate in daily affairs exist active family-oriented Ancestral Beings that share responsibility for the nurture of territories particular to their family or clan group. On the island of Saibai the identification of people with their terrestrial territories is given fullest expression through relationships with family Ancestral Beings called muruyg, who take the shape of snakes. Muruyg are recognized as being high-status Ancestors who have gardened at a particular area as humans and have over a long period of time transformed into snakes with special powers. Their presence around garden beds that they were associated with in human life is propitious for cultivated crops and if a fire has devastated a garden they help bring it back to good health. They also act in a protective manner for their descendants’ lands and sometimes extend the range of their activities to include monitoring other lands within a clan estate.

At present, Islanders in the Strait face significant issues of environmental care. High levels of trace metals in marine biota, some of which may originate in the Ok Tedi outflow (located in the headwaters of the Ok Tedi, a tributary of the Fly River) may render some marine foods inedible for Islanders. Also, Islanders are unable to support the high cost of licenses and infrastructure needed to take advantage of lucrative local commercial fisheries.
Accessing the wealth from this industry would help establish independent economic security, resource management and sustainability and continue long-established affinities to the marine environment.

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Further Reading
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See also: Australia; Pacific Islands.

Totemic Practices in Borgu (West Africa)

Borgu straddles present-day Republic of Benin and Nigeria in West Africa. Before its partition by the British and the French in 1898, Borgu covered a vast expanse of land, stretching from the Atakora mountains in the west to the River Niger in the east, with three main kingdoms (Bussa, Illo, and Nikki) and several chiefdoms. The major towns included Bussa, Illo, Kaima, and Nikki. The Borgu people spoke several languages, but the major ones were Batonu and Boko. In spite of the partition and linguistic differences, the people practised similar religious belief systems.

Before the penetration of Islam and Christianity, the Borgu people associated religion with nature by worshipping the sun, moon, rocks, and rivers. They demonstrated the intersection of nature and religion by venerating animal, reptile, bird, and plant totems. Thus, the forces of nature brought spiritual attraction.

A British colonial officer described Borgu religion as "a fumble of superstitions, with strong indications of totemism," but this religious belief system was not unique to the Borgu society because the veneration of natural phenomena was a common concept in West Africa. A mystic relationship existed between an individual or clan and an animal, bird, or plant totem whereby the totem could not be killed or eaten. This practice was common among individuals of both sexes and clans. The people believed in the existence of spirits who were invoked or appeased by particular rites. In the Batonu language, totems are referred to as sheshera.

The most prominent animal totems were the leopard and the red antelope but others included the weaverbird, monitor lizard, rabbit, and crab. Reptiles, such as the python and cobra were also revered. Mostly, the sacred animals and birds were from non-domestic species because as hunters the people related more to animals in the bush than domestic ones.

The leopard, known as musuku or musu, was a royal animal totem of Mora and Kenu clans. Members of the Mako, Sawe, Yari-Ateuwa, and Yo clans, who were mostly farmers and hunters, adopted the leopard as a totem. The spiritual relationship has been explained in the tradition, which claims that the leopard embodied the soul of their ancestors. A live leopard was accorded respect in human fashion, but if found dead, members of the clans would bury it with two cowries and mourn it seven days. Sacrifices of appeasement were often offered and the adherents of the totem believed that the leopard usually ate up the food that was put at a shrine located within the courtyard of the palaces.

As hunters, the people believed that if they were lost in the bush, the leopard would lead them back to the town safely. If somebody accidentally killed a leopard, a propitiatory sacrifice would be offered. Failure to perform the sacrifice would evoke the leopard’s wrath in form of widespread sickness among the clan members. The Mako clan referred to the leopard as “father,” which accentuates the close relationship between the animal and the people. A surviving oral tradition indicated that a leopard protected the clan ancestors by attacking and killing their enemies during a battle. Hence, in appreciation of the animal, the ancestors gave great respect to the leopard and preserved the act of revering it in their clan tradition and history.

The veneration of the leopard in Borgu was closely related to that of the Jukun (Kwararafa) and the Nupe in central Nigeria. The Kisra legend, which was popular among many West African societies, referred to Kisra as the founder of the dynasties of the Borgu, Hausa, Jukun, Nupe, and Yoruba polities. The familial relationship has been supported by the similarity in the treatment of dead leopards among the Jukun and Borgu peoples. If a Wukari Jukun killed a leopard, he would parade the dead animal around the town mounted on a mat. The people would salute the animal with uplifted arms as they would a chief. However, the slayer was required to perform propitiatory rites and three days’ solitude in the bush. To kill a leopard among the Igara of Nupe was tantamount to committing an offence against the living and dead chiefs. A dead leopard was often brought to the chief, dressed up in white, and carried around the town with singing and beating of drums. The royal mausoleum of the Ata (the king) of Nupe was known as “The Grave of the Leopard.”

The gbero (red antelope) was the animal totem of several clans, such as the Bare, Kabo, Kpai, Kpasi, Mako, Mora, Mori, Sawe, Yari-Ateuwa, and Yo clans. These clans
may have had a common ancestry or they migrated from the same place. While on a hunting expedition, an ancestor of the Mora clan entered the warren of an animal to rest, but he could not find his way out. Fortuitously, a gbero made a hole through which the ancestor came out. As an expression of gratitude, the ancestor declared the gbero a totem for members of his clan.

Reptiles constituted another form of totem in the Borgu society. The Tosu royal clan of Okuta revered the python, which inhabited the Kuroboko hill. Pythons (mileda in the Boko language) lived in two shrines located at Kabami rocky hill in Gurai town. Bare, Kabo, Wanro, and Yari Wanro clans also revered shurokoro (cobra). The reverence of pythons and cobras might have developed from snake worship, which was commonplace in pre-colonial West Africa. People kept serpents in their homes and allowed them to wander about the village without being attacked by members of the community. Among the Mako, Kenu, Sawe, and Yo clans, both gunusemu (rabbit) and shekuro (weaverbird) were accorded human burial. One cowry would be buried with it and mourning would last only a day.

Animal totems were more common than plant totems but spirits lived in sacred trees. The Lesaworu clan at Ilesha revered the Besigondo tree but Baatoke tree was the plant totem of the Yari at Okuta. The Laru-speaking people of Lashi in Wawa District regarded Kanya tree as the abode of Zarami, an important spirit who provided security for members of the community in times of sickness or epidemics. The chief priest of Lashi, an important Earth spirit represented by a stone in a hut, could not be circumcised, and was not allowed to farm. The chief of Sabon Gari could not eat new yam until he made a sacrifice of a sheep and corn to Lashi. The Kani spirit lived in Kawa tree and often accepted a sacrifice of a white cock, a libation of honey, milk, and flour for appeasement. Ants, represented by a small piece of iron, could be invoked in case of sterility. The spirit of Fu lived in a Rimi tree. In addition, the spirit of Dauda at Kagogi near Bussa lived in Duki tree. Furthermore, the spirit of Doguwa Faru in Illo lived in the sacred tamarind tree.

Unlike the others, the Dandawa (Muslim) clans, such as the Taruwere, Ture, Mane, and the Wangara merchants, did not adopt any animal totem. But like other clans, the Muslims observed food taboos, which do not fall within the category of totemism. For a long time, the Borgu people refused to be Islamized and the veneration of animal and plant totems could be seen as one of the devices of resisting the Islamic religion. Mohammed Bello, the Sultan of Sokoto, once described the Borgu people as “devils and of stubborn nature” because of their refusal to accept Islam.

The people of Borgu worshipped other natural phenomena, such as rocks, hills, and rivers. Jekanna, a rocky hill in Bussa, was invoked for childbirth, sickness, and wealth, and its chief priest was called the Bamaso. Another rocky hill, Kuroboko, served a natural barrier against external military attacks, but it was also a symbol of religious practice. A newly installed chief of Okuta would visit the Kuroboko hill for prayers and to offer a sacrifice for a peaceful and prosperous reign. Before and after a war, sacrifices were offered at the Kuroboko hill. The Ozera hill in Kaisama served both political and religious functions. During the annual Gani festival, the traditional shaving of the royal family took place at the Ozera hill. The people of Ilesha chiefdom used to offer sacrifices to Tutuku hill, especially during epidemics.

The River Niger with its tributaries, including Alibori, Makrou, Minni, Moshi, Oli, and Teshi were worshipped and sacrificed to for successful fishing and peace. Daraku was the only river that the people of Okuta worshipped. The spirits of the river inhabited a hole in a big tree and the chief priest was called Shina Woshho.

The centrality of nature and religion cannot be undermined in the Borgu society. As deeply religious, farming, hunting, and fishing communities, the Borgu people placed high emphasis on the interplay of nature and religion. Whether adopted as primary or secondary totems, animals, birds, rocks, and rivers have been employed as instruments of religion to consolidate socio-cultural cohesion and cross-clan relations. They served as symbols of unity within the society. The breaking of a totemic practice could imperil the unity of the clan. Determined to remain traditionalists and nature worshippers, the Borgu people did not adopt Islam or Christianity until the colonial period. Traditional religion still exists, an example of which is Bionkuro, whose shrine is represented by a collection of fine stones in Kenu and the priest attends to patrons who come to ask for improved health, wealth, or childbirth. Although Islam and Christianity are gaining ground in contemporary times, they have not completely obliterated the practice of totemism and nature worship.

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Further Reading
See also: African Religions and Nature Conservation; Totemism; West Africa; Yoruba Culture (West Africa).

**Totemism**

The word totem comes from the Algonquin language of the Chippewa (or Ojibwe) people of the American mid-West. It first came to prominence in the late eighteenth century, when trader James Long wrote:

> The religious superstition of the Savages consists in each of them having his totem, or favourite spirit, which he believes watches over him. This totem they conceive assumes the shape of some beast or other, and therefore they never kill, hunt or eat the animal whose form they think this totem bears (Long 1791: 86).

Long also told the story of a Chippewa man whose “totam” was bear. The man one day killed a bear, thereby angering the Master of Life. So he was punished by a second bear, who admonished him and struck his face. As it turned out, Long had confused the Chippewa’s idea of a personal guardian spirit (or manito) with their idea of a collective clan spirit (or totem), but the words “totem,” “totemic,” and “totemism” developed and gelled in the English language from that time on.

Totems are usually defined as objects or beings that are emblematic of individual or group identities. Typically, the totem is an animal; less typically a plant or some other natural feature (like fire, rain, the sun, or the moon). In Long’s time, and for more than a hundred years afterwards, anthropologists usually interpreted totemism as the classical type of “primitive” religion – religion that belonged to such a low level of human social development that it was inextricably tied to nature, whose forces were seen to dominate primitive worlds. Some even argued that it was a kind of “pre-religion” or magic found among people who had yet to take any significant steps toward civilization and the rational control of natural forces. Spiritual beliefs from throughout the Americas, Australia, the Pacific Islands, and Africa, as well as large parts of Asia, all came to be lumped together under the category “totemism.”

These speculations more or less came to a definitive end when Claude Lévi-Strauss published *Le Totémisme Aujourd’hui* in 1962. Lévi-Strauss drew attention to the incredible variation that existed in the ethnographic record, suggesting that no single form of totemism could be identified as characteristic of the phenomenon as a whole. Totems could symbolize individual, lineage, or sexual identities, to name only a few, and have been found in all kinds of combinations in a single society. However, Lévi-Strauss did make one positive observation about this variety, saying that each type of totemism had to be understood as an example of a universal human propensity to utilize metaphor in the negotiation of identity. From that moment on, Aboriginal and other tribal people’s use of totemic emblems became no more remarkable than Americans identifying with the bald eagle, an army regiment identifying with its mascot, or the American prisoner Robert Stroud becoming “the Birdman of Alcatraz.” Recent attempts to enlist ostensibly tribal forms of totemism to environmentalist or New Age agendas, so that pandas, dolphins, salmon, or wolves, for example, come to symbolize particular human identities, such as conservation organizations or neo-tribal shamans, build on firm traditions long embedded in modern as well as pre-modern thought.

The extensibility of totemism is a key question in its ethnographic definition. For example, W.E.H. Stanner once described the local selection of Australian Aboriginal totems as “irreducibly arbitrary” (1979: 130). His account is worth quoting more fully.

> A totem is in the first place a thing; an entity, an event, or a condition – what I have called an existent. Virtually anything perceivable can serve: plants and animals of all kinds – anything in the entire floral and faunal realms; wind, rain, storms, thunder, lightning, stars, sun, moon and clouds – anything of the heavens; tools and weapons, food and cosmetics, fire and smoke, mist and spume, fresh water and salt – anything of the Earth; the human exuviae and genitals – almost anything of the body . . . Sexual desire, cold weather, sweethearts, vomiting, runaway wives, mother’s milk and innumerable pests have all been recorded as totems. A part of an object can serve – the handle of a spear-thrower, or the bowels of an animal; so can a disease – diarrhoea or colds; so can flood-wrack swirling down a river, or tide marks on a beach. Living persons evidently cannot be totems, but a mythical person can be – for example, the Warramunga “laughing boy” (1979: 129–30).

The totemic impulse is similarly protean in Western societies, where, for example, sports teams have totems that include not only animals, but also colors, peoples, professions, mythical beings and abstract energies, to name but a few. Such versatility is found in totemic systems worldwide, both modern and pre-modern.

Yet totemic systems do tend to be dominated by animals, probably because humans are also animals – hence a strongly perceived similarity between “us” and “them.” But at the same time humans are more diverse within the species, so that differences between nonhuman animals are readily employed to symbolize differences between people. Paradoxically, totemic species then appear closer to their equivalent groups of people than other humans and, in common parlance, the totemic species often comes
to be referred to as a friend or relative. Indeed, “totem” is actually taken from the Algonquin expression *ototeman*, which translates as “he is a relative of mine.” In societies similar to that of the Chippewa, it is common to call totemic species “brother,” “mother,” “grandfather,” and so on, so that totems, or any of the objects or spirit beings which instance them, are fully regarded as kin or extensions of the self. Totemic relationships, be they religious or secular, are invariably marked by familiarity and special intimacy.

In recent centuries the contrast between humans and other animals has been heavily compromised by the idea that humans are somehow beyond animality, or cultural rather than natural. Hence totemism has come to be perceived as “kinship with nature,” “nature worship” or “analogy between nature and culture” – this even though the Chippewa and other classically totemic societies did not originally possess a concept of nature in opposition to a concept of human society. Neo-totemic characterizations are usually strongly wedded to the romantic critique of civilization, which tends to claim that the West has lost touch with nature and needs to reinstate a reciprocal relationship with it. In this mindset, totemism tends to take on a distinctly New Age feel in terms of the ability of people to communicate with nature and comes to be strongly connected with the wisdom of “primitive peoples,” particularly insofar as they are exponents of shamanism and spiritual journeys to commune with other species. The extent to which this romantic vision accurately reflects past ethnographic reality remains problematic, but it is certainly now part of the contemporary ethnographic landscape.

Take, for example, the contemporary image of the wolf. This creature has a long history in the totemic folklore of a large part of the Northern Hemisphere. In Europe, the wolf is most famously associated with the stories of Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs, where he is the personification of the forest and a symbol of the potential destruction and transformation of childhood. He also appears in a related unkindly guise as the werewolf. But the wolf also figures in the totemic mythology of Native North America, where the associated symbolism, often more benign, is rapidly hybridizing with the ongoing romantic backlash against the modern world. For example, Jungian works like Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ *Women Who Run with the Wolves* invert classical European imagery to make a statement about modernity.

Within every woman there lives a powerful force, filled with good instincts, passionate creativity, and ageless knowing. She is the Wild Woman, who represents the instinctual nature of women. But she is an endangered species. For though the gifts of wildish nature belong to us at birth, society’s attempt to “civilize” us into rigid roles has muffled the deep, life-giving messages of our own souls (1992: 1).

Hence, loss of kinship with the wolf, which is lack of contact with nature, is also detachment from one’s own nature – one’s true self. Neo-totemism preaching this kind of “back-to-nature” scenario inevitably establishes links with tribal regimes.

The reference to the Wild Woman/wolf as “endangered species” is telling, for in recent years the “originators” of totemism, the Chippewa people, have organized with other Native American groups (Nez Perce and Dakota Sioux) to protect wolves in their local areas. Chippewa spokespeople have stated in relation to their campaign that they are “concerned citizens that are worried for the protection of the wolf” and they have claimed the right to participate in “decisions that will affect our brother the wolf.” They back their claims with mythological precedent, saying that, at the beginning of time, Anishinable (the first Chippewa man) walked the Earth alone “naming all creation, lands and waters.” Because he was alone, the wolf was created to walk with him and share his fate. What would happen to one would also happen to the other. And this is how the Chippewa see their dispossession in the modern world. Just as they have had their lands taken, and been hunted and pushed to near extinction, so too has the wolf become endangered. If, as the Chippewa and others intend, the wolf returns in numbers to the land and gains in strength, then this will show how Chippewa life, culture and spirituality will also return and gain strength in those places where they were once destroyed. And perhaps, they say, “the wolf will lead the way to a more natural living” and teach the new Americans to respect “Mother Earth” (Bob Shimek and Jean Brave Heart. “Native Americans Enter Wolf Controversy.” http://nnic.com/mnwolves/nap.html, visited 3 July 2001).

These ideas are at once old and new, a recasting of totemic traditions in hypermodern circumstances. They also mark a tense conjunction of interests expressed by indigenous peoples, environmentalist groups and New Age spiritualists. These interests often help to form strong alliances, but they also often lead to accusations of neo-colonialism and the wrongful appropriation of indigenous knowledge. Some ethnographers have argued that classical totemic systems, in effecting ritual control of human movement and foraging, have long played a part in environmental resource management in pre-modern societies. In turn, successful environmental management is reflected in spiritual beliefs about maintaining harmony and balance in the cosmos. Yet violent hunting practices and other pragmatic issues in indigenous communities do not always sit easily with contemporary environmentalist or New Age sensibilities. Consequently, neo-totemic solidarity across the indigenous/non-indigenous divide cannot be taken for granted, but is rather a matter for...
negotiation. In recent decades, environmentalists and New Age spiritualists have been on steep learning curves in relation to totemic sensibilities in indigenous communities; but, equally, indigenous peoples have been keen to discover what the West’s disenchanted have to offer in their struggle against neo-colonial domination.

When Lévi-Strauss penned Le Totémisme Aujourd’hui his intention was to dissolve the phenomenon into something different and far broader. While his intention has been supported by examination of the fuller content of totemic systems, the core problematic relationships between “nature” and “culture” (animality and humanity, “primitive thought” and “modern thought”) have remained ideologically to the fore. Indeed, the British anthropologist Roy Willis recently observed that, thanks to the ongoing twinning of primitivism and ecological concern, the period after Le Totémisme Aujourd’hui has been marked by a kind of “totemic revival” (1990: 5). The Chippewa situation described above can be taken as symptomatic of this neo-totemic environment in which the contrast between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples has become synonymous with the opposition between human nature (“the soul”) and its corruption by technocratic rationality. But Lévi-Strauss’s words still strike a note of caution; totemic emblems have never been restricted to natural species, any more than they have been exclusively religious in the conventional sense. We live in a world dense with personal and corporate emblems, only some of which resonate with the juxtaposition of religion and nature.

*John Morton*

**Further Reading**


See also: Anthropology as a Source of Nature Religion; Ecology and Religion; Estés, Clarissa Pinkola; Indigenous Religions and Cultural Borrowing; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Totemic Practices in Borgu (West Africa).

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge**

The theme of traditional ecological knowledge is important for the consideration of a broad range of questions related to nature–human relations. Different groups of people in various parts of the world perceive and interact with nature differently, and have different traditions of environmental knowledge. Their perceptions and knowledge are in part shaped by their values, worldviews, and environmental ethics – religion in the broader sense. In the exploration of environmental ethics and religion toward an ecologically sustainable society, indigenous peoples and traditional ecological knowledge have attracted considerable attention from both scholars and popular movements. Traditional ecological knowledge may be defined as “a cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment.” As a knowledge-practice-belief complex, traditional ecological knowledge includes the worldview or religious traditions of a society. It is both cumulative and dynamic, building on experience and adapting to change, as societies constantly redefine what is considered “traditional.” It is an attribute of societies with historical continuity in making a living in a particular place.

Many discussions of traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous knowledge focus on North American Indian peoples. However, there are traditions of ecological knowledge in various indigenous societies in South America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia. Culturally transmitted, cumulative, multigenerational knowledge is held also by some groups that have European backgrounds, such as Newfoundland fishers and Swiss Alpine people.

**TEK in Our Common Future**

Tribal and indigenous peoples’ . . . lifestyles can offer modern societies many lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain and dryland ecosystems . . . These communities are the repositories of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience that link humanity with its ancient origins. Their disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems (*Our Common Future* 1987: 12, 114–15).

*Fikret Berkes*
Traditional ecological knowledge may be considered as a sub-set of indigenous knowledge, defined as local knowledge held by indigenous peoples or local knowledge unique to a given culture or society. There is controversy over the term, traditional. Some scholars consider that the term implies backwardness, and instead favor “indigenous” or “local.” Others point out that many indigenous peoples themselves see “tradition” in a positive light. They do not take it to mean inflexible adherence to the past but rather to mean time-tested and wise.

These considerations make it difficult to generalize about traditional ecological knowledge. But in any case, one cannot generalize about “the Amerindian (or African) view of nature.” Every cultural group has within it a range of environmental values and ethics, and a range of practices. Environmental relations of a group are not uniform; they are shaped by the day-to-day contingencies, as well as their worldview and ethics. Environmental ethics do not describe how people actually behave, but indicate how they ought to behave. Human–nature relations tend to be ambivalent; there often is a discrepancy between belief and practice.

**Origins of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and its Development as a Field**

The intellectual roots of traditional ecological knowledge are in ethnoscience (mainly ethnobotany) and human ecology. The field started with the documentation of lists of species used by different indigenous groups, and elaborated a science of folk taxonomies of plants and animals, and later, of other environmental features such as soils. Early ethnobotany goes back at least to Barrows’ 1900 work on Coahuila Indians of southern California who made a living in a seemingly barren desert environment by harvesting no less than 60 kinds of edible plants and 28 kinds of medicinal plants. The science of folk taxonomies is often associated with the name of Harold Conklin who documented in the 1950s the extensive plant knowledge and classification systems of traditional groups such as the Hanunoo of the Philippines.

There is a technical literature on various kinds of indigenous environmental knowledge. For example, traditional agricultural practice is a major field of indigenous knowledge; others include traditional medicine and architecture. Much of the indigenous knowledge literature is not about ecological relationships but about other kinds of ethnoscience, including agriculture, ethnobiology, ethnopharmacology, ethnoveterinary medicine, and ethnopedology (soils). Some of these areas, for example, traditional practices of water conservation and erosion control, are directly related to ecological knowledge, but others (e.g., ethnoastronomy) are less so.

The shift of emphasis from the documentation of species used by indigenous groups and their taxonomy, to a consideration of functional relationships and mechanisms, gave rise to the field of traditional ecological knowledge. The field borrows from the cultural ecology tradition of the anthropologist Julian Steward who emphasized the study of adaptive processes, and argued that social organization itself may be considered an ecological adaptation of a group to its local environment. This emphasis on adaptive processes in human–nature relations may be seen in some of the key volumes on traditional ecological knowledge. As defined in this literature, traditional ecological literature overlaps with cultural ecology, ecological anthropology or anthropological ecology but is not a sub-set of these fields because it often goes beyond the discipline of anthropology.

The rapid development of traditional ecological knowledge as a field in its own right started with the documentation of a tremendously rich body of environmental knowledge, not just of species but also their ecological relations, among a diversity of groups outside the mainstream Western world. These included studies of shifting cultivation and biodiversity conservation in tropical ecosystems, and traditional knowledge and management systems in coastal fisheries and lagoons, semi-arid areas, and the Arctic. These studies showed that a variety of traditional peoples, in diverse geographical areas from the Arctic to the Amazon, had their own understandings of ecological relationships and distinct traditions of resource management.

By the mid–1980s, the rapidly growing literature on traditional ecological knowledge led to a recognition in the international arena of its potential applications to contemporary resource and environmental problems. This recognition is reflected in *Our Common Future*, the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. The report pointed out that indigenous peoples hold a wealth of knowledge based on thousands of years of experience, and that their practices can offer modern societies lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain and arid land ecosystems.

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Science**

Even though the importance of traditional ecological knowledge is recognized in the international arena and the number of publications has grown rapidly since the 1980s, the relationship between Western science and traditional knowledge has remained controversial. There are both similarities and differences between traditional science and Western science. Both kinds of knowledge are ultimately based on observations of the environment, and both result from the same intellectual process of creating order out of disorder. But they are different in a number of substantive ways. Traditional ecological knowledge is often an integral part of a culture, and tends to have a large social context. Different kinds of traditional knowledge have their own rules, but they are different from science regarding rules of evidence and repeatability.
Some of the conflict between science and traditional knowledge is related to claims of authority over knowledge. In the modernist tradition, Western science is seen as having a monopoly on truth. Hence, knowledge and insights that originate outside institutionalized Western science are not easily accepted. Scientists tend to dismiss understandings that do not fit their own (and this often includes understandings of other scientists using different paradigms). Scientists tend to be skeptical, demanding evidence when confronted with traditional knowledge that may not easily lend itself to scientific verification.

Some traditional knowledge may include elements, such as the religious dimensions of the environment, which do not make sense to science. For example, many of the Dene (Athapascan) peoples of the North American subarctic consider that some non-living parts of the environment (including rivers and mountains), as well as all living beings, have spirit. Science has no tools for the study of the spiritual dimensions of the environment, but nevertheless such beliefs are important for understanding Dene traditional ecological knowledge.

For their own part, traditional knowledge holders are skeptical of book learning, and tend to dismiss scientists who do not have extensive first-hand knowledge of a specific land area. As well, they are often baffled by the preoccupation of scientists to measure and quantify everything. Power relations become an issue when Western experts and Aboriginal experts have different political agendas. Traditional ecological knowledge has frequently been used to assert indigenous land and resource rights and to fight government-imposed development projects on native land. In turn, science may be used to justify the very same projects.

Hence the issue is complex, even if one agrees with postmodern philosophers of science that Western scientific methodology is merely one way, and not the only way, to acquire knowledge. However, it is the one that happens to be the dominant knowledge system by far, and the one used as the basis of environmental decision-making by centralized bureaucracies throughout the world.

Significance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Traditional knowledge and Western science need not be thought of as opposites. Rather, it may be useful to emphasize the potential complementarities of the two, and to look for points of agreement rather than disagreement. The use of traditional knowledge contributes to conceptual pluralism, and expands the range of approaches and information needed to solve environmental problems.

The explosion of interest in traditional ecological knowledge since the 1980s is in part related to its practical significance. However, the interests of different parties are quite different. For many indigenous groups, the broader social and cultural aspects of traditional knowledge are very significant, and this is one of the reasons why dealing with traditional ecological knowledge has become politically volatile. In many indigenous areas, researchers no longer have a free hand to conduct their work independently from the people themselves.

Politically organized groups of indigenous peoples are beginning to assert control over their knowledge systems for at least two reasons. First, some indigenous groups have seen their knowledge and biological resources (for example, medicinal plants) turned by others into profit-making commodities. Thus, they have started to ask the question of who benefits from the recording of their knowledge, and to investigate how they themselves can control their knowledge and products.

Second, indigenous knowledge has become a symbol for many groups to regain control over their cultural information. Reclaiming their indigenous knowledge has become a major strategy in many parts of the world for movements of cultural revitalization. For example, many of the Aboriginal groups in Alaska and Northern Canada have been carrying out their own traditional knowledge studies as part of an effort to strengthen their culture, educate their young people, prepare land and resource claims, and assert their rights. Such revitalization is not merely a cultural exercise; it is about empowerment and political control.

The need for indigenous groups to control their knowledge has to be balanced against the importance of traditional ecological knowledge as the common heritage of humankind. There are tangible and practical reasons why traditional ecological knowledge is important for the rest of the world’s people. I have identified seven areas in which traditional ecological knowledge is significant.

First, it is a source of biological knowledge and ecological insights. Second, indigenous knowledge is important for the sustainability of difficult-to-manage ecosystems such as tropical forests. Third, it is important for community-based conservation by connecting human values with conservation values. Fourth, some traditional systems are of special interest for biodiversity conservation because they are based on multiple-use principles that distribute resource-use pressures in space and time. Fifth, in-depth local environmental knowledge and trends over time for a given site are important for environmental assessment. Sixth, traditional knowledge is essential for development, especially for “bottom-up” (as opposed to top-down) development planning with people.

Finally, traditional ecological wisdom is a source of inspiration for environmental ethics. Belief systems of many indigenous groups incorporate the idea that humans are part of the natural environment, and their relationship with nature may be characterized as peaceful coexistence. Callicott points out that some traditional ecology sees humans and nature in a symbiotic relationship, with mutual obligations leading to “respect,” a central idea in the relations of many Amerindian groups with nature.
These observations are significant. The explosion of interest in traditional ecological knowledge in recent years reflects in part the need to derive ecological insights from indigenous practice, and the need to develop a new ecological ethic based in part on indigenous wisdom.

Fikret Berkes

Further Reading


See also: American Indians as "First Ecologists"; Domestication; Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Environmental Ethics; Ethnobotany; Ethnoecology; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Harris, Marvin; Indigenous Environmental Network; Native American Languages (North America); Rappaport, Roy A. ("Skip"); Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; A Religio-Ecological Perspective on Religion and Nature; Traditional Ecological Knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada; Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management (South Africa); Yunnan Region (Southwest China and Montane Mainland Southeast Asia).

Traditional Ecological Knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

Each contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate: Subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge innovations and practices (from www.biodiv.org – the Convention on Biological Diversity’s website).

For generations, indigenous peoples in what is now known as Canada have been using their own knowledge systems to live sustainably with the land. Indigenous knowledge systems are unique systems of generating, storing and transmitting knowledge completely separate and independent from Western science and Western epistemologies. Rooted in relations with the spirit-world, indigenous knowledge continues to provide Aboriginal peoples with unique worldviews, languages that are constructed to reflect those worldviews, systems of governance, values, and processes and ways of knowing and interacting with the land. Aboriginal philosophies and values reflect worldviews that are based on inter-relationships and interdependency with the natural world and all other elements of the cosmos. Traditional teachings, stories, songs, dances and ceremonies reinforce the importance of relationships and process in the lives of individuals, communities and nations. Indigenous knowledge is dynamic and creative and, although it varies from nation to nation, has certain common elements and themes. Indigenous knowledge is at once ancient and contemporary knowledge, recording through the oral tradition the collective knowledge of a people in addition to documenting the impacts of colonization, colonialism and environmental destruction. Experts in indigenous knowledge are not academics or researchers who study TEK, but they are the Elders and knowledge-holders who not only hold the knowledge, but who have lived the knowledge and the teachings over the course of their lives. It is these experts who are best equipped to provide leadership around this topic, and it is these experts that need to be included in an effective way in discussions regarding the many potential applications of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

During the initial stages of colonization, Europeans were dependent upon indigenous peoples and their knowledge for their survival. The colonizers relied upon technology in the areas of transportation, hunting, fishing, food gathering, nutrition, healthcare and navigation. They relied upon Aboriginal peoples for their most basic needs and in turn had great respect for indigenous knowledge. However, as the settler economy developed and the infrastructure needed to support the colonizers way of life was realized, they no longer relied on Aboriginal peoples and
Aboriginal knowledge for their continuance and survival. Subsequently, over that next five centuries, indigenous knowledge was disrespected, undermined and assimilated into Canadian society with no recognition or acknowledgement for Aboriginal peoples. Many of the modern symbols of Canadian culture, such as maple syrup, canoes, kayaks, snow shoes, wild rice and wild meat, represent appropriated Aboriginal knowledge. The systemic dispossession of Aboriginal nations from their territories along with the assimilative policies of the Canadian government through the Indian Act would have come close to destroying indigenous knowledge if it were not for the resistance and commitment of past generations of Aboriginal peoples.

In recent times, non-Aboriginal researchers, academics, environmentalists, industry and government personnel have once again become interested in what has become known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Many environmentalists believe that TEK holds answers to the pending ecological crises and provides Euro-Canadian society with a blueprint toward sustainable living. The pharmaceutical and natural health products industries are interested in the Aboriginal knowledge and use of traditional medicines and medicinal plants so that these might be commercially exploited for profit. Natural resource managers at the federal and provincial levels are interested in TEK in hopes that it can contribute to the management of renewable and non-renewable resources in a positive way. These interests in the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples have unfortunately caused researchers to separate out "ecological" or "environmental" knowledge from other kinds of knowledge, because it is the component of the knowledge system that outside researchers are currently most interested in learning. Existing academic literature regarding TEK continues along this line of thinking, privileging the components of indigenous knowledge that conform well to Western ideals over the spiritual basis of indigenous knowledge. Aboriginal spiritual traditions, beliefs and values form the foundation of traditional knowledge, and are completely integrated into every aspect of TEK and indigenous thought. Much of the TEK literature published in applied scientific journals and publications is written by non-Aboriginal scientists and academics and has focused on introducing TEK to scientists. Works written by Fikret Berkes, for instance, attempt to gain acceptance for TEK and Aboriginal peoples in disciplines that have traditionally ignored the contribution and knowledge of indigenous peoples. Publications in scientific journals generally ignore contemporary impacts of colonization and colonialism on indigenous peoples, the land, and their knowledge, marginalize indigenous elders and knowledge-holders, and undermine the oral tradition, thereby constructing "TEK" in a manner that is often not meaningful to the very people who hold the knowledge. These criticisms, long observed by indigenous elders and knowledge-holders are making their way into the academic literature articulated by indigenous scholars such as Marie Battiste, James Sa’ke’j Youngblood Henderson, Leanne Simpson and Deborah McGregor.

Aboriginal peoples have approached these outside interests with caution, concerned that their knowledge could be taken out of context, misused and appropriated. Indeed, there have been several examples of this kind of exploitation increasingly occurring, and indigenous peoples continue to take special precautions when sharing knowledge with people from outside their communities and nations. Many communities have developed information-sharing policies and guidelines for researchers entering their territories in addition to their traditional protocols for sharing and transmitting knowledge. Some communities and organizations, like the Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Organization are investigating the possibility of using Canadian Intellectual Property law to protect aspects of their knowledge, despite current deficiencies in the laws in terms of indigenous knowledge.

Internationally, TEK has most recently been recognized in the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. Article 8j (see the epigraph) of the Convention outlines the importance of indigenous knowledge and indigenous peoples in the protection of biodiversity. Canada, as a signatory to the Convention, is slowly working toward implementing Article 8j in its domestic legislation. As a result, environmental impact assessments, co-management agreements, and certain pieces of legislation such as the proposed Species at Risk Act are beginning to include certain aspects of indigenous knowledge within them. Despite these initiatives, there are many barriers to including TEK in environmental management in ways that respect Aboriginal peoples and bring about meaningful change to these processes. Scientists and resource managers have little opportunity to learn about Aboriginal peoples and their TEK first-hand. This can create misunderstandings regarding the nature of TEK. Governments often require their bureaucrats to include TEK in policy and legislation without proper consultation with Aboriginal peoples, in unrealistic timeframes, and without appropriate financial support. Governments also regularly require TEK to be written down or documented before it is considered useful. Documented TEK is then integrated into processes and frameworks that remain strongly rooted in Western science, and much of the transformative potential of indigenous knowledge is assimilated in the process. Many Elders are concerned that once their knowledge is removed from the oral tradition and the knowledge-holders, translated into English and textualized, it is removed from its context and all of the relationships that give the knowledge its meaning. Aboriginal advocates have challenged this approach and Aboriginal peoples are monitoring these initiatives with concern. It is critical that Aboriginal people, not just isolated components of their
knowledge, are included in a meaningful and respectful way in environmental management in Canada, and it is important to realize that including the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples in environmental decision making ultimately means that different decisions will be made.

Contemporary Aboriginal peoples in Canada are concerned about protecting their territories from environmental destruction not only as a way of protecting their relations with the natural world, the health of their communities and their cultures, but also as a way of protecting their knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge comes from the land. Without these relationships, it is difficult to strengthen, promote and preserve the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples for the coming generations and it is difficult to envision healthy, sustainable Aboriginal nations in the future. TEK has much to offer Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies if it is accessed and used in a way that is respectful and fair from the perspective of the people who hold the knowledge. As interest in TEK grows, and Aboriginal voices are listened to, so does the potential for using both indigenous and Western forms of knowledge together to address some of the many local, national and global environmental issues facing the world.

Leanne Simpson (Anishnaabe Kwe)

Further Reading


See also: American Indians as “First Ecologists”; Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Ethnobotany; Ethnecology; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Indigenous Environmental Network; Native American Languages (North America); Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management (South Africa).

Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation is a spiritual movement organized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, an Indian who came to the U.S. in 1959 to utilize modern media and communications to spread his teachings. These teachings are based on monistic Advaita-Vedanta, a Hindu tradition that describes the universe as diverse manifestations of a single, underlying Absolute, called Brahman. The goal of meditation is personally to experience direct knowledge of Brahman, and realize that the essence of one’s own self is this same Brahman. In the 1970s, Maharishi rephrased his teachings to use Western scientific terminology and described his meditation program as the Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI) with Creative Intelligence being the all-pervasive, organizing principle of the universe. Nature appears in two areas of SCI, first as Brahman and second in the context of environmentalism.

In writings from the 1980s, Maharishi often used “Nature” instead of “Brahman” when describing the underlying foundation of the cosmos. In this context, nature is described as the basis of all order and the goal of meditation is to become aware of it. TM uses the language of physics, mathematics, and chemistry to explain the order of the universe and show that modern science is describing a unified cosmos that coincides with the ancient Indian scriptures, the Vedas. Maharishi makes effective use of the Grand Unification Theories of physics to communicate the idea of the basic unity of all material existence to a Western audience. This emphasis on science also allows TM to define itself as a practical technique for improving modern life rather than a religion with a creed. Referring to the Absolute as “nature” rather than God or Brahman facilitates the movement’s non-religious identity.

Nature is not, however, completely passive. It is the Creative Intelligence that organizes the cosmos and is said to have “moved Maharishi” to begin his life of teaching. This teaching is necessary for “nature to work out its divine plan for the spiritual regeneration of mankind” (Maharishi 1986: 2). From such statements, it is clear that nature is an active, conscious force in Maharishi’s philosophy. And the divine plan requires that people learn to
meditate so that they can realize their inherent oneness with the cosmos and be brought into harmony with the natural order of the universe. This, in turn, transforms one’s life and leads to the full realization of “human potential.” A person who is attuned to nature will be confident and content, able to handle the pace of modern life without succumbing to stress. Such a person is in harmony with the cosmic order. Maharishi attributes his success and his movement’s growth to “the natural expression of the force of evolution, silently reshaping the destiny of the world through the thought and action of one moving in perfect attunement with the infinite intelligence of nature” (Maharishi 1986: 1). If his followers meditate, they too will be successful at life because they are in accord with the natural order.

TM’s description of nature concerns the cosmic whole, not specific phenomena such as the sun or mountains. The same is true of the movement’s approach to the earthly environment. One of TM’s stated goals is “To maximize the intelligent use of the environment” (Forem 1974: 10). However, TM writings do not have specific aims such as stopping global warming or requiring that all members be vegetarian. Rather, there is a general belief that those who practice TM will find themselves naturally living a more harmonious life. This will include better human relationships, reduced stress, greater clarity of thought, and better choices about how to live. Among these will be environmental awareness, because polluting the world is selfish and places short-sighted gratification before long-term well-being.

Although TM does not champion specific causes, Maharishi describes two ways in which it can have an effect on the world beyond its membership. First, he suggests that the “custodians of this knowledge” should serve in governments where they will create “problem-free” nations and raise life to the level of a “Heaven on Earth.” Second is the “Maharishi Effect,” the theory that the mental states of a few people can influence the behavior of others at a distance. According to TM, if the square root of one percent of a population meditates regularly, the higher consciousness of the meditators will affect the whole area and social problems will be alleviated. Thus, their efforts will bring the society into harmony with nature.

Cybelle Shattuck

Further Reading

Transcendentalism
Transcendentalism refers to the intellectual and social movement that emerged primarily in Boston and surrounding areas during the mid-nineteenth century and included such familiar figures as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller, as well as Frederick Henry Hedge, George Ripley, James Clark, Orestes Brownson, Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Peabody, and Theodore Parker, among others. Already known to each other through intellectual and social circles, the Transcendentalists formalized their relationship (to the extent that they ever did so) through a regular symposium—sometimes dubbed “the Transcendental Club”—that gathered at participants’ homes from 1836 to 1840. The group analyzed such topics as “the essence of religion as distinct from morality,” “American Genius,” “Pantheism” and “the nature of Poetry.” As these titles indicate, the preoccupations of this group were flexible and wide-ranging (as was its informal membership).

Participants in the club were interested in expanding the latest trends in German philosophy, developing original—recognizably American—literary contributions and experimenting with new forms of religious life and thought. Often, they were referred to as the “New School” by their critics and even the term “Transcendentalist” was more often a term of criticism leveled by opponents than a term used by its participants. While regular meetings of the club waned after 1840, the Transcendentalists continued to communicate and exert their influence through their publication, The Dial (1840–1844), which was edited first by Fuller and then by Emerson.

The Transcendentalists were highly individualistic in both character and philosophical outlook, resisting any common doctrinal or intellectual stance. They shared, however, a highly optimistic vision of humanity and a confidence in the future of American intellectual life and thought, freed from the bonds of intellectual precedent or religious superstition. These young writers also shared an intellectual affection for various forms of idealism, from neo-Platonic thought to the increasingly influential work of Immanuel Kant, whose use of the term “transcendental”—mediated through the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge—these thinkers both borrowed and transformed for their own purposes. What was “transcendental” for the Transcendentalists was a preference for spiritual (or “intutional”) over material (sense-based) forms of knowledge. Similarly, they expressed a commitment to shaping life according to individually discerned aesthetic and spiritual priorities, rather than those of social convention or the
marketplace. Their intellectual stance was the starting place from which they developed their ideas of nature, as well as their moral and religious views.

The intellectual agenda of the Transcendentalists was broad, eclectic and not always consistent, consistency itself not being an ideal toward which the Transcendentalists strove. In the most general sense, however, the Transcendentalists embraced a new theory of knowledge. This theory refuted the, then prevailing, Lockean view of the process of human knowing. At the same time, the Transcendentalists put forward new theories of morality that countered more conservative religious approaches, while also opposing the skepticism of David Hume and other Enlightenment figures. In a general sense, the Transcendentalists can be said to have welcomed the Enlightenment critique of religion, while resisting recourse to forms of rationalism that overlooked human emotions and disenchanted the natural world.

In terms of epistemology, the Transcendentalists resisted Locke’s empiricist approach, which proposed that knowledge comes from sense experiences which are impressed on the waiting mind just as words are written on a blank slate. While Locke’s own view was more complex than that of his followers, Lockean psychology was generally accepted by the intellectuals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, particularly the New England Unitarians. Taking cues from the writings of Kant and Coleridge, the Transcendentalists responded against Locke by articulating a distinction between “understanding” (rational reflection on sense experience) and Reason (the use of intuition and one’s innate, divinely created capacities to discern the good, the true and the beautiful). While accepting Locke’s confidence in the rational capacities of humanity, the Transcendentalists argued that Reason was also an innate human gift which each individual should cultivate.

The Transcendentalist’s view of the moral life followed from this epistemological premise. While rejecting orthodox religion and even the comparatively liberal Christian Unitarianism that was culturally dominant in nineteenth-century Boston, the Transcendentalists also rejected Hume’s skepticism with respect to religion and morality. Most Transcendentalists affirmed their belief in a divine Creator, while rejecting the notion of divine revelation of miracles. Many also became increasingly interested in the religions of China and India as these became available to them through newly available European translations of Eastern texts. Moreover, Transcendentalists’ vision of human nature was indefatigably optimistic, resting on the assumption that all individuals carry the divine within them and must dedicate their lives to nurturing this divine potential, particularly through education and artistic expression.

The Transcendentalists’ view of nature rests on the important epistemological and moral assumptions described above. As with particular philosophical, literary and political preferences, the Transcendentalists’ reading of nature also varied among individuals. In general, however, the Transcendentalists borrowed from the European Romantics the notion that a regular contact with nature (by which was generally meant: living in or visiting rural and pastoral settings) was essential for regaining human innocence and originality that was corrupted by civiliza-

The quest for originality and authenticity both in spiritual experience and in literary expression was a central preoccupation of the Transcendentalists. While the foundations of their ideas were, belatedly, shaped in response to European Romanticism, the Transcendentalists worked to create literature, educational theory and, more broadly, “culture” that was distinctly American. Because such work was dependent on the experience of and response to a particular natural landscape (primarily, pastoral New England), it is no surprise that much Transcendentalist literature concerns itself with “nature” both as an abstract concept and as a particular physical context for spiritual experience.

When considering the Transcendentalists’ views of nature, it is important to recognize the complexity of what the term “nature” could signify. In its broadest sense, it represented what was not the self. “Nature” then was equivalent to the Kantian “not-Me.” More particularly, nature might refer to a particular biophysical context for the experiences of insight and intuition that were sought after by the Transcendentalists: the “bare common” upon which Emerson experienced himself as a “Transparent Eyeball,” Thoreau’s Walden or the communal Brook Farm in West Roxbury. Even in these instances, however, the reading of nature offered by the Transcendentalists was not one of appreciating nature for what today we might call its “intrinsic value.” When theologically departing firmly from their Puritan heritage, the Transcendentalists continued, while altering, the Puritan view of nature as a “book” to be read for spiritual lessons. They also carried forward Unitarian interests in natural theology, particularly the study of nature to comprehend the character of the divine. The Transcendentalists reworked and reimagined these Puritan and Unitarian legacies, ultimately asserting the presence of the divine in nature (as well as in humanity), while also not limiting their understanding of the divine to the Christian tradition. They incorporated spiritualism, Emmanuel Swedenborg’s theory of correspondences and Eastern concepts of sacred geography into their cultural repertoire.

Nevertheless, nature remained in what we might call a “spiritually utilitarian” position. Nature was most often
understood to be something which was “read” by the individual artist (the Poet, as Emerson conceived him), whose job it was to decipher and interpret the moral lessons hidden in nature. Nature was valued, then, for what it could teach the attentive student and its function was that of moral formation. The ultimate emphasis remained on the ideal Transcendentalist (which each Transcendentalist saw latent within) whose practice of self-cultivation would enable him or her to “read” nature correctly and to share that reading with a wider audience. Nature, in the Transcendentalists’ view, was primarily symbolic, representing moral truths and aesthetic insights that lay “behind” or “inside” external, natural phenomena. The pursuit of nature was most often a pursuit of the self, or of knowledge of the divine, without and within.

At the same time, pastoral and wilderness environments remained vital as the ideal contexts for Transcendentalist self-cultivation, as was the case in Thoreau’s experiment at Walden. Thus, paying close attention to the natural world as a symbolic “book” for spiritual insight also led many Transcendentalists to acquire a large body of scientific knowledge of their surroundings. Many kept detailed records of flora, fauna, weather patterns and natural events in the places where they lived or traveled. Emerson, for instance, was an amateur orchardist and early conservationist of threatened woodlands, while Thoreau’s work in natural history and studies of plant succession were consulted by professional scientists of his day.

**Rebecca Kneale Gould**

**Further Reading**


See also: Adams, Ansel; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Muir, John; Pantheism; Romanticism in European Literature; Romanticism – American; Swedenborg, Emmanuel; Thoreau, Henry David; Unitarianism.

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**Transpersonal Psychology**

Transpersonal psychology is the branch of psychology which integrates psychological concepts, theories, and methods with the subject matter and practices of the spiritual disciplines. Its interests include spiritual and mystical experiences, meditative practices, ritual, shamanism, and the connections between spiritual experiences with disturbed states such as psychosis, mania, and depression. Transpersonal psychologists apply their work in clinical and counseling psychology, spiritual guidance and pastoral counseling, organizational and community development, healthcare and healing, the transpersonal dimensions of interpersonal relationships, cultural diversity, gender studies, business, ecopsychology, and other areas.

The root of the term transpersonal, or literally “beyond the mask,” refers to self-transcendence, the development of the self from a sense of identity which is exclusively individual to one that is deeper, broader, more inclusive, and more unified with the whole. The core concept in transpersonal psychology is nonduality, the recognition that each part or person is fundamentally and ultimately a part of a larger, more comprehensive whole. From this insight come two other central insights: the intrinsic health and basic goodness of the whole and each of its parts, and the validity of self-transcendence.

Transpersonal psychology is phenomenological, inclusive, and optimistic. It values and integrates the personal with the transpersonal, the psychological with the spiritual, exceptional mental health with psychological disturbance, and analytical intellect with contemplative ways of knowing. It finds wisdom in Western psychology and philosophy, Eastern spirituality, postmodern insights, and worldviews of indigenous traditions. Such overlaps between psychology and spirituality have been present in both psychology (e.g., the work of William James, Carl Jung, and Abraham Maslow) and in the spiritual traditions (which have their own rich views of development, cognition, social interactions, emotional and behavioral suffering, and methods of healing). The work of Ken Wilber (Integral Psychology) and Stanislav Grof are at the forefront of transpersonal psychology today. Among its important projects are describing the stages and processes of transpersonal development, researching the psychological effects of meditation, exploring spiritual emergences (those mystical or spiritual experiences which also create acute debilitating psychological suffering), and identifying the transpersonal dimensions of nature experiences.

Transpersonal psychology is a field of inquiry which includes theory, research, and practice, offering insights and applications based on research and experience and methods for evaluating and confirming or disconfirming its findings. It is scientific in the broad sense of the
phenomenological or "human" sciences. Research in transpersonal psychology uses both qualitative-phenomenological methods and quantitative methods such as experimental designs. In recent years, the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology has published reviews of research on psychospiritual problems, mystical experiences, meditation, and measures of transpersonal development. Still, most of the work and practice of transpersonal psychology concerns psychotherapy and self-development.

Meditation, contemplative prayer, and similar forms of open-ended phenomenological inquiry are core practices for transpersonal psychology. These practices lead to an expanded awareness, a greater sense of presence, and a greater degree of self-integration or self-transcendence. While such practices have been successfully used for self-regulation, relaxation, and pain control and for self-exploration and psychotherapy, they have traditionally been used for self-transcendence and self-liberation. Despite their many surface forms, meditation and contemplative practices can be a means of disidentifying from our "masks" or personalities and realizing our fundamental nonduality.

Ritual is another core practice for transpersonal psychology. For many individuals and in many cultures and spiritual systems, ritual is the central means of discovering connections with each other, with communities, with the Earth, and with the cosmos. Other practices that are associated with transpersonal psychology include shamanism, lucid dreaming, visualization, chanting, transpersonal uses of music and art, and religious uses of psychedelic drugs.

Transpersonal psychology arose in the 1960s out of work by Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, Anthony Sutich, and others in humanistic psychology. The work of William James on mysticism, Carl Jung on the collective unconscious, and Roberto Assagioli on psychosynthesis anticipated the development of transpersonal psychology. Interest in the psychological implications of Buddhism, Yoga, shamanism, psychedelic states, and holistic medicine fueled its development. At the present time, transpersonal psychology is gaining acceptance by many psychologists, and a number of professional organizations have been established worldwide. The Association for Transpersonal Psychology has published the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology since 1969. Its influences are found in a number of other psychological and psychiatric journals and books, both scientific and popular. Conferences and training programs sponsored by professional organizations such as the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and the International Transpersonal Association also provide training in transpersonal psychology and contribute to developments in the field.

Most transpersonal psychologists are involved in counseling and psychotherapy. Transpersonal psychotherapists may deal with spiritual crises or other explicitly transpersonal content, or they may bring a transpersonal context and processes to a broader range of psychological issues such as addictions, emotional distress, relationships, and life transitions. Art therapists, music therapists, dance therapists, and body-centered psychotherapists often use transpersonal principles in their work as well.

Transpersonal studies are arising in a number of fields, including medicine, education, anthropology, and organizational development. There are also strong connections between transpersonal psychology, ecopsychology, and deep ecology. Many people find transpersonal experiences in contact with nature, and many nature-based personal growth practices such as wilderness retreats, rites of passage, and other Earth-centered rituals have transpersonal dimensions. Similarly, some environmental activists bring a transpersonal perspective into their work. Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess, Warwick Fox, and John Seed and ecopsychologists such as Theodore Roszak and Ralph Metzner have promoted a kind of self-transcendence or transpersonal identity as a basis for environmental action. They argue that when one’s identity expands or deepens beyond the individual self to include the Earth (i.e., a kind of self-transcendence), environmental action is more likely to be based on love, joy, and caring than on fear, shame, or sacrifice and that such a transpersonal attitude leads to action which is more effective and more sustainable.

Transpersonal psychology proponents believe that the practices they are developing benefit both psychology and the spiritual disciplines. Psychology can expand toward a fuller and richer accounting of the full range of human experience and potential and incorporate practices that develop this potential. The spiritual disciplines can incorporate insights and skills related to human development and healing to deal more skillfully with the psychological issues that arise with spiritual development. They can more effectively use these issues as gateways, rather than obstacles, to self-realization and authentic service.

John Davis

Further Reading
Tree Music

When I was 26, needing to rest after injuring my back while landscaping, I realized that I would much rather relax in the forest of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula than in Seattle. So I drove out to Graves Creek Campground on the Quinault River, and spent four days reading and playing my guitar next to a giant Douglas Fir tree. At the end of the four days, right before I left to return home, the song “The Tree” came flowing out. I looked up at the big Douglas Fir and said “I bet this is your song.”

For years after that I’d sing “The Tree” and mention that I thought it was the big Douglas Fir’s song. It seemed like a nice thought, and as the concept of a tree having “a song” had never come up in my scientifically oriented Western education, I only light-heartedly believed it.

A few years later I was invited to a celebration on Orcas Island, where the Lummi Indians and their allies had succeeded in saving a place called Madrona Point, where a developer had hoped to build condominiums on top of a Lummi Indian burial ground. After a 10-year battle, the United States Congress appropriated money to buy the land and give it back to the Lummi people.

The celebration was held at the Oddfellows hall on Madrona Point near Eastsound. Several hundred people gathered from the Lummi Reservation and Orcas Island. There was a huge potluck feast with salmon and berry pies and salads and fried bread. Spirits were high and children ran around everywhere.

The man who invited me to the celebration then told me that the chief wanted me to sing “The Tree.” I expressed reluctance, however, unsure whether this quiet song could be heard over the clanking dishes and spirited children. My friend simply restated, “The chief would like to hear ‘The Tree.’”

After I was introduced, the place quieted down and I began to sing, noticing immediately something that had never happened before at one of my concerts. While everyone seemed to be enjoying the tune, the elder Lummi were riveted, holding on to every note, every word. I felt honored that they would care so much about this song.

Afterwards I spoke with the chief and several elders. I told them the story of spending four days with the old Douglas Fir tree by the Quinault River and how I had always thought it was the Tree’s song.

“It is,” said the chief, “I recognize the tune. It is a song from a tree in our region. In Lummi tradition, and for many of the peoples of this region, we get our music from trees. Each tree has its own song. We go out and spend three or four days next to a tree where we fast and pray and listen for that tree’s song. We take the song and sing it or play it on the flute. In this era when so many of our ancient trees are being cut down, we go out and learn their songs before they die, as a way of honoring the great trees. We are working to save the last remaining ancient groves on our territory.”

I have never looked at a tree in the same way since then. I have never looked at any creature in the same way since then.

Dana Lyons

Further Reading
See also: Animism (various); Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Heathenry – Ásatrú; Music; Music and Eco-activism in America; Music of Resistance; Pagan Music.

Trees – as Religious Architecture

It goes without saying that trees are essential to many architectural creations. Not only do they serve structural functions, but they are often also imbued with symbolic meaning as well. This is seen quite clearly in religious contexts. Examples are found around the world from ancient to present times. Shinto shrines, Egyptian and Greek temples, Celtic groves, the Lakota Sun Dance, Pacific Northwest coast totem poles, Buddhist stupas, and Christian churches – along with associated “Green Man” imagery – are briefly examined here as a sample of the great variety of places that exist.

We begin with Japan and Shinto beliefs. Some of the oldest Shinto shrines sites are groves or forested hillsides where rituals were performed in relation to kami. The idea, and thus the definition, of kami has changed over the millennia as influences from China, Korea, and India, among other places, participated in the shaping of Japanese thought on the subject. In general, however, kami can perhaps be best understood within a polytheistic context, where powerful spiritual forces are conceived as embodied through human, animal, tree, river, rock, wind, sun, or
other natural forms. In early Shintoism trees themselves were shrines to kami. Later, human-built shrines were erected. The natural and the built overlapped in meaning. The same characters that today are interpreted as jinja, or shrine, were understood in ancient texts as kama-tsu-yahshiro, or mori, two terms meaning “kami grove.” Close relationships between trees and architecture are visible in the torii gates and in the cylindrical wooden columns supporting shrine floors and ridge poles. At Ise Shrine, unique in that it is rebuilt every twenty years, rituals pertaining to the protection, burial, re-use, and adornment of the heart-pilar (shin no mihashira) hearken back to early Shintoism.

Similarly, trees played functional and symbolic roles in Egyptian temples. Columns were shaped to reflect lotus, papyrus, and palms. These were intentionally suggestive of the connections between religious beliefs, the fertility of the land, and the well-being of people. Other columns were shaped to represent Osiris. In addition to vegetative abundance, the myths and rituals associated with him revolve around themes of death and resurrection. A link between religious belief and trees is also indicated by the story of how he was murdered, set adrift down the Nile in a sarcophagus, incorporated into a growing tree along the river’s banks, and installed within a temple as a pillar.

Greek temples also manifest relationships between trees, architecture, and belief. Doric columns are reminiscent of organic forms. Their girth, taper, and overall appearance is quite tree-like. Architectural historians point out that logs could have been easily sculpted into a series of planar surfaces amenable to fluting. Peg features, triglyphs at the end of what would have been beams, and mutules imitative of rafters all support claims of the column’s wooden derivation. A number of Doric traits were replicated in Ionic and Corinthian forms. Greek temple architecture also suggests the physical appearance of sacred groves. The manner in which temple space was divided into spaces was intended to mimic the sense of multiple spaces within groves.

Sacred groves were also central to Celtic traditions, found across a vast area spreading from Asia Minor through continental Western Europe and into Britain and Ireland. While beech and various conifers figured prominently in the rituals and beliefs of some groups, oak appears to have the most widespread symbolic significance. The word “Druid,” in fact, is closely associated with a Celtic term for oak. In some cases altars were constructed for use in these groves. Tree motifs are commonly carved upon them. Additionally, trees themselves served as religious architecture. Miranda Green, author of Symbol & Image in Celtic Religious Art, speaks of archeological finds in Germany at places like the Coloring and the Goldberg where a large tree-like pillar was set in the center of an enclosure. There are many instances in the archeological record where Celtic groups dug pits and left offerings in association with living trees and pillars.

Trees are important in Native American beliefs, and there are many circumstances where trees serve as architecture. It is not romantic to say that participation in traditional ceremonies helps root contemporary native peoples in their heritage. Trees can play very important roles. Lakota Sun Dance ceremonies, for instance, revolve around a central pole that is understood to be a sacred tree. It is ceremonially harvested from the forest and erected in the center of a Sun Dance site. Dancers attach themselves to the pole with long cords as they pray and engage in acts of self-sacrifice. As symbol, the sacred tree links the elements of the larger universe with the dancers, and through them to the entire community gathered for the ritual.

Totem poles are associated with native peoples of the Pacific Northwest, and are especially common in the coastal regions of British Columbia and southeastern Alaska. Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth, Kwakiutl, Nuxalk, Tsimshian, Haida, and Tlingit are representative groups. Great diversity of language and religious practices exists among them. Diversity is found in the poles as well. Some serve memorial purposes, while others have mortuary uses. There are also frontal poles and house posts; both are incorporated into the structure of traditional homes. All poles are made of red cedar. Preferences for one or another type vary among groups. Carvings are not actually totems. Rather, they symbolize crests and signs of a given family or clan. Pole-raisings were, and today typically are, attended by the narration of stories, prayer, singing, drumming, dancing, feasting, and the gift exchange known as potlatching. In contemporary times a fifth type of pole – the commercial pole – is often carved for non-natives and erected in non-traditional settings. More important than merely generating revenue, these intentionally communicate the vitality of indigenous groups and indicate that their ties to the land remain.

Buddhist architecture, such as that found in stupas, also features a central pole with strong tree associations. Originally a type of pre-Buddhist Indian burial mound, stupas were tumuli with a wooden post in their center. The pole may have symbolized Aryan traditions where community leaders met under a tree for discussions, and it may have symbolized their beliefs about sacred or cosmic trees. In Hindu contexts, the tree and umbrellas under which royality were shaded, and ideas of Mt. Meru, were all combined in stupa architecture. Buddhists adopted and embedded these notions into places like Sanchi, where a central axle-pole at the top of the stupa symbolizes the process of enlightenment. The vertically arranged series of disks on the pole represent levels of enlightenment; they are in essence stylized branches of the cosmic tree.

Tree motifs, some of which refer to a cosmic tree, are integral to the architecture of churches and cathedrals. Not only are representations of the Tree of Knowledge and the Fall highly significant, but in many places carved foliage and even the Green Man is seen. The Green Man appears in
church architecture as a male face encompassed by leaves. Sometimes leaves are shown sprouting from his mouth. Common across much of Western Europe, the Green Man evidently predates the spread of Christianity, and very well may have Celtic associations with fertility. The Church incorporated the Green Man as an expression of death and resurrection. In a similar way the cross, symbolizing resurrection and the promise of salvation, is often understood to be a tree or tree-like. One example is found in the architecture of St. Andrews in Ellensburg, Washington. On the interior wall behind the altar hangs a large wooden cross. Behind it a series of tightly clustered beams stretch toward the ceiling, spreading ever-further apart as they go. The overall effect is that of a tree emerging from the cross.

In the sites described here, as in many more from all around the world – Africa, Oceania, Australia, Europe, Asia, and the Americas – trees are a significant element of religious architecture. While the particular symbolic meaning of a tree or trees may differ from one culture to another, they are all reminders of the organic connection between humans and the world they inhabit.

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Further Reading
See also: Cathedral Forests and the Felling of Sacred Groves; Druids and Druidry; Heathenry – Asatru; India’s Sacred Groves; Japanese Religions; Lakota Sun Dance; Sacred Groves of Africa; Tree Music; Trees in Haitian Vodou; Trees (Northern & Middle Europe); Trees – Sacred; Wenger, Susan, Yoruba Art & the Oshogbo Sacred Grove.

Trees in Haitian Vodou

Vodou crystallized as a religion among African and African-descended slaves in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (1697–1804), whose massive sugar production made it Europe’s most lucrative colonial enterprise. With the most dynamic early Vodou communities springing up in settlements of escaped slaves from diverse African ethnic groups in the colony (which became the independent Republic of Haiti in 1804), since its inception the religion has demonstrated significant variety. Certain traditions are primarily ancestor cults, while others focus on particular spirits brought from West Africa or others revealed in the New World. Because of the clandestine and variegated nature of colonial-era Vodou, moreover, the religion has no founder, no unifying doctrine, and no formal organizational network. Neither any of these, nor a Vodou scripture, has ever developed.

Slaves brought to the colony were baptized Catholic upon arrival and given minimal religious instruction by Dominicans, Capuchins, and Jesuits. Syncretism thus immediately resulted, as slaves identified Catholic saints as new manifestations of African spirits, and adopted crosses, holy water, and incense as powerful religious trinkets to be used in conjunction with the amulets that they reconstructed from African religious memory. The Catholic “pantheon” – with its single high creator God, Virgin Mary, and host of dead individuals (the saints) who intervene in the world of the living – lent itself quite fluently to assimilation with the traditional African community of spiritual beings, which likewise has a single distant creator God (called Bondyé in Vodou) and numerous spirits and ancestors, who, much like the Catholic saints, are perceived of as accessible and with whom the greatest amount of human/divine commerce transpires.

Spirit possession and divination are the main forms of communication with the dead (lémò) and the spirits (lwa yo) in Vodou, and together form its ritual focus. Put simply, when our relationship with lémò and/or lwa yo is in harmony, life is full and pleasurable, whereas when this relationship is discordant, sickness, some other hardship, or even death may result. Upon the occurrence of such misfortune, ritual specialists (female: manbo; male: oungan) are consulted. Either through divination or the orchestration of ceremonies aiming to provoke spirit possession (which most often take place either in temples [ounfò], family burial compounds, or public cemeteries), the manbo or oungan effects communication with the lémò or lwa yo in order to discover the cause of the illness or discord and to determine a means of reestablishing harmony or effecting healing. Both the maintenance and the reconstitution of this harmony rely primarily on sacrifice in various forms, while healing often involves herbalism and ritual baths.

Haitian Vodou thus combines a variety of traditional African (e.g., Fon, Yoruba, and Kongo) and Catholic elements. While decidedly more akin in ritual and belief to African traditional religion than to Catholicism, Vodou is not an African religion but a product of the Haitian experience of and response to the social and natural worlds. Its understanding of nature is thus more rooted in
West African spirit and ancestor cults than in Catholic theology, which is especially reflected in the religion’s great reverence for trees and forests. In Vodou, spirits and the ancestors abide in nature. Together they are spoken of with great reverence for trees and forests. In Vodou, spirits and theology, which is especially reflected in the religion’s West African spirit and ancestor cults than in Catholic

Trees gain their great religious significance in Vodou for a number of reasons, such as being the source of sacred drums and the gourd out of which is made the Vodou priest’s sacred rattle (asson). The most important reason is that trees are believed to be the residence and the “preferred avenue of divine approach,” in Maya Deren’s terms, of the lwas. Because of this, certain species of trees considered especially sacred are planted around Vodou temples, or temple sites are determined by the presence of such trees. These trees, called in French arbres-reposoirs (lit.: resting-place trees; altar trees), are recognizable by the straw sacks and strips of cloth that often hang on their branches. Since the lwas are thus considered to live in these trees, the arbres-reposoirs are themselves rendered cult in Vodou, and thus the straw sacks sometimes contain offerings for these trees and/or the spirits who reside in them, candles are lighted at their trunks, and pottery is broken against them. As the home of the lwas, these sacred trees are also addressed by candidates during initiation rituals in rural Haiti.

Whereas virtually all of the lwas may live in trees, and most lwas prefer certain species of trees, four lwas in particular are most closely associated with trees: Legba, Gede, Gran Bwa (Great Forest) and Loko. As the guardian of the crossroads where intersect the sacred and the profane, and as the gatekeeper who holds the keys to the doors of communication between spirits and humans, Legba is in a true sense the most important member of the lwa pantheon. Every Vodou temple has a post at its center that runs from the floor to the roof, down which are believed to arrive the lwas during communal ceremonies. Commonly known as the poto-mitan (center post), this essential feature is also called the poto-Legba, reflective of Legba’s authority over all use of the pole by spirits or humans. As the gatekeeper, moreover, Legba’s sacred tree is the most important in or around the temple yard, and it invariably stands near the entryway. And as the lwa of the crossroads, any tree standing near the intersection of paths or roads may be a site of devotion to Legba.

The most venerated tree in Haitian Vodou is the mapou (alt.: mapou africain; mapou zonbi), or ceiba pentenda, one of the most majestic trees in the Caribbean. In West Africa, especially in Benin, the homeland of an important segment of Saint-Domingue’s slave population, the spirits of the ancestors are believed to reside in ceiba pentenda. The mapou, which appears in many Haitian proverbs and is revered in other parts of the Afro-Caribbean, is the preferred home of the Gede family of spirits, the lwas of death and the dead (and, dialectically, of life and the living) who collectively represent Vodou’s trickster spirit. Being the moments when the veil between the living and the dead is most permeable, noon and midnight are times when the mapou is reserved for the Gede, hence Vodou practitioners know to stay clear of mapous at 12:00 a.m. or p.m. Given the power of the mapou at noon and midnight, on occasion secret religious societies in Haiti have been known to hold ceremonies then and there.

The lwa who is most associated with trees generally is Loko, the spirit of vegetation and the life-force within all plants and trees. As such, Loko provides the healing power manifest in Vodou’s rich herbalism and is thus the patron lwa of the religion’s “leaf doctors” (medsin fey). There is consequently a tradition in Haitian Vodou reminiscent of many Native American ritual preparations for the hunt, wherein the Vodou practitioner makes offerings to Loko to secure his blessing before cutting down any tree.

However pervasive is this spirit of reverence for trees in Haiti, it has been overwhelmed by the nation’s grueling poverty and overpopulation, which has resulted in, among many other catastrophes, Haiti’s almost total deforestation: 95 percent of the country’s forest has been lost, and each year 15,000 acres of fertile topsoil is washed away as a result. With an annual per capita income of roughly $250, Haitian peasants cut trees for charcoal as a means of income, while electricity-deprived urban Haitians also rely on charcoal for cooking. The result is desertification and a litany of related ecological problems. Thanks to Vodou, at least, in some of the countries most desertified regions there are at least a few mapou trees and arbres-reposoirs that remain standing.

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Further Reading
See also: Caribbean Cultures; West Africa; Yoruba Culture (West Africa).
Apart from the arctic prairies and deserts on the northern fringes, Europe is a continent of trees. The dark, evergreen conifers of spruce and fir characterize the northernmost part, the light conifers with its larches and pines are to be found where the sunlight is more generous the year around. The forests reign in Middle Europe where the seasons are even and the rainfall bountiful. The deciduous forests, with their oaks and beeches, show much more diversity of trees than the boreal conifers.

The Teutonic, Celtic, Baltic and Slavic tribes who inhabited Northern and Middle Europe from at least 900 B.C.E. were of Indo-European origin, akin to tribes in Southern Europe. Their languages were and are related, and many of the surviving myths and legends are similar. The Finnish-Ugrians who inhabited the northeast of Europe form a special group within the family of European cultures. The religious history of the continent is multilayered and complex, because the settlements of the ancient tribes were scattered or they were nomadic, and their ideas diverse. Moreover, the extant sources of information are often colored by the worldviews of the commentators.

Julius Caesar described the religious, sacrificial practices of the Druids, the religious class of the Celts, in his Gallic Wars (VI.13, composed ca. 50 B.C.E.). Caesar pictured the Druids weaving immense figures out of twigs, which were filled with living people and set on fire. The funeral rites, according to Caesar, were also connected with great bonfires. A century later, Pliny the Elder spoke in his Natural History about the Druids as the “people of the oak,” a name derived from the Greek “drouios” which means “oaken” or “from the oak,” and stated that their magic potions consisted primarily of oak-bark (XVI). Pliny also described the sacredness of the mistletoe for the Druids. According to Pliny, mistletoe grows rarely on a hard oak, and when it occurs, it is collected with a great ceremony, which takes place around the oak tree.

According to Edda (a collection of poetry from ca. 300–800 and preserved in fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts), the mythical tree of Nordic mythology is the Ash of Yggdrasill, the largest tree in the world, stretching its branches over the skies. Yggdrasill has three roots and each is stretched over a well. The first root is in heaven, over a well where the gods have their sanctuary. Three Fates who represent past, present, and future guard the well and decide the fate of humans. Human ancestry is thought to have come from the twigs of Ash and Elm that floated to shore and were given spirit, breath, and life. The second root reaches over a well filled with water of wisdom, where the primal, yawning void of the Nordic creation story used to be. In exchange for the water in the well, Odin had to be hanged on the tree for nine nights. The name of the tree means “the stallion of Odin” (one of Odin’s names is Ygg) and is derived from this ordeal. The third root ranges over hot-spring Hvergelmir, filled with snakes. Yggdrasill constantly suffers a great hardship, as four stags bite the trunk from above, and below the snakes gnaw its root. The Fates wash the tree every day with white clay, which keeps Yggdrasill green, in this balance of destruction and preservation, until the day of doom.

The hanging of Odin may bear shamanistic traits of connections with and travel to the underworld and point to an influence from the Finnish-Ugrians on the Teutonics. Kalevala (the epic poem of the Finns, collected in 1835–1849), tells the story of Väinämöinen, who goes to the underworld in search of a magic formula which he needs to finish his oak-boat. He walks for three weeks, through a stand of saplings, bird-cherry and, at last, through junipers (Poem 16). In the end he meets the giant Vipunen (Poem 17), who is fast asleep under the ground. An aspen grows on his shoulders, birch from the brows, alders spread from the jaws, willows from the beard, firs from the forehead, and the pines from the teeth. Väinämöinen is swallowed by Vipunen, but the former tortures the tree-monster from within the belly until Vipunen sings the magic rhyme of the creation of the world.

Bonaventure (1217–1274) was a Franciscan teacher at the University of Paris. His book, The Tree of Life, is an important Christian source on trees and spirituality in medieval Europe. The Tree of Life is based on tree metaphors in the Bible, framed by the trees of the first and the last books of the Bible, the trees of knowledge and life in Eden and Revelation 22. The tree of Revelation bears twelve kinds of fruits and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations. For Bonaventure the twelve fruits are symbols of twelve virtues, which all show aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus as described in the gospels.

According to Bonaventure, one can avoid the fallacy of Adam, who chose the tree of knowledge instead of the tree of life, by meditating on the fruits of the tree of life in Revelation, each of which symbolizes the life of Jesus from his conception in eternity to resurrection. The goal of meditating on the tree and its fruit is to be one with the body of Christ in ecstatic unity.

The popularity of The Tree of Life, miracle plays, and old Roman traditions of using evergreens as decorations, may have inspired the Christmas tree. This tradition became popular in Germany after the Reformation, especially at the end of the eighteenth century. It was expanded to Britain, America, and throughout the world in the nineteenth century, under the strong influence of Victorian family values, where the tree became the center of family and home rituals during Christmas. The tradition of celebrating spring with a dance around the maypole in Northern Europe is another example of a European tree ritual.

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Further Reading
See also: Cathedral Forests and the Felling of Sacred Groves; Druids and Druidry; Heathenry – Ásatrú; Odinism; Sacred Groves of Africa; Trees as Religious Architecture; Trees – Sacred.

Trees – Sacred

A tree is a tall, single-stemmed, woody plant which bears branches some distance from the ground. Trees are the oldest and largest living organisms on planet Earth. The bristle cone pine (Pinus longaeva) in the White Mountains of California can live to be over 4000 years old. The species with the largest individual trees is the giant sequoia (Sequoiadendron giganteum), averaging at maturity 300 feet tall and 15 feet in diameter.

In many ways trees are a primary source for life on our apparently unique planet Earth. A leaf is a miniature food-making factory – sunlight, air, and water interact with chlorophyll cells in the leaf through photosynthesis and with nutrients from the soil to produce food which allows the tree to grow. In turn, the tree produces food and shelter for other plants (epiphytes), animals, fungi, and microorganisms that visit or reside somewhere on it. Trees influence other life far more than any other kind of plant by their wood, leaves, and fruit, as well as by the special kinds of environments they create (shelter, shade, microclimatic zones).

For humans, trees provide oxygen, food, fuel, building and craft materials, paper products, shade, and soil-erosion and flood control. The monetary value of the environmental services provided by a single tree that lives for fifty years has been calculated at nearly $200,000.

There are also whole cultures, sub-cultures, industries, and occupations focused on trees of a particular kind such as logging redwood trees (Sequoia sempervirens and Sequoiadendron giganteum) in the Pacific coast forests of the northwest United States; maple sugar (Acer spp.) in New England; rubber trees (Hevea brasiliensis) in the Amazon and rubber tree plantations in South and Southeast Asia; mulberry (Morus alba) for the cultivation of silk worms in China; olive (Olea europea) in the Mediterranean and Middle East; and coconut (Cocos nucifera) in the Pacific islands and other tropical areas. In addition, special arts have developed around trees like topiary, tree sculpturing in eighteenth-century England, and bonsai, the cultivation of miniature or dwarf trees in Japan. Trees can have physiological and psychological impacts on individual humans as well, such as relaxing heart rate, blood pressure, and brain waves. Research has shown that hospital patients recover faster than otherwise if they can see a tree outside their window.

From observations such as the above it is little wonder that trees may also be considered sacred. The common characteristics of sacred trees are described by Nathaniel Altman:

A tree becomes sacred through recognition of the power that it expresses. This power may be manifested as the food, shelter, fuel, materials used to build boats, or medicine that the tree provides. How a tree is used will vary according to geography, species of tree, and the particular needs (and ingenuity) of the human culture involved. Sacred trees have also provided beauty, hope, comfort, and inspiration, nurturing and healing the mental, emotional, and spiritual levels of our being. They are symbols of life, abundance, creativity, generosity, permanence, energy, and strength (1994: 9).

I first discovered the existence of sacred trees while conducting field research in Thailand. From Bangkok to the remotest rural villages, one often sees colorful cloth wrapped around the lower trunk of a tree. A small spirit house with offerings such as candles, incense, food, and water may be placed near the base of the tree. Local people believe that the tree is the residence of a spirit. Anyone who harms such a tree might experience misfortune, sickness, or even death as the spirit takes revenge. Consequently, because of their special status sacred trees are usually protected in effect.

Sacred trees are usually extraordinary in age, size, shape, or some other attribute. For example, in one village in Thailand that I visited, a giant ironwood tree or Malacca teak (Afzelia bakeri) is considered sacred. Its secretions resemble blood. Also residents in the area mentioned that twice lightning struck and burned other trees nearby, but did not touch this tree because of its extraordinary power. In addition, some residents have seen an unusual light near the tree in the early evening.

Certain species of trees are sacred because of their
relation to a religion. The banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) and bodhi (*F. religiosa*) have been associated with Buddhism since its inception. The Buddha is believed to have been previously incarnated as a tree spirit and later during his reincarnation in human form he reached enlightenment under a bodhi. Also in Hinduism the bodhi is supposed to be the home of the gods Krishna, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Thus, the bodhi is the most sacred of trees for both Hindus and Buddhists, and this is reflected in its species name. The banyan tree is also considered sacred by Hindus. Moreover, in the Buddhist country of Bhutan, it is actually illegal to cut down any living tree.

In many Asian countries, some monks wander in forests where they shelter and meditate under trees, emulating the life and teachings of the Buddha. Furthermore, in Thailand, a number of monks have symbolically ordained trees by ceremonially wrapping the saffron robes around giants in the forest to protect them from loggers. By mere association, the surrounding trees may also be protected. Tree ordination as a conservation technique has usually proven successful in Thailand.

Throughout the world, diverse cultures recognize sacred trees. For instance, the Celts, Druids and many other tribes in ancient Europe venerated single trees, groves, and forests, especially of oak (*Quercus* spp.). Oaks seem more prone to being struck by lightning than other tree species, and this may have contributed to their sacred status. Oak and spruce (*Picea* spp.) were of special significance in ancient Germanic rituals, and this is the origin of the modern tradition of the Christmas tree. Yew trees (*Taxus* spp.) were especially important in ancient Britain, and churchyards were built around or close to them. To this day there are several hundred shrines throughout Europe associated with individual trees.

In the United States, the Mormon religious faith was born near the town of Palmyra in New York. There today it is still possible to visit the Sacred Grove where the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith first had divine visions. Also in the United States and elsewhere, some families plant trees as a living memorial when a relative or friend dies. A tree that survived the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City became a symbol of renewal and a sacred tree of sorts.

At first glance a single sacred tree may not appear to have much if any significance for environmental and biodiversity conservation. However, a single tree is part of a hierarchy of progressively larger ecological systems. A large tree can host dozens or more of other species such as lianas (vines), epiphytes, mosses, and fungi. In turn there may be dozens to hundreds of species of resident and transient animals. Millions of microorganisms may also inhabit a single tree. Interacting with these species are others as predators, parasites, competitors, and so on. In addition, birds, bats, insects, and other animals pollinate flowers of the tree and those of other members of its species in the surrounding environment. Such animals may eat fruit from the tree and disperse the seeds elsewhere, thereby stimulating growth of other individuals of that species. In such ways, diverse animals link individual trees of the same species into wider networks of reproduction and production.

A large tree also creates microclimates and microenvironments for plants, mosses, fungi, and other organisms which grow on its leaves, branches, trunk, and roots as well as on the adjacent ground. The leaf-fall and other litter from the tree yields nutrients for plants and animals below on the ground through decomposition by decomposer species. A large tree may also act like a water pump, its deeper tap roots pulling water toward the surface. Some of this water may become available for surrounding plants as well. The roots of the tree may pump nutrients to the surface too. Acting something like a sponge, the tree captures and slowly releases some rainwater which might otherwise contribute to more soil erosion. Thus, trees are a very important component of the composition, structure, and function of many ecosystems.

From this systems perspective a single tree can contribute to environmental and biodiversity conservation. When a large tree is considered sacred, and thus afforded special protection from harm, it may help conserve a multitude of other species and their symbiotic relationships as well as specific microclimates, microenvironments, soil, and water resources. Of course, these manifold ecological functions of a single tree are multiplied many times over in groves and forests which are even more important for conservation.

If more people appreciated the numerous diverse meanings and significances of trees, then they might appreciate even more the groves and forests, and consequently be more concerned about their wise use and conservation.

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Further Reading
Rival, Laura, ed. *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological
The Trickster

The trickster is a virtually universal figure in world mythology, especially that of hunter-gatherers, on whose mythological landscape he holds center stage. Trickery and deceit, frequently exercised in the form of coarse and hurtful practical jokes on a duped party, and excessive biological drives, are the trickster’s characteristic traits. He is usually a solitary figure who roams the landscape, playing pranks and getting into scrapes, as his deceit and cunning (due to the stupidity with which they are usually performed) may backfire on him. In the context of his pranksish and foolish antics, he may, more or less inadvertently and haphazardly, find himself in the role of culture hero and transformer, bringing such things as fire, cooking, curing, weapons, carnal knowledge, conception by sex and painful childbirth, death to humans, setting the sun in the sky, or pulling the fished-up islands of Polynesia into the ocean. He may transform food plants into stars, mud into the Earth, clay into humans, ogres into animals or, in the manner very much of the trickster, create the waterholes and river-beds of the Kalahari with his hugely swollen testicles that he drags behind him through a hitherto featureless landscape, or, with one mighty, cosmic fart, scatter all living creatures to the various places of the Earth (as did the Nharo Bushman Pate and the Winnepago trickster Wakdjunkaga, respectively). His exploits and misadventures are the stuff of many tales, or tale cycles, that provide entertainment to an audience both of children and adults, as well as act as cultural mechanisms for venting social frustration and for reaffirming social values and beliefs.

Trickster figures are particularly prominent in the folklore of America and Africa. They appear in the former continent in such personas as Raven (along the northwest coast), the stealer of the sun and bringer of light to the world, or as Hare, Beaver or the anthropomorphic Nana-busho or Wiseakjak (both variously spelled) among the Algonkians and Athapaskans, who are variously tricksters, teachers and transformers. The most widespread and clearly delineated North American trickster being is Coyote. His African counterpart, Jackal, is a trickster figure also in southern Africa, along with /Kaggen (Mantis), as well as numerous others. For Hare, too, we find an African counterpart, in the folklore of a number of Bantu-speaking peoples. Spider – Ananse and Tore, among the Ashanti and Azande – and the “Pale Fox” – Ogo (Yurugu, among the Dogon) – are two of Western and central Africa’s better-known tricksters. West Africa’s most complex trickster figure is the messenger god and god of divination Elegba (or Eshu, or, as he is known among the Fon and Aflateke, a name meaning “I have tricked you”), who is prominent also in the folklore and belief systems of New World Afro-Americans in Surinam, Brazil, Trinidad and Cuba. He is reminiscent of the Greek figure of Hermes, another messenger god, as well as god of thieves, for which role he is suited through his qualities of cunning, fraud and perjury. Another European trickster god was Loki of Nordic mythology, the enfant terrible of the teutonic pantheon who was a comic trickster and transformer in the early myths, but who became progressively evil and destructive in the later cycles, having been the chief force to bring about the Ragnarök – the twilight of the gods – and the end of their realm and world. Other European tricksters are the medieval figures of Renart (Reynard) the fox and Till Eulenspiegel, both anti-establishment figures whose dupes were the temporal and clerical power holders of the day, as well as the towns’ burghers. Finally, there is the figure of Robin Goodfellow (alias Puck, of “Midsummer Night’s Dream”), the mischievous fairy being of English folklore, a trickster par excellence. As a shape-shifter – sometimes a horse, sometimes a hound, a hog, a headless bear, or sometimes a fire – who played a seductive pipe, this “shrewd and knavish sprite” lured forest travelers into swamps, “laughing at their harm.” He delighted in watching the follies of humans and – as is the trickster’s wont – in “frightening the maidens of the villagery.”

As is evident from this brief and quite incomplete survey of the world’s rogues’ gallery of tricksters, we have here a figure of great diversity and complexity. In his role and being, the trickster is an ambiguous blend of things: prankster-protagonist, culture hero and transformer and, in some instances, also god. Ambiguity is evident also in his ontological make-up, which is that either of an animal – usually one sly, agile and elusive – or of a human. However, neither guise is unequivocally “animalian” or humanoid. As animal – Coyote, Spider, Mantis, Hare, Raven – trickster, the storytellers insist, is also “a person.” As for the humanoid tricksters, these figures may be of missshapen bizarre appearance, such as the Nharo Bushmen’s Pate, a one-legged manikin who was covered with cocoon fibers and had big toes sticking out from all over his body, or the Canadian Micmac’s Kuloscop, who was a giant. Humanoid tricksters may have trouble with their limbs and body parts, which may work at cross-purposes.
with each other or may become unfastened from their owner's body, running off on their own. The body parts that are especially active in the trickster are those that contain orifices, especially those of the alimentary canal and nether regions; they - anus, penis, along with buttocks, testicles, and entrails - may sever themselves, to fly off on some mischievous pranks that blend scatology with lasciviousness (two examples of tricksters with such errant body parts are Wakadjunkaga and Kauha, of Winnebago and !Kung folklore). In refastening themselves to his body, the trickster's parts may be haphazardly reordered, such that his head may be fastened to his bottom or his penis to his back. His anatomy is thus quite fluid and unstable; its inconstancy is heightened whenever he undergoes one of his shape-shifting transformations to animal, tree, rock, or water body. The trickster delights in transformation, both of himself and of beings and states around him; as a result, he and the world around him are a-quiver with inchoate, liminal ambiguity.

Ambiguity also marks the trickster's sexual and social disposition. While usually male - with often voracious heterosexual appetites - he may also assume a female guise, usually in the context of some sexual escapade. While generally solitary, the trickster may wander with a companion, who may be the butt of his pranks, or who may turn tables on the trickster and outwit him; the classic example is Coyote and Wolf (or, in the southern African variant, Jackal and Hyena). In Amazonia, the trickster may be one of a pair of mythical twins, while the Chippewan Wenebojo's sibling companion was Nekajiwezik - one of his two younger brothers (after he had killed the second brother). Some tricksters - such as the /Xam and !Kung Bushmen's /Kaggen and Kaova (or Kauha) - have wives and live in extended families, permanently or for a while. The family members provide a foil to the trickster's moral and social failings, of food greed, failure to share or provide properly, sexual lusts and jealousies (frequently incestuous in bent), which all conspire against the trickster's ever being a solid family man.

While the moral qualities of this vindictive and destructive prankster and boaster, vulgarian and libertine, may seem to be unequivocal, once again we note ambiguity. The trickster may also be seen in the role of Heilbringer, extending help, generosity, compassion and protection to those he deals with, especially weak or oppressed beings who are threatened by danger or monsters. An example is the Athapaskan-speaking Tagish people's "Smart Beaver" who, in a cycle of myths that chronicle his heroic voyage down what is probably the Yukon river, "cleaned out" all the giants and animals (and scaled down the latter to their current size, as well as changing their diet to foods that excluded human flesh).

The ambiguity that surrounds the trickster also has a temporal dimension. While his world is usually the inchoate, mythic age back in the mythological past, he may also enter the historic and recent past; thus, we find the Khoisan tricksters Heiseb or Jackal roaming the farms of the pioneer trek Boers and working for, and duping the baas, or the Zande Tore, who was arrested by the British colonists who, among other things, taught him to drive an automobile. Life and death are poles that the trickster confronts as well. Many a tale tells of his death or murder, sometimes in a gruesome manner, through burning, drowning, dismembering, being devoured and swallowed up, only to be revivified anew (or revivifying himself). He may do so by healing himself, as did the !Kung trickster Kauha (introducing thereby the trance curing dance to humankind).

The fact that this being, of deceit, moral turpitude and stupidity, may also be a being that is god-like in his power and acts, and the reverential attitudes he may invoke in the people, who, at other times, would laugh at his antics and express outrage at his moral perversities, is perhaps the most striking manifestation of the ambiguity that envelop the trickster figure. Among the Navaho, Coyote was both a holy being and a buffoon, and to the Bushmen, the tricksters /Kaggen or /Gäuwa were, in addition to pranksters and vulgarian, both also gods, who protected game animals and were a numinous presence at initiation and curing rites. Among some of the Bushman groups, the curing shaman had to seek out the help of trickster god, who was a bit of a curer himself, when he went on his trance-induced outer-body, spirit journeys. As among the North American Indians, there is a similarity between some of a trickster's exploits and adventures and shamans' journeys to the spirit world.

Combining in his being the traits of animal, human and god, the trickster points out the unity of such universally separated realms as culture and nature, sacred and profane, natural and supernatural. Among hunter-gatherers, whose trickster figure is especially prominent, well delineated and universal, and whose guise is usually animal - yet, at the same time also human - the inseparableness of nature and culture is perhaps the main symbolic message of the trickster. That humans and animals(167,163),(851,897) are kindred beings, that the ontological and conceptual boundaries that separate them are fluid or even illusory, is a message that resonates with the lifeways and worldviews of hunter-gatherers, which are embedded within nature. Among other societies, with states and food production and complex pantheons and charter myths, the trickster is more likely to be a god - such as Loki, Hermes, Legba, or Maui, respectively of the Scandinavians, Greeks, West Africans and Polynesians - with his own divine profile and purpose, as creator or destroyer, demiurge, messenger, translator, diviner, protector or fertility god. Through the constraints of his human and animal side, such a trickster-god displays a sacred quality that is different from that of other gods. It is a sacrality that is both more and less accessible than that of the other divine mortals. Through
his foolishness and carnality, his lies and moral failings, he is akin to mortals and their own follies and failings. Yet the trickster-god is capable also of dumbfounding the gods, of stealing from them, outsmarting and out-talking them, through witty double-talk that contains depth of wisdom that may surpass their own divine understanding.

As a wanderer, an outsider, a “marginal man,” the trickster, in each of the places and domains he enters, causes both havoc and consternation. The reason is that he shocks its inhabitants – humans, animals, gods – into recognizing the relativity and fragility of the world of order and structure they have created for themselves and live by unself-consciously. Puck’s exclamation – “Lord, what fools these mortals be” – is the message of the trickster everywhere, presented by the outsider looking in on the insiders’ ways of doing things, living their lives, thinking their thoughts, which to him, the outsider, seem antic and contestable. In upsetting and challenging them, he reminds humans – or gods, or animal-humans of the mythic age – of the arbitrariness and limitations of a set and seemingly given cultural, sacral and biological order. As such, the trickster becomes an agent of creativity who challenges a culture’s monocultural ways and univocal thoughts; he brings a “more than this” dimensionality to existence, alerting humans to the “unquenchable fecundity of all that truly is and can be” (Hynes 1993: 212, 216).

Mathias Guenther

Further Reading
See also: West Africa.

Tucker, Mary Evelyn – See Religious Studies and Environmental Concern.

Tu B’Shvat – See Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Waskow, Rabbi Arthur.

Tukanoan Indians (Northwest Amazonia)

The Tukanoan Indians form a linguistic macro-unit divided into two geographicaly separated populations in Northwest Amazonia, the Western and Eastern Tukanoans. Straddling the borders between Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, the Western Tukanoans (including principally the Secoya, May Huna, Siona and the Koreguaje ethnic groups) comprise some 1500 individuals living on the upper Putumayo and Caquétá rivers and the lower Napo river. The considerably larger population of Eastern Tukanoans, amounting to some 20,000 people, inhabit the Vaupès and Apaporis drainages in the Colombian Amazon and the upper Rio Negro region of Eastern Brazil. Though related closely linguistically, the two populations are socially and culturally distinct.

The habitat of the Eastern Tukanoan Indians (henceforth Tukanoans) is interfluvial (terra firme) tropical lowland forest. The Vaupés region is ecologically described as a blackwater ecosystem with nutrient poor soils and rivers (Moran 1993). Biological diversity is high while the productivity of terrestrial and riverine fauna is low, even by Amazonian standards. In these harsh surroundings the native populations make a satisfying living by means of shifting cultivation (bitter manioc being the staple), fishing, hunting and gathering. Population density is low, and settlements widely dispersed along rivers and streams. The traditional settlement is the multifamily longhouse or maloca comprising a patrilineally extended family. Today settlements are increasingly concentrated around schools, shops and other facilities, and the traditional maloca is largely replaced by smaller, single-family houses grouped into villages. Though the traditional livelihood system still provides the basis for sustenance, petty trade, mining and contract labor are increasingly important in the local economy.

The Tukanoan social universe is composed of some twenty named exogamous groups (including the Tukano proper, the Desana, Cubeo, Wananao, Bara, Barasana and Makuna), each identified with a distinct language and a proper river territory. Each group reckons descent in the male line from a putative, mythical ancestor, conceived of as an Anaconda. The exogamous group also holds what may be described as corporate sacred property, including tangible ritual goods (musical instruments and dance ornaments), sacred substances (blessed coca, tobacco, red
paint and beeswax), and intangible, spiritual wealth, such as chants, songs and a specific set of personal names which circulate among its members in alternate generations. The most important material symbol of the group is the set of sacred palm-wood flutes, the Yurupary instruments, which are said to embody the ancestors. This sacred property is described as the "weapons" and "defenses" of the group.

Different exogamous groups relate to each other as putative kin (between which marriage is avoided) or affines (between which marriage is prescribed). Tukanoan society is economically undifferentiated, and there is little evidence of political cohesion beyond the local group of adjacent settlements. Leadership is confined to settlement headmen and occasional charismatic local leaders. However, this equality in the economic and political field goes with a conspicuous differentiation in the religious and ritual domain. Shamans and other ritual specialists (dancers and chanters) of varying and complementary skills play an important role in society. Large-scale public rituals are frequent and considered essential for survival and prosperity.

Tukanoan religion is conveniently described under three general headings: the Yurupary cult, animism and shamanism. Of these, the Yurupary cult does not (and probably never did) form part of the Western Tukanoan religious universe, while the essential features of animism and shamanism appear to apply to both the Eastern and Western groups.

Environmental understanding is constitutive of Tukanoan religion. Social and religious imagery draws on, and is fundamentally inspired by, indigenous knowledge of biological and ecological processes. The Tukanoan environmental understanding is encoded in an animistic ontology-cosmology. Animism, as understood here, implies a fundamentally monistic, participatory orientation to the world, transcending the Western ontological divide between nature and culture, the animate and the inanimate. The human–environment relationship is one of relatedness, inter-subjectivity and inter-agentivity; it is fundamentally social and dialogical in nature. This is the ontological basis for Tukanoan shamanism.

It can be argued that such a participatory stance is conducive to environmental sustainability and the conservation of biological diversity. The traditional Tukanoan notion of reciprocity, which guides their interaction with the environment, and the mythologically grounded ritual regulation of resource use, provide strong behavioral sanctions against the overexploitation of forest and river resources. In the Tukanoan view, human life is ultimately geared toward the overall goal of sustaining the cosmos. This life-sustaining responsibility is epitomized in the role of the shaman. Fundamentally concerned with human survival and the continuous fertility of nature, shamanism is the dominant mode of religious practice among the Tukanoan Indians.

**The Yurupary Cult**

The Yurupary cult is the fullest expression of (Eastern) Tukanoan religious life. Misunderstood as a “devil’s cult” by early missionaries, the Yurupary complex involves the ritual use and display of sacred palm-wood flutes and trumpets (the Yurupary instruments) representing the deified ancestors of the clan and exogamous group. The cult, which is common to the Tukanoan and Arrawakan groups of the Vaupes-Icana region of Northwest Amazonia, has therefore been described as an ancestor cult with features of a male secret cult. The Yurupary instruments are handled by adult men only, and the ritual display of the most sacred instruments is the key event in the process of male initiation. The Yurupary complex is thus intimately connected to the patrilineal descent system – the establishment of gender difference and the formation of male personhood and collective identity. However, beyond their patrilineal connotations, the sacred instruments are associated with the fertility of nature and the regeneration of life at large. The ancestors, embodied in the Yurupary instruments, are the generative source of all life.

There are two types of Yurupary rituals: the principal ritual, involving the display of the most ancient and sacred instruments, and the Tree Fruit ritual. The latter is a weaker version of the main ritual, involving less sacred instruments and the ritual redistribution of forest fruits. The main ritual, which does not feature any ritual redistribution of fruits, is held at the beginning of the rainy season, which is also the season of the ripening of the wild forest fruits. In Tukanoan thinking, this is the beginning of the annual cycle. The Yurupary ritual heralds the new year, and is seen as instrumental in bringing about the renewal of nature and the spiritual revitalization of the community.

Just as it inaugurates the annual cycle, the Yurupary ritual initiates male adulthood and conveys full membership in the descent group. As the key event in the male initiation process, it marks a new stage in the life cycle of men. Indeed, the annual ritual cycle, beginning with the Yurupary ritual and ending with the Peach Palm festival, a food feast celebrating the peach palm harvest and the final departure of the recently dead, symbolically reproduces the male life cycle from initiation to death. Also pubescent women are ritually initiated. However, in contrast to the male ritual, which is a collective and public affair, female initiation is a private and discrete event following upon first menstruation.

At male initiation, a group of pubescent boys are made to see the Yurupary instruments. Under the effect of hallucinogenic yagé (*Banisteriopsis* sp.), and supervised by elders and the officiating shaman, the initiates are brought...
into direct contact with the ancestors (in the form of the sacred instruments). Women and children are excluded from the central events of the ritual. The ritual sequence follows the familiar pattern of a passage ritual: the initiates are symbolically killed (immersed in a cold forest stream) at the eve of the ritual, and brought back to life as new-born beings at the end (as they are again made to immerse themselves in the river, now together with the instruments, and subsequently led back into the house). At the height of the ritual, the initiates sit in fetal position inside the house, as the instruments are played over their heads and motionless bodies. Thus, they are impregnated with the vital force of the living ancestors. The boys are then whipped to become hard and strong. The Yurupary instruments are imaged as fierce predators (jaguars and anacondas), swallowing and regurgitating the initiates and thereby reconstituting them as full social and spiritual beings. Infused with regenerative, patrilineal essence, the pubescent boys are reborn as fertile, adult men.

**Animism**

Tukanoans inhabit an animated landscape where everything created has the capacity to become alive and to actively intervene in the course of events. Hills, mountains, rocks and rivers are infused with the forces of creation; they are seen as consubstantial with the creators and incorporate their powers. Every place and feature of the landscape has a name and tells a story about the deeds of the ancestors. These mythical events, encoded in names and places, confer particular powers to the local landscape. The beings – plants, fishes, land animals and humans – inhabiting this empowered landscape share in its potency; they are charged with creative as well as destructive powers which must be ritually handled to ensure human survival and well-being. Everything made and crafted from natural materials is also believed to contain this ancestral potency; baskets, tools and weapons, houses and canoes situationally obtain agency and become alive. Objects are fundamentally subjects; subjectivity is their natural condition. Crafted things are thus doubly potent; they contain not only the powers of the materials from which they were made but also the agency and creative intentionality of their makers.

In Tukanoan metaphysical discourse, nonhuman animals and plants are generally described as “people” or “humans.” The term, which in ordinary discourse is used to denote an (unspecified) exogamous group and to distinguish human beings from other living kinds, is thus contextually expanded to include all living kinds. In the religious ontology of Tukanoan peoples there is no absolute distinction between human and nonhuman beings. Social groups and natural species are categorically fused; exogamous groups are natural kinds, and different species are “distinct peoples.” Nonhuman animals and plants are attributed with human agency, will and intention. Animals and plants have houses, are organized into communities, have headmen and ritual specialists. Game animals, in particular, are said to live like human beings: they cultivate the land, harvest their crop and prepare their food, make their proper ritual dances and drink their beer. They have their own ritual attire and, most significantly, their proper Yurupary instruments. Like all people, they have “culture.” Humanity, the human life form, is the model for all living kinds. Culture is what all mortal beings, human and non-human, have in common.

What distinguish different species or “peoples” from one another are their distinctive “bodies,” their shape, coloring, sound and corporeal habits which are all associated with their different mythical origins and the specific metaphysical roles assigned to them in the cosmic scheme of things. In the case of animal species, difference is conceived of in “cultural” terms – as distinctive “clothing,” body paint, language, food habits and ritual property (“weapons” and “defenses”). Natural differences are, as it were, culturalized. Conversely, in the case of humans, cultural difference is essentialized and naturalized: differences in language, food habits and ritual goods are perceived as natural – innate and corporeal, constitutive of group identity. To Tukanoans, culture is nature – timeless and unchanging, created along with the rest of nature and handed down to present generations from the first ancestors.

A wholly socialized or humanized cosmos such as that of the Tukanoans, in which the Western nature-culture divide is abolished and where all beings and things are construed as actual or potential subjects-persons, is conveniently called animistic. Animism, in this precise (and revised) sense, refers to a participatory (monistic) type of ontology which is extremely widespread among indigenous peoples around the world, and one which is fundamentally distinct from, or opposed to, the naturalistic (dualistic) ontology characteristic of Western modernity.

**Shamanism**

Tukanoan social and religious practice is situated in this ontological-cosmological space. Survival, reproduction and the pursuit of well-being take place in a perceived reality where every life form (species) is seen as a “people,” and every being a person – a sentient, intelligent subject. Natural objects, artifacts and features of the landscape have a subjective side and, thus, a potential for intentionality and agency. What is generally referred to as shamanism should be understood against this animistic background. Tukanoan shamans, invariably male, are part-time ritual specialists possessing expert knowledge of the ultimate powers. Their function is to mediate between humanity and the nonhuman agencies that surround them in order to make human life possible and to oversee the proper working of the cosmos.

Shamanic knowledge is essential for making a living in
this animated world, made possible by the creative and destructive powers of the ancestral beings. By shamanic means – incantations, spells and blessings – the world is made safe, food is blessed and humans are protected from spiritual dangers. Shamans are, quite literally, gods on Earth; they cure and prevent disease, but may also send sickness and death; they supervise and metaphysically control the events at birth, initiation and death, literally constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing human persons; they ensure, by ritual means, the continuing fertility of nature and, thus, the availability of game and fish for human consumption; and they transform beings of nature (game, fish and forest fruits) from potentially perilous subjects and vehicles of death and disease to life-giving and strengthening food (Arhem 1996).

Tukanoans distinguish between two kinds of shamans, one intimately associated with curing but also with causing death and disease, the other associated with protective, preventive and life-sustaining shamanism in connection with life-cycle rituals and public rituals more generally (Hugh-Jones 1996). The former, usually referred to as payé in the literature, is feared and perceived as a morally ambiguous figure of comparatively low social status. The source of his power is highly inspirational and idiosyncratic. As curer and sorcerer, he operates as an individual, often at the margins of society. In many respects he is the prototypical shaman.

The other, life-sustaining and protective shaman, by contrast, has attributes usually associated with priesthood: his role is entirely benevolent and thoroughly social. Directed toward the good of the community, the life-sustaining shaman is morally unambiguous. Consequently, his social standing is high, usually merging secular and ritual authority. The source of his authority is his knowledge of the mythical canon of the group. The office tends to be inherited from a senior patrilineal relative and invariably involves many years of apprenticeship, from initiation to mature age. Recognition as a true life-sustaining shaman comes only with advanced age and demonstrated expertise.

All initiated, mature men are attributed with some amount of shamanic knowledge. All men know how to bless food and, thus, to render it safe for consumption, and all men are capable of sustaining themselves in the local environment: they know the spiritual dangers and assets of their territory and the ritual acts that necessarily accompany the everyday chores in the forest and on the river. However, only the curing shaman is capable of treating the seriously ill, and only the life-sustaining shaman possesses the expertise to direct the major life-cycle rituals and the public ritual events aimed at ensuring the fecundity in nature.

Yet, even among the shamans, knowledge and skills are differentiated and graded. Thus, only the most reputed and knowledgeable of life-sustaining shamans are entrusted with the supervision of the annual Yurupary ritual, when the ancestors come alive and enter into direct contact with the living community members. At this ritual, the officiating shaman turn into a primordial being himself; he embodies the Yurupary, the omnipotent Ancestor-Creator. Among the Makuna, one of the Tukanoan groups in the Pirá-Paraná region of the Colombian Amazon, the principal Yurupary is identified as the Ancestral Bumble-Bee, the Primordial Pollinator. The imagery is revealing: feeding on flowery plants, the Pollinator enables the plants to reproduce and multiply. Impersonating the Primordial Pollinator, the shaman fecundates nature and renews the world.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the indigenous population in the Vaupés region was heavily affected, in close succession, by the booming Colombian coca trade and the Amazonian gold rush. Both events implied dramatic upheavals in the regional economy. For many indigenous communities they provided much needed cash income but also caused social disruptions and local environmental depletion. Nevertheless, the Eastern Tukanoan homeland has, on the whole, been spared large-scale forest destruction and settler penetration. In 1982, the main part of the Colombian Vaupés (some 3.5 million hectares) was declared Protected Indigenous Land (resguardo). Within this legal framework, Tukanoan Indians have largely been successful in defending their heritage and homeland against external intrusion. Indigenous interests have been effectively promoted by the Regional Indigenous Organization (CRIVA), founded in 1973, and by its several local offshoots.

Missionary influence is strong along major waterways and in the vicinity of frontier towns and trading settlements. In more remote areas, however, indigenous beliefs and practices remain strong. Partly in response to the threats posed by the cocaine boom and the subsequent gold rush, partly as a result of the activities of the regional indigenous movement, there are today signs of indigenous cultural revival in the region (Arhem 1998b). Traditional rituals are performed with renewed vigor, and shamans and other local authorities are assuming a new role in the emerging Tukanoan leadership, now efficiently interacting with state institutions, the church, and pro-indigenous international organizations.

Kaj Århem

Further Reading


See also: Amazonia; Animism (various); Ethnobotany; Ethnoecology; Rainforests (Central and South America); Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo – and Ethnecology in Colombia; Rubber Tappers; Shamanism – Traditional; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; U’wa Indians (Colombia); Yanomami.