Dalai Lama (1935–)

The fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was born in the Amdo region of eastern Tibet in 1935. Recognized at age six as the reincarnation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, he was brought to central Tibet, where he began his formal education. Dalai Lamas traditionally are invested with full temporal power at age eighteen, but due to the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 the date was moved up by two years.

For the next nine years the Dalai Lama attempted to cooperate with Tibet’s new Chinese rulers, but following an abortive popular uprising in March 1959, the Dalai Lama fled to India. Once there, he formed a government-in-exile headquartered in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh. Since then, he has become one of the world’s most widely recognized religious leaders, and in 1989 he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in attempting to promote a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Tibet with the Chinese government. He has authored numerous books on Buddhist philosophy in both Tibetan and English, and also has a keen interest in current social issues, particularly human rights and the environment.

In his writings on the environment, the Dalai Lama stresses the Buddhist notion of interdependence (Sanskrit: *pratitya-samutpada*), according to which all things come into being in dependence upon causes and conditions and change in every moment in dependence upon causes and conditions. The world is conceived as an infinitely complex network of interconnected relations, and there is no clear dividing line between oneself and the environment. This is also linked to the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anatman*), which holds that there is no permanent, enduring essence or soul, and that individuals should be viewed as continuums, changing in every moment, continually influenced by and influencing the surrounding environment. In this view, each individual is intimately connected with the dynamic system of the environment, and so one’s innate concern for oneself becomes extended to the entire universe.

In light of these ideas, the Dalai Lama contends that a concern for the environment is a natural outgrowth of Buddhist teachings, and he points to the fact that Tibetans have traditionally maintained a sustainable approach to natural resources. That this is due primarily to Buddhist beliefs is open to debate, however, because prior to the Chinese invasion and the subsequent introduction of modern technology, Tibet was a low-technology society that was sustained mainly by primitive agriculture and animal husbandry.

Moreover, the Dalai Lama’s own engagement with environmental themes is not evident prior to the mid-1980s, when his first public remarks on the environment were made in several speeches, which were later published by the government-in-exile. Since this time, however, he has shown an increasing concern with environmental issues, and his plan for a future Tibet envisions it as an environmentally aware country that practices sustainable agriculture, a “zone of peace” in which there would be no armed forces or weapons of mass destruction.

While the Dalai Lama is widely revered among his people, both in exile communities and in Tibet itself, there is little evidence that his pronouncements on the environment have significantly altered Tibetans’ attitudes toward the environment or their day-to-day practices. Visitors to Dharamsala frequently remark at the fact that the road-sides are filled with garbage, and there is little visible evidence in other Tibetan refugee communities of widespread concern for environmental issues. Among educated Tibetans, however, there has been a more positive response, and his environmental pronouncements have also struck a responsive chord among his followers overseas. In the past two decades the Dalai Lama has emerged as one of the world’s leading Buddhist thinkers in this area.

John Powers

Further Reading


See also: Bon (Tibet); Buddhism – Engaged; Buddhism – Tibetan; Environmental Ethics; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Tibet and Central Asia; United Nations’ “Earth Summits”; Yunnan Region (Southwest China and Montane Mainland Southeast Asia).
Daly, Mary (1928–)

Known for her fierce wit and creative wordplay, Daly is widely regarded as one of the most important thinkers of the radical feminist movement. With doctorates in religion, philosophy and theology from Notre Dame and the University of Fribourg, her work is deeply rooted in existentialist and Catholic philosophical traditions, though since 1975 she has publicly disavowed Christianity as irredeemably misogynistic. Daly’s impact on feminist thought can be traced to her insistence that radical feminism cannot be content with social, political or psychological change, but requires fundamental shifts at the level of language, spirituality, and ultimately ontology. While she has moved beyond and/or rejected much of the theology of her most influential book, *Beyond God the Father*, its understanding of the sacred as Be-ing, the movement in which women move out of patriarchal constructs into authentic existence, remains a touchstone in her work.

As early as 1978 and increasingly in her later work, Daly identifies “inherent connections between women, especially Wild Women, and all Elemental/Natural Reality” (Daly 1998: 7), and is a prominent voice in discussions of ecofeminist spirituality. She contrasts “biophilia,” or love of life in all its elemental forms, with “necrophilia,” the death-loving ethos that drives contemporary patriarchal societies worldwide. In *Gyn/Ecology* she catalogs atrocities committed on women’s bodies, and in *Quintessence* links these practices with planetary rape and the “necrotechnologies” that pass as creative science. Often charged, especially by postmodern feminists, with essentialist views of gender, Daly insists that the distinction between biophilia and necrophilia is not based on sexual difference. Nonetheless it is the spiritual – indeed metaphysical – journey of women toward biophilic Be-ing that remains her unwavering focus and the telos of her radical vision.

*Kate McCarthy*

**Further Reading**


See also: Biophilia; Ecofeminism (various); Feminist Spirituality Movement.

**Dance**

Dancings – the diverse and ever-changing activities of dance, dancing, and dancers – have been associated with religions and “nature” from pre-history to the present day. Paleolithic images of human dancers with animal masks enliven caves in southwestern France and northern Spain. Petroglyphs and pictographs of ritually dancing hunters and planters appear later not only in Europe, but in north and southern Africa, Scandinavia, the Americas, Australia, and the Far East. Pottery, statuary, sarcophagi, weavings, and paintings attest to such dancings worldwide as well.

Much of contemporary secular theatrical and social dancings owe their allegiance to religious “nature” dancings. *Kagura* dancings of Shintoism spawned the court dance *Bugaku*, the classical dance/theatre *Noh*, and the popular theatre of *Kabuki*. Chinese theater developed from Chinese fertility and ancestral rituals practiced by Daoists and Confucianists. Greek dancings and theater are said to have evolved from the rituals of Dionysus, god of wine, fertility, and vegetation. The influence of animal- and plant-inspired dancings from West Africa continues in the dance halls and clubs of the United States, with retentions of particular gestures and movements, and names like “the monkey,” the funky “chicken,” and “the grapevine step.”

In the United States, deeply spiritual, although not necessarily institutionally religious, theatrical dancers in various eras have “gone back to nature” to discover what they have considered to be the essence of dancings. Among these are Isadora Duncan (1877–1927) who scandalized audiences by removing her shoes, her corset, and the clasps from her hair to dance more “naturally” on the concert stage, embodying the movements of waves, weather, and wind. Doris Humphrey (1885–1958) developed an entire movement vocabulary based on the rise and fall of breathing. In the last thirty years, Anna Halprin has made “planetary dances,” Simone Forti has embodied animals, and Joanna Haigood has choreographed dancings with live bees or butterflies. Jennifer Monson is following the migration patterns of whales and birds, dancing outdoors in fields, on beaches, and in national parks. Eiko ōta Koma have blended influences from Shintoism, Buddhism, Marxism, *butoh* and German expressionism to create dancings for stages, caravans, and rivers. In the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, Project Bandaloup dances outdoor aerial choreography, soaring on ropes from the crest of Yosemite’s El Capitán.

Religious “nature” dancings – defined for now as those dancings done in relationship with manifestations of “nature” – have occurred in a variety of ways since ancient times based on where and when the dancers dance, what they wear, and whom or what they invoke, supplicate, propitiate, embody, communicate or join with, defend themselves against, or are entered by. People might dance
in relationship with the deities, spirits, or powers of animals such as deer or whales; plants like corn or manioc; weather, including rain, snow, thunder or lightning; geographical features like mountains or bodies of water; or astronomical entities including the milky way, sun, or moon. Dancers might carry, clothe themselves with, or make musical instruments from “nature”: skins, furs, feathers, flowers, leaves, fronds, bones, horns, claws, shells, and/or masks of “nature” beings. They might dance at “natural” sites considered sacred such as springs or outcroppings of rocks.

People might dance ritually at times that mark the cyclic reappearance of “natural” passages, celestial or biological. Dancings performed at transitions such as solstices, equinoxes, conception, birth, puberty, or death reinforce for the dancer and the community a visceral understanding of the interrelationship between cosmological, earthly, human, and/or “supernatural” spheres. Through certain dancings, particular peoples might also link the creation and destruction of the universe with the sowing, growing, and harvesting of the Earth’s plants and animals, including or excluding humankind.

Evidence of religious “nature” dancings exists in Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Daoism, West African Religions, Indigenous Religions, and to a less widely acknowledged extent in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Some of these dancings are more obvious in their relationships with “nature.” Others are less visible. For example, the Hindu god Siva Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, is the ultimate dancing eco-cycler. With his matted hair symbolizing the sacred river Ganges, the sun’s flames encircle him as he dances the creation and destruction of the universe. Less frequently pointed out in Hinduism is that the three classic heroes in the epic Ramayana are animal deities. Hanuman, the monkey general, Sugriva, king of the monkeys, and Jambava, king of the bears also represent “nature’s” beneficent powers, and they bring order to the universe while they help Rama to vanquish the demon king.

Disguised under the veneer of Roman Catholic saints are the dancings of the orixas, manifestations of “nature” brought from Africa by the Yoruba people, among others, to the New World. For example, in the Brazilian religion of Candomblé, Yemoja (Yemaya) is both goddess of the sea and associated with the Virgin Mary, sharing, as Robert Farris Thompson writes, “the qualities of sacred love, faith, and purity” (Thompson 1984: 77). Likewise, Xangó (Shàngō), god of thunder, who is associated with the summer solstice, is equated with Saint Barbara, whose murderers God killed with lightning.

Ritual cham dancings performed by Buddhist monks include not only the Black Hat Ceremony, but the Ngonpa Don, dance of the hunters, a purification rite that appears in nearly every Ladakhi play in northern India; the Snow Lion Dance, performed to secure peace and prosperity; and the Sha Cham, dance of the sacred stag. In Daoism and Confucianism, dancings were an essential practice in the ancestor and nature worship of the Chow (Zhou) Dynasty for nine hundred years. Hexagram XVI in the I Ching explains that, “The enthusiasm of the heart expresses itself involuntarily in a burst of song, in dance and rhythmic movement of the body” enabling people to “draw near to God” (I Ching 1967: 68). Ritual dancings provided a pathway linking past and present for “The ruler who revered the Divinity in revering his ancestors became thereby the Son of Heaven, in whom the heavenly and the earthly world met in mystical contact” (I Ching 1967: 68).

Best known among Shinto dancings is Kagura, danced to revitalize and prolong human and divine life. Kagura was originally performed by Shinto priestesses to honor Ame-no-Uzume, goddess of dancings. For it was through her divine dancing that she lured the sun goddess Amaterasu from her cave, retrieving the world from darkness to light. Less known are other Shinto “nature” dancings including dengaku, performed to encourage agricultural fertility, and furya, designed to ward off natural disasters and diseases.

Sun-dancing practices of the Lakota Sioux have been widely studied. Less known are those of the cult of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton, or the Inti Raymi, still practiced in Andean Peru. Little known is that Sufi sheikhs also represent the sun, whirling slowly in the center of a Mevlana solar system, surrounded by spinning dervishes orbiting like planets around them. Rarely considered are the Christian medieval dancings of the pilota, in which a ball passed among dancers was linked both to the movement of the sun and the resurrection of Christ during Easter celebrations. Rarer still in the context of “nature” dancings is that the French King Louis XIV not only called himself the Sun King, but choreographed himself as the most important celestial being among those lesser, his subjects.

Much has been written about the so-called “rain” dancings of the Hopi and other indigenous peoples. Less has been written about the water-drawing ceremony of Judaism, which was held at harvest time when prayers for rain were offered and performed in the Temple during the seven days of the festival of Tabernacles. Still less has been mentioned of the orans (praying) figures of Roman catacomb frescoes that portray what could be called early Christian rain dancings in the biblical story of Daniel 3. As Theodoret wrote in ca. 430, “They [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] summon to the dance both heaven and the waters above the heavens, and the powers that circle round the divine throne” (in Taylor 1976: 80–1) to put out the flames of the fiery furnace that threaten their lives. Likewise, the animal and “spirit” dancings of indigenous peoples have been widely described in the context of “nature” by various scholars, but those of Europeans – for example, the ballet dancings of swans (animals) and sylphs (spirits) – are rarely considered with the same lens.

Religious dancings can serve a variety of functions in
relationship with “nature.” Along with other ritual activities, certain dancings can be a conduit for divine energy or power, providing a relational through-way between beings and worlds, between the seen and unseen. Sufi dancers, for example, turn holding their right arms high, palms up to receive power from heaven, which travels through their bodies, and into their left arms held low, palms down, facing the Earth. According to the Indian theory of aesthetics, for Hindus, works of art, including dancings, create a bridge from the formless ground of the cosmos, through the many forms of life, to that which is beyond form. Leslie E. Sponsel reports that for indigenous Hawaiians, “A mystical force, mana, permeates everyone and everything, including people, plants, animals, fish, stones, landforms, sea, wind, clouds, and rain. Prayers, chants, dances (hula), offerings and rituals are among the ways of channeling mana and communicating with the spirits” (Sponsel in Grim 2001: 166).

“Nature” dancings are often used to convince deities and spirits to act on behalf of the dancer and/or the dancer’s community. Mohan Khokar writes that in India,

In preserved [traditional] societies, dancing is universally recognized as an exercise akin to prayer, in which context it becomes a profound and intense experience. The objective is to communicate with the chosen divinity with a purposefulness that moves the divinity to respond (Khokar 1987: 18).

In a presentation on “Andean Cosmovision, Biodiversity, and Regeneration,” Julio Valladolid said of Andean peoples, “We don’t pray; we dance” (Conference on Indigenous Traditions and Ecology, Cambridge, MA, 15 November 1997). In this way, rain dancings and those that encourage the fertility of people and fields are vital to invoke the deities to effect transformational and practical change.

Religious “nature” dancings are also used to teach the cultural history, traditions, ethics, and values of peoples in relationship with “nature.” They intensify beliefs about and experiences with “nature” psycho-physically. They can strengthen communal bonds among, or hierarchical divisions between, those who are dancing in activities practiced in relationship with “nature.” In many circumstances, they impart a sense of empathic connection with and reciprocal responsibility in the triangular relationship between deities, “nature,” and human beings. As Gregory Cajete writes, for Puebloan peoples, they are essential to “maintain the balance of all essential relationships of the world.” Referring to animal dancings in particular he writes, “These symbolic acts of respect and remembrance reinforce communal relationship to animals that gave life for the community’s benefit. It is a way of remembering to remember relationship” (Cajete in Grim 2001: 627).

This “remembering to remember relationship” requires a responsibility on the part of humans to co-create order, harmony, and balance in the universe. It is a responsibility restricted not only to indigenous religions, but present in “nature” dancings of many, perhaps all, religions. In the Gemma Animae, the hermit Honorius describes a Christian dancing in the twelfth century that “remembers” cosmological relationships,

They thought of the rotation of the firmament; in the clapping of their hands the union of the elements; in the sounds of song the harmony of the planets; in the gestures of the body, the movements of the celestial bodies; in the clapping of the hands and the stamping of feet the sound of thunder; something which the faithful imitate, converting all to the true service of God (Honorius in Taylor 1976: 90).

There are many questions to investigate in the discussion of “dancings,” “religions,” and “nature.” Among them, is there a correlation between those people who still practice religious “nature” dancings and good ecological stewardship? What responsibility do people have now to co-create their universe? Is there a correspondence between the rise of scientific inquiry in the West and the divisions of dancings into categories of “folk” (rural) and “classical” (urban) genres? Is the presence or absence of “nature” dancings a barometer for environmental health of an area? What happens psycho-physically and environmentally when “nature” dancings are restricted or removed from a people? What might be regained if they were recovered, reintroduced, or made new?

Marda Kirn

Further Reading
Daoism, or Taoism, is an English word that refers to a wide variety of beliefs and practices that originated in China and are now found, in varying forms, across the world. These various movements have at their heart an understanding of Dao as the deep wellspring of life, and the human condition as inextricably folded into this matrix of cosmic creativity. The staggering diversity and often conflicting values of these movements preclude any attempt at defining a unitary Daoist view of nature. Furthermore, Daoism has taken different cultural forms in China, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, India, Brazil and Canada, to name some countries where Daoist religious groups are currently active. Still further complicating the situation is that Daoism was nearly destroyed in the People’s Republic of China in the latter half of the twentieth century, and the scholarly work of understanding Daoism has been undertaken largely in countries that have had a historically colonialist interest in China, such as Japan and France. Despite these problems and with all these caveats in mind, it is possible to make some tentative generalizations about the core motifs and values that have historically influenced Daoist attitudes and behaviors toward the natural environment.

The concept of Dao originated in China during the period of political disunity that saw the gradual dissolution of the Zhou empire (1122–256 B.C.E.) and was accompanied by the flourishing of an intellectual culture whose question was: Where is the Way? This question was answered on a wide variety of levels – ethical relationships, political organization, moral self-cultivation, and ritual order – that were seen as being mutually related. There was, however, one seminal text that penetrated right to the heart of this deeply humane question by stating that the Way is to be sought in the very vitality of nature, in the wholly natural and wholly spontaneous transformation and flourishing of the world. The Daode jing (Scripture of Way and Power, fourth century B.C.E.) or the Laozi (after its mythical author) is the key text around which the variety of Daoist traditions continue to construct themselves by means of written commentaries, ritual recitation, and meditation. The worldview of this text implies a certain redundancy to the title of this present essay: there can be no “Dao and Nature” as though these were two discrete categories of being (cf. Creator and the created in Christian thought). Dao is no more – and no less – than the flourishing of nature itself.

This natural spontaneity translates a Chinese term ziran (literally, “self-so”) that is the basis of the Modern Standard Chinese term for nature (ziranjiei). In Daode jing 25 we read: “Humans model Earth / Earth models Heaven / Heaven models Dao / Dao models natural spontaneity (ziran).” The three basic dimensions of existence (human, earthly, and heavenly) are thus folded into the natural evolution of the Way, which proceeds without reference to any wholly external power or transcendent force.

The earliest Daoists sought a practical experience of nature’s creative power, manifested in the spontaneous arising and decaying of things in a ceaseless flow of activity (yang) and receptivity (yin) within the energetic field (qi) that constitutes the material of the universe. And they sought to model their lives after this natural spontaneity, making ziran, or naturalness, the core value of their philosophy. In the Daode jing this core value entails a strategy of non-(artificial) action (wuwei) as a means to achieve the optimal state of harmonic integration between the various dimensions of life.

Many modern environmentalists, who see in this text the principles of conservation, organic harmony and respect for nature that they themselves espouse, have enthusiastically adopted the Daode jing, together with selected parts of the tradition. Although it is foolish, not to say blatantly anachronistic, to suggest that early Daoists were environmentalists, nonetheless it is easy to see why the text and its traditions should be so appealing given present environmental concerns.

Indeed, there is much support for the view that early Chinese thought is deeply embedded in the natural world. Sarah Allan persuasively explains how the root metaphors of Chinese culture are derived from images of nature or explained in terms of natural phenomena. The term Dao, for instance, is analogous to the flowing of water. It provides irrigation-life for the ten thousand things (Daode jing 62), and like water it is soft, weak, pliable, yielding, and ultimately unstoppable. On the other hand, the attitude that seemingly equates Daoism (or at least the classical, textual Daoism) with an environmentally friendly naturalism, has not been universally shared among modern commentators. Although it is impossible to think Daoism without thinking nature, the Daoist problematitik calls into question the nature of nature itself and offers many seemingly conflicting and paradoxical answers to the question of the human relationship with, and our being embedded within, the natural world. This is entirely appropriate as the root understanding of dao as the spontaneous and creative unfolding of nature is, for Daoists, fundamentally a concept that is also dark, obscure and mysterious.
Correlative Thinking

During the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. to 220) a basic cosmological system was established that remains at the heart of the traditional Chinese worldview. This basic microcosm/macrocosm relationship can be seen in such early Han dynasty cosmological texts as the *Huainanzi* in which the four seasons, five phases, nine directions and 360 days of heaven are correlated with the four limbs, five inner organs, nine orifices, and 360 joints of human beings.

As traditional Chinese medicine developed, a more mature and technical understanding of the relationship between the various cosmic–human dimensions of life emerged. This cosmology is based on the concept of a universe of multiple, interrelated dimensions of qi-energy that resonate synchronically with each other and diachronically in a sequence of five phases.

Although there is nothing specifically Daoist about this correlative thinking, it lies at the heart of all traditional Chinese thinking. Moreover, since the body is the pre-eminent field or domain in which Daoist practices take place, it is important to understand how the functioning of the body is located within, and synchronically affected by, the constantly transforming phases of the natural world. In the fully realized or perfected (zhen) Daoist, the boundaries between self and world are completely porous; it is as though one is fully transparent to the cosmic location in which one is situated.

This holistic or correlative way of thinking is also emblematic of Daoist texts and practices, in which words and gestures signify and actualize objects of a wholly other dimension. For instance, in Highest Clarity (*Shangqing*) Daoist texts, meditation practices developed that sought to visualize astral deities dressed in certain colored clothes, inhabiting certain organs of the body at certain times of the year. Here the energy cycles of the body are fully aligned with the seasons, the stars, and the colors in an elaborate and highly technical exercise of meditative harmonization. It is important to appreciate how this multi-dimensional all-pervasive way of thinking threads itself throughout the Daoist worldview. In this way, heavens, the Earth, and the body are woven together into the seamless fabric of the spontaneously self-creating dao.

Nature in Daoist Community

The most important form of communal Daoism is known as the Way of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshi dao*), a movement that allegedly originated with a series of revelations from the divinized Laozi to a man known as Zhang Ling in 142. We have some insight into how, historically, this communal movement functioned in its earliest days through a text the Celestial Masters adopted and transmitted, known as the *One Hundred and Eighty Precepts* (*Yibaibashi jie*). Some twenty of the precepts are directly relevant to the preservation of the natural environment, including injunctions against chopping down trees without cause, poisoning lakes and rivers, drying marshes, disturbing birds and other animals.

In answer to the question of why the earliest Daoist communities were concerned with the state of the natural environment, Kristofer Schipper has drawn the conclusion that the natural environment functioned as a kind of sanctuary, in the sense of a sacred space, and in the sense of a place of refuge from the human world. Although the *Precepts* have been replaced by other texts as the code for Daoist priests today, their influence is evident in that discussions as to the contemporary Daoist approach to nature are couched in terms of the person-within-the-world, not in terms of “nature” or “environment” as though these terms referred to some external entity or object with which we have to do. In this light the respect for the environment indicated in the *One Hundred and Eighty Precepts* indicates a respect for the life of the communal body and for the life of the individual.

Nature and the Body

From the earliest days of the Daoist tradition, the practice of nourishing the vitality of the body has been a central concern, a concern that was elaborately developed in the Daoist tradition of inner alchemy (*neidan*). The foundations of internal alchemy practices can be found in the cosmogony set forth in chapter 42 of the *Daode jing*: “Dao gives birth to One; One gives birth to Two; Two gives birth to Three; Three gives birth to the ten thousand things.” This cosmogony accounts for the gradual decay and dissipation of energy within the cosmos. The aim of the alchemist is to reverse this dissipation by reverting or countering the cosmogonic process, a process further
elaborated in terms of the cyclical mutation of yin into yang and yang into yin, as symbolized in the 64 hexagrams of the Yijing. Briefly, the aim is to arrive, through a series of purifications, at the decoction of undifferentiated yang- and yin-energy (the “Two” of the cosmogonic sequence), and to fuse these two primal energies into the undifferentiated Oneness of the original Dao.

Alchemists such as Ge Hong (283–343) had sought to arrive at this stage through an “external,” operative or laboratory alchemy (waidan) based on the use of mercury sulphide or cinnabar (HgS). In one version, cinnabar was heated seven or nine times to produce a pure form of mercury, representing pure yin energy. In a second version, mercury (pure yin) was extracted from cinnabar, and lead (pure yang) from native lead. These two were then fused together, thus reversing the cosmogonic division of One into Two. Many Daoist traditions, however, viewed laboratory alchemy as distinctly inferior to internal forms of alchemy and meditation, reflecting the overall priority of the inner landscape as the field of operations for Daoist practices. Within the landscape of the body, pure yin (mercury) is imaged as the pure energy of the kidneys (corresponding to water), and pure yang (lead) as the pure energy of the heart (corresponding to fire). The elixir is decocted in the three “cinnabar fields” (dantian) of the body. By correctly directing the essence (jing) and the qi of the body through a series of internal meditations, the adept produces an “immortal embryo,” the pure distillation of the primal energy from which the adept was created. Having been appropriately nurtured and nourished, the embryo is birthed through the head in a complete inversion of the physical birth of the adept.

This alchemical tradition embodies a seemingly contradictory attitude toward nature. On the one hand, life is seen as good and worthy of preservation, but on the other hand, this life is preserved paradoxically by reversing the process that seems to govern it. It must be remembered however, that this reversal is not to be understood as an eradication or as a wholly negative movement. Rather it has the character of a recursion.

Contemporary Daoist Cultivation

China’s rapid industrialization in the late twentieth century has led to widespread environmental degradation throughout the country. The Chinese Daoist Association issued a declaration on global ecology in 1995 that firmly placed the practices of immortality and self-cultivation in the context of the flourishing of nature: one may not cultivate oneself unless one also cultivates one’s environment. This is entirely consistent with the ancient traditions in which Daoist masters retired to the mountains to cultivate their bodies, and in which energy practices and other forms of self-cultivation pay close attention to the rhythms of nature. The recent environmental devastation has, however, made this “ecological” aspect of Daoist cultivation more urgent than ever. The declaration further proposed using traditional Daoist monasteries and hermitages located in mountain areas as bases where the environment and the body could be properly cultivated. Field research in China indicates that this proposal has met with some success as temples and their environments have been restored since the relative liberalization of religion in 1979, but paradoxically this success has come at the price of increased tourism and development in the mountain areas. The Daoist mountain complex at Mt. Qingcheng, Sichuan Province, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is not only full of tourists year round, it is also full of signs warning them to respect the natural environment.

Conclusions

It is not easy to sum up the Daoist view of nature and environment in a few swift sentences, because the tradition is so rich and complex in terms of the appropriation of nature by adepts and the metaphysical imaging of the operation of nature. There are, however, three key principles that tend to distinguish the Daoist view of nature: the surprising recursivity of nature, the practical correlativity of all dimensions of life, and the textuality of the fabric of the Dao.

The recursivity of nature means that nature is evolving in a way that continuously folds back on itself and, as it were, gathers itself up in its hands. Nature is always pregnant with itself in an irrepressible superfluity of vitality and power. This is the theoretical explanation for the fractal-like identity of microcosm and macrocosm in which the overarching patterns of creation, transformation and decay are imaged in both the tiniest and the grandest processes of the cosmos. The practice of correlativity is thus the way in which the human mind fits together the many different dimensions of life so as accurately to reflect the interlocked and interconnected trajectories of evolution (dao) that are woven together into the fabric of time. This fabric, symbolized spatially as a rotating canopy that is suspended from the central ridgepole of the cosmos, contains many different dimensions of being, but they are all made from the same qi. This vibrates in particular forms and frequencies to configure the various arrays of matter and energy in the universe, all of which resonate sympathetically with each other.

The Daoist tradition, moreover, holds that the deep mysteries of nature are available to the properly initiated adept in the form of texts and talismans that decode the very nature of the Dao for us. These texts are the symbolic revelation of the root processes of the Dao, processes that are ordinarily veiled from our understanding, and which have the appearance of magic to the uneducated. The whole of nature itself, however, may be understood as an ongoing activity of communication or dao – whose
alternate meaning is “to speak.” In this drama whose script – the script of nature – is continuously evolving, we are both privileged actors and mere fragments of self-consciousness. But this is no Hegelian drama that is aiming toward a final purpose of absolute self-communication. It is a drama that is spontaneously rewriting itself in unpredictable, marvelous and deeply mesmerizing ways.

James Miller

Further Reading

See also: Chinese Traditional Concepts of Nature; Confucianism; Zhuangzi.

Darré, Walther (1895–1953)

The man most representative of the “green” wing of National Socialism is Walther Darré, who served as Minister of Agriculture for a decade during the Third Reich. Born Richard Walther Oskar Darré on 14 July 1895 to a middle-class German family living in Buenos Aires, Argentina, at the age of 10 he was sent to finish his primary school education in Germany. He later enrolled in the German Colonial School at Witzenhausen and began his formal agricultural studies which he completed after serving in World War I.

In the 1920s Darré became involved with various associations relating to agriculture and husbandry, but generally avoided larger political affiliations. The Wandervögel phenomenon was then still prevalent, with its emphasis on rural values and interaction with the outdoors through climbing and hiking, and Darré was exposed to influences from this as well as input from agricultural collectives and sects such as the Artamanen. In tandem with their attempts to live in greater harmony with nature, many of these völkisch groups eschewed Christianity in favor of neo-heathenist ideals. While Darré shared similar anti-Christian and anti-materialist beliefs, he does not seem to have been inclined toward the mysticism or romanticism that were common in such circles. He was a strong proponent of Nordic racialism and maintained contact with groups such as the Nordic Ring that promulgated these ideas. His biological interpretation of Nordicism was not entirely synonymous with more extreme National Socialist beliefs, but instead focused on a preservationist, defensive position. Darré’s racialism was “ecological” in the sense that it was an effort to safeguard precious racial characteristics that he understood as threatened in an increasingly urbanized and unnatural world.

Darré’s two major works were *Das Bauernum als Lebensquell der nordischen Rasse* (The Peasantry as the Life-Source of the Nordic Race, 1929) and *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (A New Nobility of Blood and Soil, 1930). These present the core of his thinking, which remained unchanged over his lifetime. He maintained that the basis of a healthy racial aristocracy depended upon and drew from a thriving peasantry, whose direct link to the Earth was essential. This extended beyond pure biology when Darré extolled the “inner sense” of the Germanic peasant as a gift from the gods which could only properly develop away from the cities. These conceptions were summed up in the evocative phrase “Blut und Boden” (Blood and Soil). Despite the fact that it was originally coined by a German Socialist Party member, this slogan would become practically a cliché in the early years of the Third Reich. In Darre’s books he presents a positive vision of this rooted peasantry, and it was only in later commentaries (e.g., the brief forewords to later printings of his books) that he opportunistically added more negative and explicitly anti-Jewish remarks.

Darré began working with the National Socialists at the end of the 1920s, having gained their attention due to his influence among the farmers and the agricultural sector. Following Darré’s crucial success at garnering the peasant vote for the NSDAP, Hitler appointed him the Minister of Agriculture and Peasant Leader in June 1933 after coming to power. It was only at this point that Darré formally joined the party.

Darré quickly set about to improving conditions for farmers in the Reich. Through his efforts the Erbhofgesetz
or Hereditary Farm Law was enacted which would protect small and medium-sized farm holdings and ensure they be passed down from generation to generation within families. A Reichnährstand or National Food Estate was also formed. This was a corporatist/syndicalist entity that set quality standards for agricultural products, created direct lines of distribution, and ordained equitable prices to the benefit of the farmers. The old town of Goslar in the Harz region was declared a national “peasant capital,” and this became the seat of Darré’s operations. In addition to the large annual rallies held there, a publishing arm called Blut und Boden Verlag was formed which issued books on the importance of peasant history, culture, and racial typology. Darré edited a monthly journal, Odal (the title is a reference to the Germanic rune meaning “hereditary property” – this symbol also officially designated the Erbhöfe, or hereditary farms), that actively promoted his peasant ideology, and wrote articles during his early years in office on ecological topics as well as on the importance of small-scale farming.

With his vocal opposition toward imperialism and the Führerprinzip, Darré was not a typical NSDAP leader. In contrast to the party functionaries, he was a social visionary with a more revolutionary outlook – he leaned toward decentralization and was generally opposed to Germany waging wars of aggression, which he predicted would spell catastrophe for the peasantry. By the latter half of the 1930s increasing conflicts erupted between Darré’s staff and other factions of the government. His last significant achievement was the Entailed Estate Law of 1938. He had also begun initiating measures to promote changeovers to organic farming – a move that was perceived as reckless or unrealistic with the onset of the war. Another key party member who supported environmentally sound and holistic approaches to agriculture was Rudolf Hess, but the latter’s ill-fated solo flight to England in 1941 caused such tendencies to be looked upon with grave suspicion among other party leaders. “Biodynamic” farming methods were seen as inherently connected to Rudolf Steiner, the pedagogical theorist and mystic whose Anthroposophy Society and Waldorf schools had been officially shut down as part of the wider crackdown by the regime upon any non-aligned and potentially subversive groups; as a result, those who campaigned for such methods (including some of Darré’s staff) were persecuted. In an effort to downplay associations to Steiner’s “biodynamic” practices, Darré advocated the use of the term “organic farming,” which has since become commonplace.

Increasingly isolated from the rest of the party leadership, Darré was demoted in 1942 from his position as minister and replaced by a staff member more loyal to Hitler. Although some of his ideas found their way into the doctrines of the SS, Darré never regained his influence on national policies; by this time Germany was in full war-production mode and the proponents of standard industrialized agriculture and artificial fertilizers had won out.

After the war, Darré underwent two trials and was eventually sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment, primarily for his involvement in the Race and Settlement Office which managed deportations and relocations of non-German farmers in areas of occupied Poland. Given an early release in 1950 on account of failing health, he spent his final years authoring articles on his old themes of the peasantry and the necessity of organic farming. He died on 6 September 1953 and is buried in Goslar.

Notwithstanding his clashes with other government leaders, Darré was generally a popular figure during his years as Minister of Agriculture. His approaches often met with positive interest from abroad, and he has also been cited as an influence on the “Soil Association” organic farming movement that was blossoming in Britain at the time. More recently his legacy has received renewed attention due to the work of ecology historian Anna Bramwell. There are also many sympathizers who see him as a role model for an alternative and pragmatically oriented “Green Nazi,” a racial revolutionary who is opposed to the ill health and alienation caused by the excesses of modern capitalism in an industrialized, urbanized, and globalized modern world.

Michael Moynihan

Further Reading
See also: ATWA; Evola, Julius; Fascism; Heathenry – Asatru; Odinism; Steiner, Rudolf – and Anthroposophy.

Darwin, Charles (1809–1822)

Charles Darwin, the British naturalist and author of various books and essays on natural history, ranks among the most influential scientists of all time. His theories regarding the evolution and the distribution of species, articulated in On the Origin of Species (1859), revolutionized biology during the nineteenth century, and have exerted considerable sway over a wide range of scientific
and other intellectual activities ever since. Arguably, no modern concepts of nature have been as widely influential, or as controversial, as Darwin’s.

**Darwin’s Views of Nature**
Although the study of nature made great strides in the century before Darwin, attempts to develop a systematic theory of organic development, such as Jean Baptiste Lamarck’s assertion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, had been poorly received. Therefore, in many ways the natural history Darwin encountered at the start of his career was grounded in theological assumptions. It was widely held that God had directly created a natural realm that was abundant, benevolent, and stable over time. The tasks of natural history were to describe and catalog natural phenomena, and in doing so to glorify nature’s Creator by recognizing the marvelous ingenuity that went into its design. Darwin would undo the cozy relationship between science and theology by developing a thoroughly naturalistic explanation of evolutionary development. Such has been the influence and explanatory power of his work that subsequent generations of scientists would speak of their work as being grounded in Darwinian assumptions.

Darwin built his natural philosophy from various sources: his lifelong passion for observing natural phenomena, established scientific traditions (particularly in botany, zoology, and geology), and assorted ideas derived from his reading in philosophy, economics, and literature. Although subsequently referred to as “Darwinism” (i.e., as if a single theory), according to historian Ernst Mayer, Darwin’s mature thought accounted for two distinct biological processes, transformation in time and diversification in space, using a “bundle of theories” (Mayr 1991: 35–7). Taken as a whole, Darwin’s “bundle” emphasizes dynamism, spontaneity, and novelty alongside the cruelty of natural process wherein the early death of many individuals, and even entire species, was inevitable.

First and foremost, Darwin argued that nature was neither static nor subject to repeating cycles, but in a constant process of change. Drawing upon recent geological theories, he assumed that the Earth was much older than previously thought, perhaps by many orders of magnitude. This allowed nature the time to work through processes of change that were incrementally slow. He next asserted that similar species could be traced to common ancestors, or more generally, that all organisms were descended from a few simple species. This meant that the history of life looked like a branching tree—a process that started with a few forms that subsequently diversified. Darwin felt that variations in organic beings were rather small, but accumulated changes wrought over time could bring about conspicuous change, or transmutation. He also believed that the multiplication of species, and thus the plenitude of nature, was driven by the tendency of all species to produce more offspring that could be supported by the food supply and space in a given area.

Darwin’s most daring, and subsequently controversial concept was natural selection. He argued that because of various competitive pressures there was a constant “struggle for existence” among individuals of a species. Some individuals, because of slight variations that allow them to better compete for resources and mates, are better able to produce healthy offspring and thus are naturally selected to survive. In this, Darwin made an analogy to “artificial selection,” or the way that breeders of animals and gardeners in domestic situations culled individuals with undesirable traits and promoted the breeding of individuals with desirable ones. He also recognized the influence of other factors such as “sexual selection,” or the way that animals choose their mates.

Although immediately recognized as a set of theories to be reckoned with, Darwinism was not immediately or completely accepted within the scientific community. For example, many who accepted the idea of organic evolution remained skeptical of Darwin’s mechanism of natural selection and posed alternatives such as neo-Lamarckianism. Thus it took genetics and population biology in the early twentieth century, the so-called “modern synthesis,” to secure Darwin’s position as the major theorist of modern biology.

**Darwin’s Religious Views**
Darwin’s religious views have been the subject of scholarly and public interest from the time he became famous in the mid-nineteenth century. His voluminous paper trail (including published works, correspondences, notebooks, and other materials) can both assist and vex this line of inquiry in that it offers up evidence that is simultaneously intimate, detailed, and ambiguous. Darwin had free-thinkers and religious dissenters in his family tree, notably his deist-evolutionist grandfather Erasmus, but as a youth he was exposed to, and seems to have accepted, a good deal of prevailing Anglican theology. As a young man, he read the works of natural theologians, and also studied with, and greatly admired, two devout Anglican naturalists, John Henslow and Adam Sedgwick. Darwin even considered a religious career for a while, in part, because it would have afforded him time to study natural history. Writings from his famous trip aboard the H.M.S. Beagle, show the influence of natural theology. For example, while observing the rich variety of life in tropical rain-forests, he described feelings of “wonder, admiration, and devotion which fill and elevate the mind” (Darwin 1958: 91).

After returning to England, Darwin began to rethink some of the reigning assumptions about natural history that dominated his era. In particular, he began to question whether the explanation for the “economy of nature” proffered by natural theology (that God had created
everything in its place) was intellectually satisfying. In searching for an alternative, Darwin was encouraged by Hume, who had challenged the design argument in his famous *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*; Comte, who felt that theological thought should be replaced by a “positive” philosophy that emphasized scientific laws; Wordsworth’s poetry and prose, which encouraged intellectuals boldly to rethink the relationship between humanity and nature; and Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population*, which argued that natural populations are irreducibly subject to food shortages that lead directly to struggle and competition. In regards to the last issue, some scholars argue that Darwin, unable to square notions of a good God with the centrality of pain and suffering in the natural process, gave up theism in any meaningful sense during or soon after the development of his theories in the late 1830s.

Others locate his apostasy in later life. James Moore, for example, argues that Darwin only gives up on the basic elements of Christian theology after the death of his daughter in 1851, for reasons related to his bitterness over the doctrine of eternal damnation. And still others find in Darwin’s public and personal writings a lifetime struggle with the concept of God—a theological “muddle,” that wavers between theism, deism, and doubt. Intellectual historians such as Dov Ospovat argue that a type of rational theism underwrote Darwin’s naturalism well into his career. And biographers like Moore note that many members of Darwin’s immediate family and social propriety endorsed religious belief. Clearly, Darwin is ready to call himself an “agnostic” in his *Autobiography* written in the late 1870s. The term, coined by his colleague T.H. Huxley, expresses a formal and perhaps irresolvable feeling of doubt about foundational questions such as the existence of God.

Also noteworthy were Darwin’s later writings that tried to put religious belief in evolutionary perspective. In his main work on human evolution, *The Descent of Man* (1871), he argued that religion (like language and morality) probably first arose as a by-product of the development of the human mind. Building from faculty psychology, Darwin assumes that mental attributes, like limbs or instincts, emerged because they gave adaptive advantage to their hosts. The earliest type of religion, “belief in the unseen or spiritual agencies,” emerged when basic human mental faculties of “imagination, wonder, and curiosity, together with some power of reasoning” had developed enough to speculate crudely about the surrounding world and the nature of existence. Later more elaborate systems of gods and monotheism developed out of these basic attributes. Although Darwin recognizes the complexity of religion and calls belief in an Omnipotent God “ennobling,” he is also quick to point out how religion often got misdirected into superstition and barbaric practices. Cursory as these speculations were, they set the tone for later thinkers, notably the sociobiologists, who argue that certain ethical ideals, such as altruism, and collective religious activity can be understood in terms of natural selection and adaptive advantage.

**General Reactions to Darwinism**

As might be anticipated for such a major figure, attempts to situate Darwin’s views of nature into a wider intellectual framework have varied, and these diverse reactions have contributed to Darwin’s decidedly mixed reception in religious quarters. Some interpreters regarded Darwin as the scientist who decisively extended the mechanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment to the biological realm. In doing so, according to scholars such as Michael Ghiselin and Richard Lewontin, he was the key figure in advancing the anti-metaphysical positivism of modern science and the general cause of secular thought. Critics of these tendencies, such as cultural critic Jacques Barzun, accordingly, decry Darwinism as a potent form of reductionism and materialism that contributes to the disenchantment of the natural world.

Historian Daniel Worster regards Darwin’s ideas as a major impetus to modern ecological thinking and thus the reassertion of an essentially organic view of nature. Darwinism has also been celebrated for its ability to unify broad fields of knowledge and inquiry. Philosopher Ernst Cassirer saw in Darwinism a biological version of the idea of universal historical development that elsewhere had more metaphysical (Hegel) and political (Marx) manifestations. Conversely, others find in Darwin’s work a stark recognition of the precariousness of life and the primacy of “chance and necessity” in cosmic history. For some, notably philosopher Jacques Monad, this has been a liberating insight, and an escape from the subjective illusions and teleological views of natural order of previous eras. Many intellectuals, however, have echoed historian Bert Loewenberg’s assessment that Darwinism carries a profoundly unsettling message of randomness and purposelessness, and thus contributes to the modern sense of angst and pessimism.

Political evaluations have found ideological implications in Darwinism; however these have varied considerably. Many on the left saw in the general idea of evolution, particularly when linked to the idea of social progress, a mandate for reform, even revolution. On the other hand, other leftist critics regard Darwinism as a kind “natural” apologetics for Victorian notions of individualism, marketplace competition, and other forms of social coercion and thus highly suspicious. Often these criticisms will echo anarchist Peter Kropotkin in rejecting Darwin’s emphasis on the brutal struggle in favor of a naturalism that emphasizes synergy and cooperative effort. Conservatives have been mixed as well. Many condemned Darwin for undermining traditional social and religious institutions, whereas others, notably American social theorist William
Graham Sumner, used Darwinism to legitimize laissez faire free-market capitalism.

In terms of literary analysis, Stanley Edgar Hyman regards Darwin as the author of a cosmic tragedy wherein all struggles against all, and most of the characters die painfully and young. In contrast, literary critic William Scheik and others recognize traces of a cosmic epic in Darwin’s work, a sweeping narrative whose final act emphasizes the emergence of a self-aware humanity that better comprehends its history and controls its own destiny.

Religious Reactions to Darwinism

Darwin’s ideas directly challenged one of the bulwarks of theistic theology, the design argument, which held that the intricacies and beautiful structures found in the natural world were evidences of the creative action of an intelligent and omnipotent deity. As opposed to the action of an external power (a supernatural entity that intervened into history and arranged matter directly) Darwinism implied that forces resident within nature, the “laws” of biology, working over a vast time scale, were capable of producing the variety and intricacy of the natural world. Was “God” necessary to this process? Darwin himself was ambiguous on this issue. Although he used language like “Creator” in his works, notably in the first edition of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), many regarded supernaturalism superfluous to his natural philosophy. Darwinism also challenged the centrality of a humanity created in “the image” of God and given dominion over the natural world by arguing that human beings were simply another type of primate with no special claims or status. In ethics as well, Darwin’s focus on struggle, fitness, and reproductive success seemed to give sanction to aggressive, even violent, impulses at the expense of classic virtues such as love, benevolence, and selflessness. Finally, Darwinism figured prominently in a larger intellectual revolution that historicized scriptural traditions and, for many, threatened their authority as molders of culture. Thus, since their introduction, Darwin’s main ideas have been understood as potent and pointed challenges to religious thought.

The major Western traditions have responded in markedly diverse ways to Darwinism. Some groups have tolerated and assimilated evolutionary views, in part or in total. These include liberal and moderate Protestant denominations, most Jewish groups, and, after a long period of suspicion, Roman Catholicism. Also many of the alternative religions of the Western tradition, various esoteric, occult, and New Age groups, have adopted evolutionary thinking. Many of those who accept evolution, however, maintain teleological and theistic beliefs that are arguably extraneous to Darwin’s scientific views. Other religious groups have utterly rejected Darwinism as irreligious and immoral. In the United States, anti-evolutionism has been a conspicuous feature of the conservative wing of Protestantism since the latter half of the nineteenth century. Helped by famed orator and politician, William Jennings Bryan, various fundamentalist groups mounted an aggressive anti-evolution campaign in the wake of World War I that culminated in the Scopes Trial of 1925. Post-Scopes, anti-evolutionists have continued to challenge textbooks that include Darwinism, press for equal time in school curricula for biblically based interpretations of natural history, and disseminate alternatives to Darwinism such as creation science. Popularly, the anti-evolution movement has actually grown in strength over that time, and some current polls indicate that 45 percent of the American population utterly rejects the idea of evolution. In other major world religions, comparable patterns have developed. Thus various attempts to reconcile evolutionary thought with, for example, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, must be measured against antimodernist, traditionalist, and fundamentalist movements that tend to view Darwinism as a subversive “Western” influence that denies supernaturalism or other traditional beliefs.

Liste Dalton

Further Reading


See also: Creationism and Creation Science; Malthus, Thomas Robert; Science; Scopes Trial.

Death and Afterlife in Robinson Jeffers and Edward Abbey

The poem “Vulture” by Robinson Jeffers expresses a religious perspective on death and afterlife that is pervasive in contemporary green spirituality. In it, Jeffers reflects on an occasion when, while lying on his back in a desert canyon in the Southwestern United States, he was once mistaken for carrion by a vulture.

Vulture

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside
Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture wheeling high up in heaven,
And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit narrowing,
I understood then
That I was under inspection. I lay death-still and heard the flight feathers
Whistle above me and make their circle and come nearer . . .
. . . how beautiful he looked, gliding down
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away in the sea-light
over the precipice. I tell you solemnly
That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by that beak and
become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes –
What a sublime end of one’s body, what an ensky-ment; what a life after death.

Another author with a deep love of the desert was the novelist Edward Abbey. Abbey’s reflections on death are reminiscent of Jeffers, whom he admired. For Abbey, an authentic death is unaccompanied by life-prolonging technology. It is when the body is left unpolluted so that it can properly reunite with and nurture the Earth. Reflecting on a tourist who died alone in the desert, he had good luck – I envy him the manner of his going: to die alone, on a rock under the sun at the brink of the unknown, like a wolf, like a great bird, seems to me very good fortune indeed. To die in the open, under the sky, far from the insolent interference of leech and priest, before this desert vastness opening like a window onto eternity – that surely was an overwhelming stroke of good luck . . . [Today], I think of the dead man under the juniper on the edge of the world, seeing him as the vulture would have seen him, far below and from a great distance. And I see myself through those cruel eyes . . . I feel myself sinking into the landscape, fixed in place like a stone, like a tree, a small motionless shape of vague outline, desert-colored, and with the wings of imagination look down at myself through the eyes of the bird, watching a human figure that becomes smaller, smaller in the receding landscape as the bird rises into the evening (1968: 186, 190).

In their own ways Jeffers and Abbey expressed their sense of belonging to a sacred Earth and a feeling of reverence toward the processes of life and death. In so doing they also rejected the prevalent monotheisms of their day, which obviate the fear of death through belief in supernatural rescue from it.

This kind of attitude, which sacralizes a natural death and views artifice in death as a desecrating act, can be found in a wide variety of contemporary green subcultures. It is expressed in conversation, poetry, art, and song. It has also been implemented through burial practices perceived to be natural. Before his death in 1989, for example, in his last act of desert consecration, Abbey arranged for his body, unpolluted by toxic embalming fluids, to be spirited away and illegally buried in his beloved, sacred desert. In death Abbey would nourish and return to his beloved and sacred desert landscape.

Bron Taylor

Further Reading


Deep Ecology

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (b. 1912) coined the term “Deep Ecology” in 1972 to express the idea that nature has intrinsic value, namely, value apart from its usefulness to human beings, and that all life forms should be allowed to flourish and fulfill their evolutionary destinies. Naess invented the rubric to contrast such views with what he considered to be “shallow” environmentalism, namely, environmental concern rooted only in concern for humans. The term has since come to signify both its advocates’ deeply felt spiritual connections to the Earth’s living systems and ethical obligations to protect them, as well as the global environmental movement that bears its name. Moreover, some deep ecologists posit close connections between certain streams in world religions and deep ecology.

Naess and most deep ecologists, however, trace their perspective to personal experiences of connection to and wholeness in wild nature, experiences which are the ground of their intuitive, affective perception of the sacredness and interconnection of all life. Those who have experienced such a transformation of consciousness (experiencing what is sometimes called one’s “ecological self” in these movements) view the self not as separate from and superior to all else, but rather as a small part of the entire cosmos. From such experience flows the conclusion that all life and even ecosystems themselves have inherent or intrinsic value – that is, value independently of whether they are useful to humans.

Although Naess coined the term, many deep ecologists credit the American ecologist Aldo Leopold with succinctly expressing such a deep ecological worldview in his now famous “Land Ethic” essay, which was published posthumously in A Sand County Almanac in 1948. Leopold argued that humans ought to act only in ways designed to protect the long-term flourishing of all ecosystems and each of their constituent parts.

Many deep ecologists call their perspective alternatively “ecocentrism” or “biocentrism” (to convey, respectively, an ecosystem-centered or life-centered value system). As importantly, they believe humans have so degraded the biosphere that its life-sustaining systems are breaking down. They trace this tragic situation to anthropocentrism (human-centeredness), which values nature exclusively in terms of its usefulness to humans. Anthropocentrism, in turn, is viewed as grounded in Western religion and philosophy, which many deep ecologists believe must be rejected (or a deep ecological transformation of consciousness within them must occur) if humans are to learn to live sustainably on the Earth.

Thus, many deep ecologists believe that only by “resacralizing” our perceptions of the natural world can we put ecosystems above narrow human interests and learn to live harmoniously with the natural world, thereby averting ecological catastrophe. It is a common perception within the deep ecology movement that the religions of indigenous cultures, the world’s remnant and newly revitalized or invented pagan religions, and religions originating in Asia (especially Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism) provide superior grounds for ecological ethics, and greater ecological wisdom, than do Occidental religions. Theologians such as Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry, however, have shown that Western religions such as Christianity may be interpreted in ways largely compatible with the deep ecology movement.

Although Naess coined the umbrella term, which is now a catchphrase for most non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, a number of Americans were also criticizing anthropocentrism and laying the foundation for the movement’s ideas at about the same time as Naess was coining the term. One crucial event early in deep ecology’s evolution was the 1974 “Rights of Non-Human Nature” conference held at a college in Claremont, California. Inspired by Christopher Stone’s influential 1972 law article (and subsequent book) Should Trees Have Standing? – Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects, the conference drew many of those who would become the intellectual architects of deep ecology. These included George Sessions who, like Naess, drew on Spinoza’s pantheism, later co-authoring Deep Ecology with Bill Devall; Gary Snyder, whose remarkable, Pulitzer prize-winning Turtle Island proclaimed the value of place-based spiritualities, indigenous cultures, and animistic perceptions, ideas that would become central within deep ecology subcultures; and the late Paul Shepard (d. 1996), who in The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game, and subsequent works such as Nature and Madness and the posthumously published Coming Back to the Pleistocene, argued that foraging societies were ecologically superior to and emotionally healthier than agricultural societies. Shepard and Snyder especially provided a cosmogony that explained humanity’s fall from a pristine, natural paradise. Also extremely influential was Edward Abbey’s Desert Solitaire, which viewed the desert as a sacred place uniquely able to evoke in people a proper, non-anthropocentric understanding of the value of nature. By the early 1970s the above figures put in place the intellectual foundations of deep ecology.
Deep Ecology Platform

Formulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions in April 1984, during a camping trip in Death Valley, California, the Deep Ecology Platform (DEP) seeks to be agreeable to environmentalists from many different persuasions. Individuals may derive the DEP from their own ultimate premises and ecosophies (a term Naess coined for “ecological philosophy”), Buddhism, Christianity, Spinozism, or ecofeminism, or they may arrive at the DEP as a result of deep questioning that moves from particular situations toward more general norms and consequences. The DEP has been criticized, for example, by those who fear that its fourth plank, regarding population reduction, could be used to justify draconian birth-control methods. In general, however, the DEP has won assent from many environmentalists.

The eight-point platform may be summarized in this way:

1. Human and nonhuman life alike have inherent value.
2. Richness and diversity of life contribute to realizing these values, and are themselves valuable.
3. Humans have no right to reduce richness or diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Human life can flourish with a substantial reduction in human population, which is needed for the flourishing of nonhuman life.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is already excessive and is worsening.
6. Economic, technological, and ideological policies must be changed, in a way that leads to states of affairs deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change must involve appreciating the inherent value of all life, rather than continually increasing the material living standard.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to implement the necessary changes.

Michael E. Zimmerman

A corresponding movement soon followed and grew rapidly, greatly influencing grassroots environmentalism, especially in Europe, North America, and Australia. Shortly after forming in 1980, for example, leaders of the politically radical Earth First! movement (the exclamation point is part of its name) learned about Deep Ecology, and immediately embraced it as their own spiritual philosophy. Meanwhile, the green lifestyle-focused movement known as bioregionalism also began to embody a deep ecology worldview. Given their natural affinities it was not long before bioregionalism became the prevailing social philosophy among deep ecologists.

As a philosophy and as a movement, deep ecology spread in many ways. During the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, Bill Devall and George Sessions published their influential book, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*; Warwick Fox in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* linked deep ecology with transpersonal psychology; David Rothenberg translated and edited Arne Naess’s important work, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*; and Michael E. Zimmerman interpreted Martin Heidegger as a forerunner of deep ecology, thus helping to spark a trend of calling upon contemporary European thinkers for insight into environmental issues. Many deep ecologists have complained, however, that the postmodern thinking imported from Europe has undermined the status of “nature,” defined by deep ecologists as a whole that includes but exists independently of humankind.

Radical environmentalist activists, including the American co-founder of Earth First!, Dave Foreman, and the Australian co-founder of the Rainforest Information Centre, John Seed, beginning in the early 1980s, conducted “road shows” to transform consciousness and promote environmental action. Such events usually involve speeches and music designed to evoke or reinforce peoples’ felt connections to nature, and inspires action. Often, they also include photographic presentations contrasting intact and revered ecosystems with degraded and defiled lands.

Some activists have designed ritual processes to further deepen participants’ spiritual connections to nature and political commitment to defend it. Joanna Macy and a number of others, including John Seed, for example, developed a ritual process known as the Council of All Beings, which endeavors to get activists to see the world from the perspective of nonhuman entities. Since the early 1980s, traveling widely around the world, Seed has labored especially hard spreading deep ecology through this and other newly invented ritual processes. The movement has also been disseminated through the writings of its architects (often reaching college students in environmental studies courses); through journalists reporting on deep ecology-inspired environmental protests and direct action resistance; and through the work of novelists, poets, musicians, and other artists, who promote in their work deep ecological perceptions. Recent expressions in ecotourism can be seen, for example, in the “Deep Ecology Elephant Project,” which includes tours in both Asia and Africa, and suggest that elephants and other wildlife have much to teach their human kin.

Deep Ecology has been criticized by people representing social ecology, socialist ecology, liberal democracy, and ecofeminism. Murray Bookchin, architect of the anarchistic green social philosophy known as Social Ecology, engaged in sometimes vituperative attacks on
deep ecology and its activist vanguard, Earth First!, for being intellectually incoherent, ignorant of socioeconomic factors in environmental problems, and given to mysticism and misanthropy. Bookchin harshly criticized Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman for suggesting that starvation was a solution to human overpopulation and environmental deterioration. Later, however, Bookchin and Foreman engaged in a more constructive dialogue. Meanwhile, socialist ecologists maintain that deep ecology overemphasizes cultural factors (worldviews, religion, philosophy) in diagnosing the roots of, and solutions to, environmental problems, thereby minimizing the roles played by the social, political, and economic factors inherent in global capitalism.

Liberal democrats such as the French scholar Luc Ferry (1995) maintain that deep ecology is incapable of providing guidance in moral decision making. Insofar as deep ecology fails adequately to recognize that human life has more value than other life forms, he argues, it promotes “ecofascism,” namely the sacrifice of individual humans for the benefit of the ecological whole, what Leopold termed “the land.” (Ecofascism in its most extreme form links the racial purity of a people to the well-being of the nation’s land; calls for the removal or killing of non-native peoples; and may also justify profound individual and collective sacrifice of its own people for the health of the natural environment.) Many environmental philosophers have defended Leopold’s land ethic, and by extension, deep ecology, against such charges, most notably one of the pioneers of contemporary environmental philosophy, J. Baird Callicott.

Although some ecofeminists indicate sympathy with deep ecology’s basic goal, namely, protecting natural phenomena from human destruction, others have sharply criticized deep ecology. Male, white, and middle-class deep ecologists, Ariel Salleh maintains, ignore how patriarchal beliefs, attitudes, practices, and institutions help to generate environmental problems. Val Plumwood and Jim Cheney criticize deep ecology’s idea of expanding the self so as to include and thus to have a basis for protecting nonhuman phenomena. This “ecological self” allegedly constitutes a totalizing view that obliterates legitimate distinctions between self and other. Moreover, Plumwood argues, deep ecology unwisely follows the rationalist tradition in basing moral decisions on “impartial identification,” a practice that does not allow for the highly particular attachments that often motivate environmentalists and indigenous people alike to care for local places.

Warwick Fox has replied that impartial and wider identification does not cancel out particular or personal attachments, but instead, puts them in the context of more encompassing concerns that are otherwise ignored, as when for example concern for one’s family blinds one to concerns about concerns of the community. Fox adds that deep ecology criticizes the ideology – anthropocentrism – that has always been used to by social agents to legitimate oppression of groups regarded as sub- or nonhuman. While modern liberation movements have sought to include more and more people into the class of full humans, such movements have typically not criticized anthropocentrism as such. Even a fully egalitarian society, in other words, could continue to use anthropocentrism to justify exploiting the nonhuman realm.

In response to the claim that deep ecology is, or threatens to be, a totalizing worldview that excludes alternatives and that – ironically – threatens cultural diversity, Arne Naess responds that, to the contrary, deep ecology is constituted by multiple perspectives or “ecosophies” (ecological philosophies) and is compatible with a wide range of religious perspectives and philosophical orientations.

Another critic, best-selling author Ken Wilber, argues that by portraying humankind as merely one strand in the web of life, deep ecology adheres to a one-dimensional, or “flatland” metaphysics (1995). Paradoxically, by asserting that material nature constitutes the whole of which humans are but a part, deep ecologists agree in important respects with modern naturalism, according to which humankind is a clever animal capable of and justified in dominating other life forms in the struggle for survival and power. According to Wilber, a “deeper” ecology would discern that the cosmos is hierarchically ordered in terms of complexity, and that respect and compassion are due all phenomena because they are manifestations of the divine.

In the last analysis, for Naess, it is personal experiences of a profound connection with nature and related perceptions of nature’s inherent worth or sacredness, which give rise to deep ecological commitments. Naess believes such commitments may be derived from a wide variety of ultimate premises, religious and philosophical, so as to form a particular ecosophy. Ecosophies that identify themselves as part of the Deep Ecology Movement are consistent with the eight-point, Deep Ecology Platform, which Naess developed with George Sessions in 1984.

Although controversial and contested, both internally and among its proponents and its critics, deep ecology is an increasingly influential green spirituality and ethics that is universally recognized in environmentalist enclaves, and increasingly outside of such subcultures, as a radical movement challenging the conventional, usually anthropocentric ways humans deal with the natural world. Its influence in environmental philosophy has been profound, for even those articulating alternative environmental ethics are compelled to respond to its insistence that nature has intrinsic and even sacred value, and its challenge to anthropocentrism.

Its greatest influence, however, may be through the diverse forms of environmental activism that it inspires, action that increasingly shapes world environmental politics. Not only is deep ecology the prevailing spirituality of bioregionalism and radical environmentalism; it also
undergirds the International Forum on Globalization and the Ruckus Society, two organizations playing key roles in the anti-globalization protests that erupted in 1999. Both of these groups are generously funded by the San Francisco-based Foundation for Deep Ecology, and other foundations, which share deep ecological perceptions.

Such developments reflect a growing impulse toward institutionalization, which is designed to promote deep ecology and intensify environmental action. There are now Institutes for Deep Ecology in London, England and Occidental, California, a Sierra Nevada Deep Ecology Institute in Nevada City, California, and dozens of other organizations in the United States, Oceania, and Europe, which provide ritual-infused experiences in deep ecology and training for environmental activists. It is not, however, the movement’s institutions, but instead the participants’ love for the living Earth, along with their widespread apocalypticism (their conviction that the world as we know it is imperiled or doomed), that give the movement its urgent passion to promote earthen spirituality, sustainable living, and environmental activism.

Bron Taylor
Michael Zimmerman

Further Reading

Deep Ecology, Institute for

If religion is “that dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms [and] ultimate concerns, as David Chidester (1987: 4) has argued, then the Institute for Deep Ecology (IDE) can be viewed as a religious movement that reveres the Earth and promotes environmental activism in its defense. The Institute’s website states that deep ecology is “a philosophy based on our sacred relationship with Earth and all beings; an international movement for a viable future; a path for self-realization; (and) a compass for daily action.” Without specifically defining what is meant by “sacred,” the site indicates that it seeks to “honor spirit” by acknowledging that the relationship between human-kind and the natural world is a matter of ultimate concern and that to speak of the interdependence of all beings in the natural world is to engage in a description of ultimate reality.

Such understandings undergird the organization’s mission to promote “well-being of the whole web of life.” In 2002 the Institute’s website stated that it does this through ecological values and actions. At our core is a recognition of and reverence for the interdependence and inherent value of all life. To nourish these values in ourselves and the world, we provide opportunities for inquiry and practice through workshops, publications, and support networks. We seek to encourage and empower people to do good work in their home communities.

These intentions lead to actions, some of which have a marked ritual nature (such as the Council of All Beings), and are designed to foster awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, and to derive promote strategic environmental action.

The Institute was initially co-founded in 1992 by Fran and Joanna Macy, in close association with Bill Devall, Stephanie Kaza, Elias Amidon, Elizabeth Roberts and others, and is situated in Boulder, Colorado. A 1993 brochure advertising its first Summer School provided the following description:

The Institute for Deep Ecology Education . . . sponsors regional and national trainings, consults on deep ecology curriculum and programs, and works to build coalitions among educators, activists, and others involved in this work. Its goal is to bring the deep ecology perspective to the environmental debates of our time.

By 1996 the organization had moved to Occidental, California, shortening its name to the Institute for Deep Ecology. In its Spring 1998 newsletter, the Institute’s description stated:

The Institute for Deep Ecology (IDE) advances a world view based upon humanity’s fundamental interdependence with all life forms – a philosophy commonly known as deep ecology. IDE seeks to heal the contemporary alienation from self, community, and the earth by encouraging a fundamental shift in the way we experience nature and respond to the environmental crisis.

The Institute provides transformative, action-oriented educational resources to a diverse constituency. In particular, IDE hosts trainings that bring community organizers, educators, psychotherapists, clergy, and others together with a large, multifaceted faculty of prominent environmentalists.

This second description reflects a shift toward experiential work. In addition, certain therapeutic claims are made concerning the work of the Institute (“to heal the contemporary alienation from self, community, and the Earth . . .”). In these shifts, it is possible to detect the influence of ecopsychology, and also, a more explicit articulation of the spirituality common within many deep ecological groups around the world.

For the first several years, the Institute sponsored workshops and trainings in deep ecology. Many of the trainings featured various teachers of deep ecology or environmental activists who ascribed to the principles of deep ecology. In the late 1990s, the Institute went through a self-evaluation process that resulted in a shift from small, workshop-styled trainings to larger conferences.
Deere, Phillip (1926–1985)

The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of Native American traditions, particularly a focused Mother Earth spirituality. One of the most significant leaders in native America who fostered and guided this resurgence was the Muskogee elder Phillip Deere. He was born into poverty, was a carpenter by trade, and became internationally recognized as a spiritual leader, civil and human rights activist, oral historian and storyteller, elder statesman, spellbinding orator and traditional healer. His people, once part of the great Creek Confederacy, had been forced to move in the nineteenth century from the Southeastern U.S. to the “Indian Territory,” now the state of Oklahoma, but retained their Earth-related spirituality.

Although he had little formal education, Phillip Deere was literate and of a profound intellect. He had a prodigious memory in which he retained prayers and healing chants in Old Muskogee, creation stories and the ancient migration legend of his people’s history in Muskogee and English, and federal and state governments’ treaty provisions in English. He was a Methodist preacher for a time and learned biblical stories and teachings, but returned to traditional Muskogee ways.

Phillip Deere’s spiritual calling kept him poor. In the Muskogee tradition, one who is gifted by the Great Mystery (the Creator Spirit) with healing powers is required to care for peoples’ needs, no matter the personal cost. The healer had to set aside their usual employment whenever necessary to respond to a request for healing, without any expectation of remuneration and without consideration of the petitioner’s ethnic or economic background; post-healing gifts, voluntarily offered, could be accepted from the person cured or their family. Consequently, Deere lived on allotted land in an unfinished home he was gradually building, cooking and heating with a wood stove, using outdoor plumbing. Near his dwelling was the open-walled roundhouse, with its central fire, which he had built for sacred ceremonies. As a traditional healer he learned chants and the names of herbs in Old Muskogee, a language not understood even by the traditional people who spoke Muskogee as their first language. He knew 424 healing chants in Old Muskogee: each chant containing a symptom of illness, the name of the healing herb to treat that symptom, and a prayer to the Great Mystery to make the healing ceremony efficacious. Healers were not allowed to use their powers to help themselves.

Although native to Okemah, Oklahoma, Phillip Deere traveled throughout the world to offer spiritual insights, support for native peoples’ treaty rights, and concrete proposals for the promotion of human rights and egalitarian, respectful relationships among all peoples. He was a founder of the Traditional Youths and Elders Circle, and served as the primary spiritual guide for the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) recognized by the United Nations. In the latter capacity, he traveled in the spring to participate in the annual sessions of the United Nations International Human Rights Commission held in Geneva, Switzerland at the Palace of Nations. He spoke there about care for Mother Earth, and called for redress for injustices suffered by indigenous peoples of the Americas.

In his teachings, Phillip Deere integrated a sense of the sacred with concrete concern for people, all living beings and Mother Earth. He taught that the Great Mystery, when bringing about the creation, instilled certain “natural laws” within it that governed it as a whole and guided each individual creature:

In the beginning when the earth was created, when everything came about, everything was given...
original instructions of life and everything followed
those instructions of life. The earth has its duties to
perform, the sun, the moon, the stars. Everything
was given instructions of life. And the trees have
never failed to follow those instructions. They have
never made a mistake. The rivers have never made a
mistake. Every plant, every animal, every bird, every
fish have never made a mistake. They still follow
those original instructions of life (Interview by
author, 1984).

Phillip Deere taught that people should be aware of and
appreciative for what Earth provides, recognizing that
although they have a spiritual dimension to their lives,
they must also care for the natural home that is their
earthly dwelling:

We cannot say that “I am just a pilgrim passing
through.” We are the caretakers of this land and we
are part of this creation. So we must respect Mother
Earth.

We believe in natural laws of love, peace and
respect. We learned this thousands of years ago and
this was the life of our people. When we destroy
anything within the creation, we feel that we destroy
ourselves . . . So we must preserve what we have . . .
We have felt ourselves to be a part of the creation:
not superiors, not the rulers of the creation, but only
part of the creation. If we understand those natural
ways, natural laws of love, peace and respect, we
will be able to get along with everyone. We will
learn to love and share with everyone (Interview by
author, 1984).

Deere taught that spiritual people must be conscious of
their responsibilities to the Creator and grateful that this
Great Mystery is solicitous of them as a loving parent,
called Father in the Christian tradition; and they must be
conscious of their responsibilities to, and grateful for the
nurturing of, Mother Earth:

When we learned about Christianity we heard about
the Father. We learned to pray to the Father and in
the churches every Sunday we heard about Father.
To this day we still hear about Father. But we never
hear anything about Mother . . . But every Indian
knows what you mean when you say, “Mother
Earth.” Traditional people know what you’re talking
about . . . We must all learn to say “Mother” as well
as we say “our Father.” And in this way of life we
will have balance (Interview by author, 1984).

The balance that Phillip Deere called for includes the
understanding that spirituality is not something reserved
only for a part of one’s week; it must permeate every
moment:

Native religion to us is a way of life. That religion is
based upon this creation and its sacredness. In this
religion every day was a sacred day to us. Religion
did not take place just Saturdays or Sundays. Every
day of our life was a holy day (Interview by author,
1984).

The Muskogee elder Phillip Deere, who walked gently
on the Earth and respected all of her life forms as well as
her being, lived a way of life related to all creation, and
encountered the Great Mystery along that way. When in
his company, people sensed that they were in the presence
of a spiritual leader who walked with the Spirit, a holy
man who not only taught about spirituality but lived con-
ected to its source and to all creatures. When he died,
Phillip Deere was mourned throughout the Americas and
Europe by people inspired by his words and made whole
from his healing touch.

John Hart

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See also: Mother Earth; Traditional Ecological Knowledge
among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

Deism

Deism is a theological position that upholds a belief in God
as a creator of the world, but rejects the concept of divine
revelation (including miracles and supernatural events). More
broadly, Deism refers to a cluster of philosophical and theo-
logical ideas that flourished in Europe and North
American during the Enlightenment and led to a thorough
critique of Christian orthodoxy. These ideas often found
their starting point in natural theology, an ancient theo-
logical approach which, in the Enlightenment, became
increasingly separate from “revealed” and “supernatural”
theology, with which it was once joined in complementary
fashion.

Deism began as a response to Christianity from within
Christian cultural circles, but often leads to a broader view
that extended past Christianity to “religion in general” or
“natural religion” (the systemization of knowledge of the
divine attained through the use of natural theology). Thus,
the thinking of some deists led to the evolution of new
ideas of “religiousness” as being part of human nature. This conclusion led, in turn, to the acceptance of non-Christian religious traditions as being equally valid. While deists varied in their particular convictions, most deists affirmed a view of God that could be arrived at solely through rational reflection (as opposed to revelation) and upheld a perspective that either rejected Christianity, accepted it as a moral guide (but not a personal means of redemption), or embraced certain aspects of the Christian tradition without arguing for its uniqueness when compared to other traditions.

In terms of intellectual history, Deism is associated with such figures as Denis Diderot, Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and M. Jean Antione de Condorcet in France; Gotthold Lessing and, to a lesser degree, Immanuel Kant in Germany; Samuel Clark, Matthew Tindal, Anthony Collins, John Toland and Thomas Paine in England, and Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in America. Not surprisingly, the Deists held a range of theological views, including the shifting views of any number of individuals in the course of a lifetime. Less radical thinkers held positions close to those of the English latitudinarians (who maintained a belief in revelation, but put their emphasis on the “reasonableness” and accessibility of Christianity) or stayed in intellectual conversation with the German Pietists, while the most radical bordered on agnosticism and atheism. Most were Enlightenment rationalists, though some, like Rousseau and Lessing, produced writing that also would qualify as “Romantic.”

The term “deist” itself was used more often as an insult (to suggest heresy or atheism) by the theological opponents of Enlightenment thinkers. Most deists upheld a belief in God as the creator of the universe and of humanity. Their precise vision of God, however, tended to be abstract rather than personalistic. God was variously termed “the Great Architect” (who designed the world), Providence (who intended good things for the world at the time of creation and gave humanity the capacity to create and sustain such goodness), and the Great Watchmaker (who wound up the “clock” of the world and set it eternally ticking in an orderly fashion). The implication of these various epithets for the divine was that God set the world in motion and gave it all the necessary ingredients to flourish (including humanity), but that God did not intervene in daily life.

Drawing on the methods and conclusions of seventeenth-century ventures in natural theology (such as the writings of John Locke), the deists discounted those aspects of the Bible that were considered to be “superstitious,” supernatural or dubious accretions. Following in the natural theology tradition, they insisted that the character of God could be discerned by studying the “Book of Nature.” By studying nature’s laws and unifying order, deists and other rationalists believed that the character of God could be determined, and they assumed that God, by definition, would act in a rational, predictable and ultimately beneficent way. Moreover, they believed that God had endowed humanity with special, rational qualities and expected humans to use these faculties. Moving beyond such thinkers as Locke (who still affirmed the existence of truths beyond reason), the deists embraced only a natural theological approach and some – such as the young Voltaire – eventually rejected even a natural theology stance and took up positions of secular humanism, skepticism or atheism.

In America, Deism was attractive to those thinkers who already accepted the thought of John Locke and the implicit rationalism of Scottish Common Sense realism, but who took the Enlightenment emphasis on rationalism much further, to the point of questioning most orthodox Christian opinion. Deism came to America through largely English sources. Deists such as New Hampshire senator William Plummer and Vermont military hero Ethan Allen, took their cues from English authors, while the more prominent Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were influenced by the French intellectual circles in which they were both involved.

In America, particularly, Deism was linked with the importance of paying attention to the natural world. Nature was seen as both a mechanical system of divinely ordained laws (the watch made by the watchmaker) and a Providential gift from the divine Creator, which human reason could “use” for its own progress. As such readings of nature suggest, Deism stood with a variety of other intellectual forces relying on natural theology (Scottish Common Sense, the Enlightenment in general, the rise of Unitarianism) in expressing a confidence that nature’s “secrets” could be discovered by humanity and put to use for humanity’s benefit (with God’s blessing). Not surprisingly, one legacy of such approaches to nature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been the development of a mechanistic view of nature that has played a role in the anthropogenic impact on the natural world and the destruction and depletion of natural resources. At the same time, however, enlightenment interest in studying the book of nature (while criticizing supernaturalism and the concept of miracles) directly influenced the growth of the sciences, including, ultimately, the development of ecology as a field of study. The deists were among the intellectual ancestors of modern science, and thus leave an ambivalent legacy of emphasizing the importance of nature, the value of progress and the promise of human intellectual capacity. At the same time, the enlightenment “disenchantment” of the natural world has led some environmentalists to search for ways in which nature might be recontextualized as a site of mystery or of divine action and grace, in contrast to a deistic concept of nature as machine or system of laws. In addition, some aspects of eco-criticism explicitly blame
Enlightenment thinking and writing for developing concepts of nature that have led to its exploitation. While Deism is generally understood to be a historical movement, some Westerners today refer to themselves as deists. Moreover, while Deism, by definition, resists “organization,” many individuals without claiming the term, hold essentially deist views, upholding a belief in God, while denying revelation and miracles. Some organized forms of Deism do persist. The World Union of Deists, for instance, promotes Deism as a rational religion that is appropriate to the contemporary period. They also emphasize Deism as a “religion of nature.” This current emphasis counteracts earlier critiques of the Enlightenment legacy and, to a certain extent, rehabilitates older deist concepts of nature which, while scientific, were not wholly disenchanted.

Rebecca Kneale Gould

Further Reading
See also: Book of Nature; Natural Law and Natural Rights; Natural Theology.

Deloria, Vine, Jr. (1933–)

The 1960s civil rights movement had an enormous impact on American Indian communities, not least in sparking the career of Vine Deloria, generally considered the leading intellectual figure among twentieth-century American Indians. Deloria has been a prolific author and – for over twenty years – professor at two public universities, making an important impact on scholarly and broader public understandings of native interests and perspectives in fields such as law, political science, religion, and anthropology. In addition to advocating a strong defense of tribal sovereignty and native rights over against mainstream American culture, he has consistently argued that native outlooks on the environment constitute an important critique of American values, and that tribal land-use practices demonstrate an important alternative to American practices toward the natural world.

A member of the Standing Rock Lakota (Sioux) tribe, in South Dakota, Deloria inherited a long family tradition of “being involved in the affairs of the Sioux tribe” (Deloria 1969: 263), including a father (Vine, Sr.) and grandfather (Philip) who were both important native leaders in the Episcopalian church, a great grandfather (Saswe) who practiced as a medicine man within the Yankton Dakota tribe, and an aunt (Ella) who, as an author trained in ethnography and linguistics, wrote a number of important volumes on Lakota/Dakota culture. Although Deloria, Jr. studied theology at Augustana Lutheran Seminary, he eventually did his graduate work in law – at the University of Colorado – after serving as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1964 to 1967.

As a student of both law and theology, Deloria’s early work appeared in the years marked by a resurgence of militancy within native communities, such as the occupations of Alcatraz Island (1969) and Wounded Knee (1973), and the “Trail of Broken Treaties” (1972) – which resulted in the occupation of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Washington, D.C. With publication of Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto (1969), Deloria issued a series of biting polemics against official American Indian policy and underlying public attitudes and prejudices.

In God Is Red: A Native View of Religion (1973), Deloria developed a sustained critique of the weaknesses of Christianity in contrast with American Indian tribal religions. Key to this critique is the claim, reminiscent of the perspective of historian of religion Mircea Eliade, that Western religious traditions have developed their understandings of human life based more on temporal as opposed to spatial orientation. Native American religions, by contrast, are place-specific, concerned more with maintaining communal and individual well-being within a particular piece of land than in providing salvation at the end of history. Christian religion, for Deloria, thus proved an exercise in alienation when Europeans brought it to the Americas, in effect removing it from its original environment.

Christianity shattered on the shores of this continent, producing hundreds of sects in the same manner that the tribes continually subdivided in an effort to relate to the rhythms of the land. It is probably in the nature of this continent that divisiveness is one of its greatest characteristics, a virtually uncontrollable freedom of the spirit (Deloria: 1992 [1973]: 145–6).

In subsequent work, such as The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty (1984) and Tribes, Treaties and Constitutional Tribulations (1999) Deloria addressed the continued dilemmas tribes faced in dealing with the legal system, the web of racial stereotypes, and the forms of official knowledge through which Americans have insured the continuing subordination
of Indians, and accomplished the expropriation of their lands. For Deloria, the legal/scientific/political administration of Indians and tribal land reflects the same differences in worldview that he first sketched out in *God Is Red*.

In arguing that the tribes, many of whom have retained important though strained cultural links to their lands in spite of colonizing pressures, could “speak meaningfully to the modern world,” Deloria has provided younger Indians with a role model of a publicly engaged intellectual with a relentless critique of American society. The heart of that criticism, though darkened over time, is that tribal values and practices offer much-needed correctives to the fundamental ideas animating industrial society. In questioning the marginalizing design he finds shaping mainstream anthropological practice regarding Indians, he asks, for instance, whether

the festivals by which people reestablished relationships with the natural world [could] provide us with a vehicle for making our concern about the environment an actual change of behavior instead of a vague sense of warm sentiment about chipmunks? (in Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997: 220)

However, in functioning as critic, his role differs from that of his forebears, who sought to soften the impact of American society land-use aims on those turn-of-the-century Lakotas first confined to reservations. Deloria’s task has been not to soften, but to challenge those aims through creation of an alternative consensus about treaty law, about conceptions of the sacred, and about the future place of Indians in American society. His expertise in both law and religion has enabled him to play a crucial role in a variety of land-claim and land-use cases brought into the courts during the last decades of the twentieth century, and in the process to amend the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, which the high courts unanimously found insufficient to provide tribes with protection of traditional sacred sites. While serving as a critic of American legal culture, he has also consistently advocated the alliance of Indian and non-Indian in efforts to protect the environment. For Deloria, all Americans have an interest in the land claims which tribes have brought to the bar. “No real progress can be made in environmental law unless some of the insights into the sacredness of land derived from traditional tribal religions become basic attitudes of the larger society” (Deloria 1999: 213).

Although much of Deloria’s career has been taken up with addressing the practical and political dilemmas facing Indian tribes, he has consistently sought to analyze the conflict of worldviews underlying the contests between tribes and Western institutions. In such works as *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (1979), and more recently in *Red Earth/White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (1995), Deloria has challenged the deepest assumptions about nature, God and truth animating modern Western culture. In these works, the knowledge claims of Western science, and the taken-for-granted-superiority of Western technology, take a thrashing for their reduction of nature to the malleable and controllable, a thrashing grounded as much in the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead and methodological suspicion of Berkeley’s anarchistic philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend, as in the reconstituted tribal traditions that Deloria hopes to preserve. Scientific theory, Deloria has argued, has yielded not so much the authoritative account of nature, but rather “the folklore of materialistic industrialism” with “no basis in fact” (Deloria 1999: 275). His willingness to attack scientific consensus as well as Western religion has earned him many opponents, some of them other American Indian writers. Deloria has consistently played the heretic, however, not simply out of a polemicist’s desire to disturb the orthodox. Instead, he has held to a rather traditional Lakota conviction that though nature remains an intractable mystery, any possible progress in meeting human needs requires epistemological humility, and in the case of modern society, a good deal more humility than religion or science have been able to retain.

Matthew Glass

Further Reading


See also: American Indians as “First Ecologists”; Law, Religion, and Native American Lands; Manifest Destiny; Mother Earth; Noble Savage; Sacred and the Modern World, The; Traditional Ecological Knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

Delphic Oracle

The Delphic Oracle, the most important religious center in the ancient Greek world, owed its existence to a unique natural setting. The Greeks themselves believed that the oracle derived its power from a number of geological features: a cleft in the rock; a spring; and a gaseous exhalation. A nearby cave and a second spring were also linked to the prophetic tradition at Delphi.

Nature visibly dominates Delphi. The temple of Apollo
and the sacred precinct lie cupped in a spectacular semi-circle of precipitous limestone cliffs, giving the effect of an open-air theatre. Below the sanctuary the ground plunges down to the gorge of the Pleistos River. The southern exposure fills Delphi with sunlight all day: “To argue about a shadow in Delphi” was a proverbial phrase for arguing about nothing. The surrounding cliffs, known as the Phaedriades or “Shining Ones,” lie on the southern slope of the massif of Parnassus, one of the holy mountains of Greece. The waters of the Corinthian Gulf are visible in the distance to the southwest, so Delphi seems to hang suspended between mountain and sea. The special geographical position of the site was shown by the omphalos or “navel-stone” inside the temple, marking Delphi as the center of the known world.

According to Greek tradition, the Delphic Oracle was founded by Ge or Earth herself, the mother of all things. Ge was followed first by her daughter Themis or Justice, and then by a succession of nymphs – female water deities. The site is indeed famous for its springs: Cassotis (the modern Kerna spring) inside the sanctuary and Castalia in a rocky cleft to the east.

The oracle played an important role in some of the most ancient myths. According to the Greek version of the Flood story, the two survivors Deucalion and Pyrrha took refuge on the summit of Mount Parnassus, and then asked the Delphic Oracle how they could repopulate the Earth. They were told to walk away from the oracle, throwing the bones of their “mother” behind them as they went. After some perplexity, they realized that Earth was their mother and rocks were her bones. From the stones that they cast over their shoulders, a new race of humans came into existence.

The Delphic Oracle was also believed to have given advice to such mythical heroes as Aegeus, father of Theseus, and Agamemnon, leader of the Greek expedition against Troy. In the Odyssey, Homer tells how Agamemnon received a riddling message at Delphi that indicated that his victory over the Trojans would come only after dissension and fighting among his own captains. The Delphic Oracle was famous for cryptic responses. Most famous of the legendary prophecies was that given to young Oedipus: “You will kill your father and marry your mother.” The oracle neglected to explain that he did not know the identity of his real parents.

Most modern scholars doubt that the oracle was in existence before the eighth century B.C.E. The ancient Greek tradition has however received some support from archeological discoveries showing that a small town existed at Delphi as early as the Middle Bronze Age, roughly 1600 B.C.E. The importance of religious cults in this first settlement is shown by finds of terracotta figurines of female deities or priestesses (some seated on three-legged chairs or thrones), and a fine ceremonial rhyton in the form of a lioness’ head.

An even older link between religious ritual and this region of Mount Parnassus was discovered in the Corycian Cave, a few kilometers north of Delphi. During classical times, pilgrims who came to consult the oracle at Delphi often hiked up to the Corycian Cave as well. Here the deities were not Ge or Apollo but Pan and the nymphs. But thousands of years earlier, in the Neolithic age, early farmers and herders were visiting the Corycian Cave for ceremonies of divination. Archeologists discovered thousands of “knucklebones” in the cave – the astragalus bones from the hooves of sheep and goats – which have been traditionally used in Greece and elsewhere in drawing lots or obtaining “Yes/No” answers to questions.

In essence, the formal oracle of Apollo continued this tradition of providing guidance in making difficult choices. During the heyday of the oracle from the eighth through fourth centuries B.C.E., thousands of pilgrims made their way by ship or overland to Delphi. There they received divine guidance on decisions ranging from founding a colony or launching a war to choosing a spouse or investing in a cargo. On days when the god did not speak, one could still receive a “Yes/No” answer to a question through the drawing of colored beans that served as lots.

But the major feature of Delphi was undoubtedly the performance of the Pythia, the woman who spoke for the god Apollo on the seventh day after each new moon in the spring, summer, and fall. The Pythia derived her title from the ancient name of the site, “Pytho,” as did the legendary serpent or dragoness “Python” that the young Apollo had killed there with his bow and arrow. The Python had guarded a crevice on the mountainside from which Ge pronounced her oracles to humans. By killing the beast, Apollo was able to claim the oracle as his own, though he continued the tradition of speaking through the mouths of women. During classical times, the Pythia served as a medium for the god’s voice, passing into a trance while seated on a tripod in the subterranean crypt or “adyton” of the temple. In no other spot could the woman be filled with the spirit of prophecy.

The service of the Pythia was exhausting and debilitating. During the glorious era when Delphi was consulted by Greek city-states and foreign monarchs alike, the Pythia who began the morning’s session might later be replaced by a second woman, with a third held in reserve for days when the line of questioners was exceptionally long. Every Pythia was a woman of Delphi, but the office was not monopolized by any one family, as was the norm for Greek religious positions. The Pythia could be young or old, rich or poor, well educated or illiterate. The sisterhood of the oracle seems to have chosen the Pythias based on their aptitude for spiritual experience, specifically for experiencing a mediumistic trance. In this state, the Pythia would reply to questions either by chanting in poetical verse, or by responding in simple prose. In the latter case,
male temple attendants might compose a poetical version of the Pythia’s response in return for a gratuity from the questioner. There is no ancient evidence for the popular modern claims that the Pythia spoke gibberish, and that the oracular responses were really composed by the male priests.

The most remarkable element of the prophetic ritual was the part played by an exhalation of natural gas or vapor within the temple. The Greek term was pneuma, which also meant “breath.” According to a number of ancient Greek and Roman writers, the Pythia mounted a tripod that straddled a cleft or fissure in the rocky floor of the adyton. She would then breathe in the pneuma rising from the cleft, and then be empowered to speak in the words of the god Apollo. The pneuma normally triggered a benign trance, in which the Pythia could sit upright (though relaxed), see and hear the questioners, and give audible responses. On occasion, however, the Pythia was seized by a violent delirium, and would rave and thrash wildly. After one such frenzy, it was recorded that a Pythia in the time of the Roman Empire actually died a few days after the oracular session.

The source of this information is Plutarch, priest of Apollo at Delphi for many years and therefore an eyewitness to the workings of the oracle. In his three essays or dialogues dealing with Delphi (“On the E at Delphi,” “Why the Oracles Are No Longer Given in Verse,” and “On the Obsolescence of the Oracles”), Plutarch made it clear that even the priests were not let into all the secrets of the women who served as Pythia. However, he did provide many insights into the relationship between religion and nature at Delphi, particularly in the third dialogue.

Plutarch cast “On the Obsolescence of the Oracles” as a debate between conservative religious belief in the limitless power and eternal existence of the gods versus rationalizing natural philosophy. Pious visitors disapproved of the idea that Apollo or any other divine being should need to use a transitory, fluctuating natural phenomenon such as the Delphic pneuma to work his will. Skeptical philosophers on the other hand attributed the behavior of the Pythia merely to the physical effects of the gaseous emission, or dismissed the oracles as mere guesswork. At the end, Plutarch attempted to reconcile Science and Religion by stating that the gods were indeed divine and eternal, but were compelled to use the corrupt substances of this earthly world in order to communicate with mortals.

In the course of this fascinating discussion, Plutarch provided considerable information about the pneuma. It had a sweet smell; it was detectable to the priests and questioners outside the adyton, although faint and unpredictable; it could reach the surface either as a free gas or through water; and its flow had diminished through time. The weakening of the pneuma was identified by Plutarch as the cause of the oracle’s decline. He advanced three possibilities to account for the change, all of them physical or geological. First, the vital essence in the rock that produces the effect on the Pythia may have simply worn out over time. Second, heavy rains may have washed the vapor away. And third, it may be that the great earthquake of 372 B.C.E. not only destroyed the old temple of Apollo but also blocked up the vents that allowed the pneuma to reach the surface. The first observation is an early recognition that natural resources are not inexhaustible, and the third a reminder that Poseidon the Earthshaker was also worshipped in the temple at Delphi.

From the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century, modern scholars took these reports of geological activity at face value. But when French archeologists failed to find a large chasm in the rock under the central part of the temple, skepticism set in. In the first half of the twentieth century, a number of articles and books were published which purported to debunk the ancient tradition. Adolph Paul Oppe published the seminal article “The chasm at Delphi” in 1904, and Pierre Amandry summed up the evidence against the ancient tradition in his book on the oracular procedure at Delphi in La Mantique Apollinienne à Delphes (1950). The latter work included the claim that it was geologically impossible for an intoxicating gas to have been emitted at Delphi, since such exhalations can be found only in areas of volcanic activity. The new skepticism was embraced by historians and archeologists throughout Europe and the Americas, and established itself as the dominant opinion concerning the oracle.

Starting in 1996 an interdisciplinary team from the United States carried out geological and archeological field surveys at the oracle site, followed up by laboratory analysis of rock and water samples. The team included geologist Jelle de Boer of Wesleyan University, archeologist John Hale of the University of Louisville, chemist Jeff Chanton of Florida State University, and toxicologist Henry Spiller of the Kentucky Regional Poison Center. The team’s fieldwork showed that the temple of Apollo had been built at the intersection of two geological faults, dubbed the Delphi and Kerna faults, at least one of which was still active. One of the springs rising along the Kerna fault emerged in the interior of the temple. The architecture of the temple had been adapted to the geological setting, with a sunken interior so that the natural surface of the mountainside could be reached by Pythia and pilgrims. The builders also constructed an off-center niche for the adyton at the spot where the spring reached the surface.

The underlying bedrock proved to be bituminous limestone, with a petrochemical content of up to 20 percent. Geologist de Boer theorized that friction due to movement along the fault would heat the rock to a temperature at which the petrochemicals vaporized. The resulting gases would rise to the surface along the fault, along with ground water. During laboratory analysis, traces of intoxicating
light hydrocarbon gases, including methane and ethane, were found in the travertine rock that had been laid down by the spring in antiquity. And sweet-smelling ethylene, also an intoxicant, was detected in the modern Kerna spring directly up the slope from the temple.

When seated in the enclosed, poorly ventilated adyton inside the temple, the Pythia would thus have been exposed to a mixture of gases that could trigger a trance state. Of particular interest was ethylene, which is known to produce both mild out-of-body experiences and (on rare occasions) violent delirium. The results of the interdisciplinary project confirmed the validity of the ancient literary sources, and suggest that the scientific observations of Greek natural philosophers should be carefully considered.

The existence of gaseous emissions and springs under the foundations of Apolline temples elsewhere in Greece and in Turkey make it clear that Delphi is not an isolated instance, but rather the center of a widespread religious tradition – a tradition that linked the worship of Apollo and the presence of oracular power to geological features in the landscape. The temples of Apollo at Ptoon in Greece and at Claros, Didyma, and Hierapolis in Turkey were all built on such sites.

In about the year 362, the Pythia at Delphi received a visit from envoys sent by Julian the Apostate, the last pagan ruler of the Roman Empire. Julian was attempting to combat the tidal wave of Christianity that was sweeping away the old pagan cults, and he asked the Pythia to prophecy once more in order to show the continuing power of the old gods. The woman replied, “Tell the king to prophecy once more in order to show the continuing power of the old gods.” Even in these last verses from the last of the long line of Pythias, the natural features of Delphi dominate the scene.

John R. Hale

Further Reading
See also: Greece – Classical; Greek Landscape; Greek Paganism; Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management.

Demons

The demon is a traditional designation for a hostile and/or evil spirit entity. As a concept, it becomes part of Western culture through the influence of Zoroastrian thought that polarizes the world between good and negative forces. The dualistic framework has become part of gnosticism, hermeticism, kabbalistic doctrine and the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, the term “demon” derives from the Greek δαίμων, Latin daemon the “divider” – the one who apportions the resources of the natural world among recipients. The daemon was originally a part-human and part-divine spiritual entity that was amoral rather than immoral. The transition of this superhuman power into a devilish being reflects the loss of an earlier understanding based on the sanctity of nature’s plenitude and its subsequent institutionalized transformation into dualistic theologies that posit the natural as something inferior and impeding to transcendental evolution. As a result, the demonic has become synonymous with impurity, sensuousness and harm. The ambiguity of the threshold zones associated with the Greek daimon as demi-god has been likewise translated into a long-standing vernacular fear of liminality. Passages, entry-ways, bridges and the like become regarded as unsafe and unclean. As Mary Douglas contends, this antipathy toward the liminal extends to the human body and its openings considered as dangerous places. By positing a framework that holds purity and impurity to be good-and-evil opposites, such natural negatives as miasma, illness and misfortune become ethical issues. The historic trajectory of the demon is, therefore, a narrative that describes the superimposition of a hermeneutics of ethics onto natural conditions. It is the story and legacy of Western civilization’s distortion of the organic and holistic into an artificial world that is divided and opposed to itself.

With the advent of Christianity, the nature spirit, the genius as intermediary between the human and the divine, and the power of the pagan gods were turned “by an easy, traditional shift of opinion . . . into malevolent ‘demons,’ the troupe of Satan” (Fox 1987: 137). While the classical
deity transcended ethnocentric ethics and the daemon could be either benevolent or malevolent, the nascent Church came to classify all demons as evil in contrast to God, Christ and the angels of heaven. Christian demonology divided the spirit world in conformity to the four elements of fire, air, Earth and water – respectively, the salamander, sylph, gnome and undine. By the Middle Ages, drawing on the account of Lucifer’s rebellion and defeat by the archangel Michael, the demonic legions assumed a complexity of order that mirrored the angelic hierarchies consisting of seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels and angels. In the magical arts of conjuration, a rich iconography developed through which the evoked devil could be identified by rank, form and shape. The corollary of conjured demonic apparition is the Christian pursuit of exorcism. Adjuration of the demonic is not, however, a Christian innovation. Ambiguous daimones might once have been eliminated, for example, through recitation of particular Homeric verse. But whereas the pagan tended to understand disease as an imbalance of nature, for the Christian it was a result of demonic invasion of the body. Remedial effort invariably centered on expulsion of the unclean spirit, and this attitude has carried through into the dominant ethos behind contemporary secularized allopathic medicine as well. Western curing does not predominantly countenance regaining health through restoring a natural balance of the whole organism but rather by simply suppressing and/or getting rid of an invading entity.

This metamorphosis of the Greek daimon into the Christian demon rests on the development of a dualistic worldview. Prior to this, the demon at worst simply represented the difficult and dangerous aspects of the natural cycle (night, winter, tempest, death, etc.) With the emergence of dualistic theology, both demons and God are removed from the natural cycle – God as transcendent; the demon as intrinsically evil. The result for the human being is alienation from nature. Moreover, if there is only good and evil – and particularly evil that is intrinsic – the danger that arises with such an understanding is that every dissenting opinion is categorically condemned. This situation ultimately leaves no room for dialogue and the possibility of reaching any democratic compromise between different positions. However, the very foundation of democracy is predicated on the fundamental equality of each individual’s worth. Without this assumption, democracy itself becomes an impossibility. If, on the other hand, one assumes that those who appear to thwart his or her own way or those who would appear to be motivated solely by self-interest are fallen angels or demons masquerading as humans, the voice of the other is simply condemned and not heard.

Michael York

Further Reading
See also: Paganism – Contemporary; Paganism in North America; Satanism.

Depth Ecology

Deep Ecology, as a movement and a way of thinking, has generally been contrasted to conventional environmentalism, and especially to approaches that focus only on alleviating the most obvious symptoms of ecological disarray without reflecting upon, and seeking to transform, the more deep-seated cultural assumptions and practices that have given rise to those problems. Rather than applying various “band-aid” solutions to environmental problems, adherents of deep ecology ostensibly ask “deeper” questions, and aim at deeper, more long-range solutions. Yet some stalwart environmental activists have taken offense at the implication that their own strenuous efforts merely amount to a kind of “shallow” ecology. In fact, the implicit contrast between “deep” and “shallow” approaches to ecological problems has led various folks to suspect a kind of arrogance in the very idea of “deep ecology”; and such suspicions have weakened the deep ecology movement.

Yet the tremendous potential of the deep ecology movement, and the real eloquence of “deep ecology” as a powerful, if largely inchoate, set of intuitions, never really had anything to do, I believe, with the contrast between “deep” and “shallow” approaches. Worthy and visionary activists from many different fields – scientists and farmers, professors and poets, artists and anarchists, all with a intense love for wild nature and a sense of outrage at the ugly insults that civilization was inflicting on the animate Earth – were drawn to deep ecology because they could sense a new kind of heartfelt humility in this movement, a gathering of brilliant spirits who were not afraid to acknowledge their own existence as earthly animals. All were happy to affirm that the human was but one of the Earth’s many creatures – a remarkable creature, to be sure, but ultimately no more astonishing than the grizzly bears, or the cormorants, or the spiders riding the grasses as they bend in the wind. Far from being arrogant, deep ecology
was marked by a new kind of humility – a new assumption that we two-leggeds were entirely a part of the intricate web of life – and by a new wish to reflect and to act without violating our responsibility as plain citizens of the biotic community. The other side of this humility was a steady wonder in the face of a world that exceeds all our designs, the delicious and sometimes terrifying awareness of being human in a much more-than-human world.

The name “deep ecology” resonated well with this new impulse, mostly because of the richness of meaning in this curious word “deep.” It is a meaning that very few of us recognized consciously, yet I suspect that our animal bodies sensed it right from the start. For the adjective “deep” speaks of a particular dimension of the experienced world: often termed the third dimension, it is that which photographers refer to when they speak of “depth of field.” It is that dimension that stretches from the near to the far, from the place where we stand all the way to the horizon, and beyond. The curious nature of this dimension is such that, unlike “height” and “width,” which seem entirely objective aspects of the perceived world, the dimension of depth is wholly dependent upon the position of the viewer within that world! The height of a boulder, for instance, seems to stay constant as I move around that rock. Yet the depth of the rock, the relation between the near and the far aspects of the boulder, steadily changes as I move around it. Unlike the height of a mountain range, and the width or span of a valley, the depth of a landscape depends entirely on where we are standing within that landscape. And as we move, bodily, within that landscape, the depth of the landscape shifts around us.

In truth, a space has depth only if one is situated somewhere within that space. A cluster of boulders, or a grove of trees, may be said to have a particular depth only if you are situated, bodily, in the same world as those rocks or those trees.

If, for example, I am watching some nature program on the television, observing a female lion, perhaps, as she lolls with her cubs under the shade of a leafy tree, and I happen to stand and walk across the room, my movement does not alter anything on the screen. The depth of the room will shift around me as I move – the bookcase looms up in front of me and then recedes as I move past it, the music stand comes between me and the television screen for a moment as I walk by – yet the spatial positions of those cubs do not shift in relation to one another or in relation to the tree behind them. For the lions and I do not inhabit the same space. There is no depth between us, for I look at their world from a position entirely outside of that world, an utterly detached spectator looking at a flat spectacle. My real, bodily encounter is not at all with those lions, but with the flat screen of the television.

Modern, conventional science has long presumed to observe the natural world from a detached position utterly outside that world. And the science of “ecology” inherited this presumption from the older sciences that preceded it – the assumption that we could objectively analyze the interactions of various organisms and their earthly environment as though we ourselves were not participants in that same environment, as though our rational minds could somehow spring themselves free from our coevolved, carnal embedment in the thick of this ecology in order to observe it from a wholly detached and impartial perspective. In high school biology class, we gazed at a complex diagram of the local ecosystem drawn on the flat blackboard, but of course we did not include our own gaze within the system. Later, some of us learned to model particular ecosystems on the flat screens of our computers. Although I learned a fair amount from such exercises, the primary lesson I learned was that earthly nature is an objective, determinate phenomenon that can best be studied from outside, not an enveloping mystery in which I am wholly participant.

Such is the view of nature that we perpetuate when we neglect, or overlook, the depth dimension of the world – the fact that, in truth, we only ever experience the actual world from our embodied, two-legged perspective down here in the thick of things. Since we are entirely in and of this earthly world, nature can disclose certain aspects of itself to us only by concealing other aspects; we never perceive the whole of any earthly phenomenon all at once. Because we are animals immersed in the world, each thing we directly encounter meets us with its own depth, its visible facets and its invisible facets, its closer aspects open to our gaze and its more distant aspects hidden from view. The belief in a purely objective comprehension of nature, in a clear and complete understanding of how the world works, is the belief in an entirely flat world seen from above, a world without depth, a nature that we are not a part of but that we look at from outside – like a God, or like a person staring at a computer screen.

Deep ecology calls this presumption into question; it suggests that such cool, disembodied detachment is itself an illusion, and a primary cause of our destructive relation to the land. It insists on the primacy of our bodily embedment in the encompassing ecology, on our thorough entanglement within the earthly web of life. It suggests that we are utterly immersed in, and dependent upon, the world that we mistakenly try to study, manipulate, and manage from outside.

Thus, the most relevant contrast provoked by the notion of deep ecology is not a facile contrast between “shallow” and “deep” approaches, but rather the contrast between the flat and the deep – between flat ecology and deep ecology – between a detached way of seeing that looks at nature from outside, and an embedded way of seeing (and feeling) that gazes into the depths of a nature that encompasses and permeates us. Deep ecology, in other words, implies that we are situated in the depths of the earthly ecology.
It is this tacit implication of our thorough inherence in the biosphere, this intuition of depth, that unites all of us who were drawn, from various directions, to the phrase “deep ecology.” We all sensed the need for a way of speaking, and thinking that did not tear us out of our felt immersion in, and consanguinity with, the animate Earth. By acknowledging that we are a part of something so much vaster and more inscrutable than ourselves – by affirming that our own life is entirely continuous with the life of the rivers and the forests, that our intelligence is entangled with the wild intelligence of wolves and of wetlands, that our breathing bodies are simply our part of the exuberant flesh of the Earth – deep ecology opens a new (and perhaps also very old) sense of the sacred. It brings the sacred down to Earth, exposing the clearcuts and the dams and the spreading extinctions as a horrific sacrilege, making us pause in the face of biotechnology and other intensely manipulative initiatives that stem from a flat view of the world. Deep ecology – or depth ecology – opens a profoundly immanent experience of the holy precisely as the many-voiced land that carnally enfolds us – a mystery at once palpable, sensuous, and greatly in need of our attentive participation.

David Abram

Desana Indians (Northwest Amazon) – See Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo – and Ethnoecology in Colombia.

Descartes, René (1596–1650) and the Problem of Cartesian Dualism

If historical figures can be understood best by examining the contradictions that condition their lives, then it is worth noting that René Descartes, the wellspring of enlightenment rationalism, found the direction of his career in a series of traumatic dreams he took to be a divine communication. And despite his rational commitment to the view that animals are soulless automata – becoming, thereby, the philosopher most often blamed for reducing laboratory animals to mere mechanisms available for guilt-free vivisection – he owned a dog named Monsieur Grat. Anthony Grafton summed this up succinctly when he noted

Paradoxically, Descartes, the pre-eminent modern rationalist, took dreams as the basis for his confidence in his new philosophy – a philosophy that supposedly did more than any other to deanimize the world, to convince intellectuals that they lived in a world uninhabited by occult forces, among animals and plants unequipped with souls, where the only ground of certainty lay in the thinking self (Grafton 1996: 36).

The following pedestrian details provide the outer shell of his life: Descartes was born in La Haye on 31 March 1596, was sent off at age 10 to the Jesuit college of La Fleche, and attended the University of Poitiers in 1615 where he graduated in canon and civil law. In 1618 he enlisted in the army of Prince Maurice of Nassau and was startled into philosophic action by dreams in 1619. He afterwards lived in Amsterdam, Deventer, and Leiden where, in 1637, he published Discourse on Method. Discourse on Method contains a more concise version of the arguments he expounded in his later and better-known Meditations – like the famous proof of his own thinking existence (cogito ergo sum), and the argument that animals do not have souls. He began work on Meditations, his most famous and lasting contribution to Western philosophy, in 1639 and published it a year later. In 1643 he relocated to Egmond du Hoef and began a correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia. In 1644 he published Principles of Philosophy and dedicated it to her. In 1646 he began to correspond with Queen Christina of Sweden. This remarkable sovereign persuaded him to move to Stockholm to become her tutor in philosophy in 1649. Unprepared for either the climate of Stockholm or the extraordinary constitution of the Queen – who scheduled their meetings well before Descartes’ normal waking hours – he died halfway through his first Scandinavian winter, on 11 February 1650.

The importance of the Cartesian dichotomy – Descartes’ division of the universe into two distinct substances, spiritual and physical – can hardly be understated. Using the language of philosophy and early science, his arguments articulated and sanctioned the long-held view that human beings are incorporeal souls inhabiting corporeal bodies. Set into the bedrock of Western culture, these underlying tectonics continue to condition the overlying topography of discourse that divides soul from body, spirit from matter, God from nature, and religion from science. These divisions continue to affect even the most mundane aspects of daily life. Even today, humans remain strangers in a strange land and nature remains a waiting room, a temptation, or a gauntlet to be endured on our trek into paradise or hell or the Great Nothing.

In his Meditations II and VI and, more accessibly, in Part IV of his Discourse on Method, Descartes argued that mind and body are composed of two distinct substances. This distinction follows, Descartes asserted, clearly and distinctly from an irrevocable certainty: that because he
thinks, he can know with certainty that he exists. *Cogito ergo sum* – I think therefore I [know] I am. From here he argued that it is possible to doubt the existence of the physical body – since anything known through the senses can always be deceived – but that it is not possible to doubt the existence of the mind – since to do so simply verifies that the doubting mind must exist. Because it is possible to doubt what we know about physical reality (since it is known through the senses) but impossible to doubt the existence of our minds, Descartes concludes that minds and bodies must be composed of distinct substances. He wrapped up by noting that physical substance is extended in space while mental substance is not. Physical objects take up space. Objects composed of mental, spiritual, substance do not.

His argument reinforces worldviews that define human beings as incorporeal souls trapped in corporeal, spatially extended, bodies.

This was the traditional and well-accepted point of view, but there are stunning contradictions buried like fault lines in his argument. Most simply: Descartes defined mental and physical substances in a way that makes their interaction impossible. If bodies take up space and souls do not, then they can not interact. He attempted to save his argument in Part V of *Discourse on Method* – just prior to his argument that animals are not sentient – with the ad hoc hypothesis that the mind/body connection is maintained by “animal spirits,” neurological angels composed of both substances. Unfortunately, once we ask how the corporeal and incorporeal parts of the animal spirits themselves are able to communicate with each other (even tinier animal spirits), this patchwork dissolves into an infinite regression.

What we have here, apparently, is a philosophical dead end.

Given these obvious contradictions one might well ask why Descartes could have had such a great effect on the history of Western thought. His distinction between minds and bodies is deeply flawed; his contemporaries aggressively critiqued it; the consequences have been sore and even dire; and yet it continues to affect the trajectory of thought at the level of an entire culture. So why would anyone have accepted it? The answer is simple. His argument was appealing not for its logical consistency, but because it: 1) asserted something his readers already believed (the paradigmatic assumption that humans are incorporeal souls inhabiting physical bodies) and, more relevant to his era, 2) temporarily soothed the mounting tensions between science and Christianity. His division of the world into mental or physical substances brilliantly resolved some dangerous and uncomfortable predicaments facing scientist and theologian alike – at first.

Descartes opened a door both to the budding scientific enterprise, fearful of religious Inquisitions and conducting its investigations in the shadows of darkened surgical theaters, and to theologians who were beginning to feel the hammer of science chipping away at the decaying fortress walls of dogma. His distinction between spiritual and physical realms negotiated a buffer zone between religion and science and set this distinction, as if in concrete, into the psyche of Western culture. By setting aside a specific subject-matter for religion (mental or spiritual substance) and a specific subject-matter for science (physical substance), Cartesian dualism 1) made a safe haven for scientific explanation and 2) allowed the religious community to avoid increasingly embarrassing questions such as “Where is heaven if not among the stars?” and “Where is the Garden of Eden if not on Earth?” – and later, “What are human origins if not those suggested by the fossil record?” Physical substance remains the subject matter of science; mental or spiritual substance, the arena of theology. This clear and distinct separation of subject matters seemed to alleviate the increasing tension between sacred and secular. Scientists and theologians alike could, at their leisure, pursue their respective lines of inquiry without interference from one another.

This boundary agreement secured a few centuries of détente between science and religion, time that would allow the logical contradictions in Western culture to work themselves to the surface – like splinters of glass in your thumb. It was a useful solution that left Western culture with some unhappy consequences. Scientists who wished to comment on religious questions and theologians who wished to say something meaningful about the physical universe found themselves hobbled by the shackles of their assigned subject-matters. The distinction that set them free became a quarantine. Science, exiled to the “merely” physical world, became a discipline without spiritual or ethical consequences. Theology, confined to mental substance, was cloaked in a spiritual insulation that kept it from being relevant to the world of time and space. The human soul was unable to interact with the body it inhabits and, analogously, the Western world’s God was left equally unable to interact with the physical universe. If God is locked out of the physical universe then Nietzsche’s sentiment is correct: the physical universe, the place in which humans live and try to find meaning, is nothing but an empty tomb. Existentialism, anomie, and postmodern desiderata all find their first toehold here.

Human values continue to divide along this fault line. Here is a simple example: Descartes’ philosophical method allowed him to contemplate an applied philosophy by which,

Knowing the nature and behavior of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens and all the other bodies which surround us, as well as we now understand the different skills of our workers, we can employ these
entities for all the purposes for which they are suited and so make ourselves masters and possessors of nature (Descartes 1956: 40, author’s italics.)

The way in which our relationship to nature has been conditioned by the Western cultural paradigm was explored, most notably, by Lynn White. Human dominion over nature was a logical consequence of defining human beings as spiritual “entities” rather than as earthly “creatures.” Incorporeality set human souls safely outside the Heraclitean flux of cause and effect. Human, spiritual, “being” was paradigmatically defined as “above” nature. In this, Descartes simply propagated an old and accepted worldview – but its inherent contradictions are easier to see in his dry philosophical prose than in the sweep and tumult of Old Testament saga or Francis Bacon’s hopes for the recovery of Eden through the implementation of a divinely implanted rationality. Descartes’ commitment to being clear and distinct makes it possible to pry out these submerged influences and take their effect on contemporary culture into account.

The clear contradictions within Descartes’ dichotomy forced science and theology to reconsider how “human” and “nature” have been defined. Contemporary environmental ethics provides a good example of how these unexamined assumptions, and the paradigm underlying them, have been scrutinized during the last few decades.

The challenge of environmental ethics is, simply put, to produce ethical theories that can extend what Kenneth Goodpaster called “moral considerability” to the rest of nature. Unfortunately, any ethical consideration that proceeds from Descartes’ definitions will fail because it begins by assuming an axiom that makes it impossible to apply an incorporeal-soul-based, human-centered, ethics to the realm of corporeal nature. If you begin from the position that the gap between humans (as spiritual entities) and nature (as fallen corporeality) is unbridgeable, then any ethical theory that attempts to extend anthropocentric ethics to nature – or supplant it by merely denying any such distinction (without addressing the assumptions that frame this distinction in the first place) – will also, and necessarily, fail.

What makes radical environmental ethics “radical,” for example, is that it begins not by arguing about what actions or objects are good or right, but by challenging the underlying conceptual framework that conditions what “good” or “right” must be. Arne Naess began the project of deep ecology by taking aim at the underlying assumption that human beings are independent from the world they inhabit, by calling into question the human-self-as-independent-from-nature. Redefining humans as part of nature shatters the grounding assumption that ensouled humans stand outside the material world – and so too it topples the ethical corollaries that depend upon this definition.

Ecofeminism takes a similar approach through the problematization of assumptions about gender and applies this method to our assumptions about the boundary between humans and nature. Descartes and Francis Bacon, the primary modern proponents of rationality as humanity’s privileged mode of understanding and manipulating nature – a mode of understanding and a manipulation, many ecofeminists claim, that has caused and justified the domination of both nature and women – stand out as primary targets for the critique of ecofeminist authors. The solution is to overcome not only the culturally institutionalized subjugation of women and nature, but the very cognitive processes that perpetuate and legitimate such oppression. Carolyn Merchant analyzed what she concluded is the common ground of this oppression and argued “we must reexamine the formation of a worldview and a science that, by reconceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women” (Merchant 1980: xvii). Karen Warren aimed her critique at “oppressive conceptual frameworks” that she believes underlie and condition any possible ethical system in a way that “an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework sanctions and justifies the domination of women . . .” (Warren 1999: 155). This “logic of domination,” a term borrowed from Marcuse, such ecofeminists claim follows axiomatically from the embedded dichotomy that defines humans as ensouled beings and nature as a realm of mechanical “creatures.”

Social ecology argues that the same fault lines underlying the paradigmatic division of nature from the human self, and female from male, are also at work in the division between the natural world and human society. In this context society can be understood to be the product and embodiment of human rationality (“spirituality” encoded by Cartesian algorithms) while nature (as the material Other) is mere matter. Just as Marx claimed that political issues are economic, social ecologist Murray Bookchin has suggested that social and political issues are environmental ones and that environmental problems are just as much social and political in nature. Bookchin notes that, “This social system is especially rapacious. It has projected the domination of human by human into an ideology that ‘man’ is destined to dominate ‘Nature’ ” (Bookchin 1991: xiv). The conceptual gulf between society and nature, Bookchin thus argues, allows political and economic institutions to ignore their effects on the environment. This conceptual gulf follows the same fault lines outlined and reinforced by the Cartesian dichotomy.

All such “radical” theories are radical simply because they address the real problem. The real problem was, as always, that we have attempted to answer questions without examining what they meant in the first place and the degree to which we may be paradigmatically conditioned to answer them.
The reader is encouraged to explore this event horizon by carefully analyzing, and then attempting to answer, the following, simple question: “Are humans natural?”

For Descartes, and the Western cultural paradigm, the answer is no.

Mark C.E. Peterson

Further Reading


See also: Deep Ecology; Ecofeminism; Environmental Ethics; Radical Environmentalism.

Desert Writers (Western United States)

A spirit of place, in the most literal sense, has long been central to southwestern storytellers whether they work in an oral or written tradition. Stories have been grounded in sand, stone, and soil since the early creation myths of the region’s native inhabitants. For tribes like the Hopi, whose crops depend on the life-giving gift of the annual rains, interactions with the desert have always been an inseparable blend of the spiritual and practical. Religious beliefs are embedded through ritual and story in the land: the basis of daily experience and the ultimate source of sustenance.

The westward migration of whites brought different values into the American desert, some of which still influence contemporary attitudes toward it. This can be traced to another set of stories, which stem from experiences in the dry lands of another continent. It is difficult to understand the American colonial past without mentioning Jewish and Christian desert imagery. The Puritans, for instance, employed desert references from the Old Testament to underline the moral imperative of what Perry Miller called their errand into the wilderness. Viewing the new continent as a test of their faith, settlers drew on biblical descriptions of making a recalcitrant desert bloom. Like the ancient Hebrews, they hoped that their devotion would be rewarded by the transformation of barren wasteland into a promised land of milk and honey.

Such a narrative of reclamation, which saw the desert as an enemy to be conquered rather than a place with which to make peace, influenced everyone from Mark Twain (who endlessly gripes about the landscape’s worthlessness in Roughing It, his account of a journey to the gold fields of Nevada) to the Mormons. The latter brought this displaced imagery into an actual desert region near Utah’s Great Salt Lake, where they settled down to turn the land into Zion. The desert appeared a forbidding purgatory, but it could be redeemed and was thus a good place to make saints, according to Brigham Young. Labor on the land was a means of achieving salvation for the soul.

But as that land was subdued and settled, different feelings emerged. Many Americans began to flee the growing stresses and excesses of urban, industrial civilization for wide open spaces like the desert, which in its relatively undisturbed state became a sort of refuge. In leaving behind the garden, Americans created “out of a desert continent,” spurning its values as destructive of our relationship with nature; the dissenters were resurrecting another Judeo-Christian narrative: that of the desert fathers, who shunned the sinfulness of human cities for the austere and revelatory purity of the wilderness.

Increasingly, it was the desert that came to seem holy, not the task of eradicating it. Edward Abbey’s 1968 book Desert Solitaire encapsulated this countercultural shift in attitudes. An agnostic of sorts, Abbey was less interested in finding God in the desert than in stripping the otherworldly away from religion, focusing on what is at hand. “I dream of a hard mysticism,” he wrote, “in which the naked self merges with a non-human world and yet

See also: Deep Ecology; Ecofeminism; Environmental Ethics; Radical Environmentalism.
increasingly threatened by a rapacious society. In Terry Tempest Williams’ book *Refuge*, the marshes and deserts surrounding the Great Salt Lake become a psychological sanctuary from the anguish of losing her mother to cancer. A Mormon, Williams grew up in an area wrested into productivity through hard work and spiritual resolve. But the changes she experienced in the desert were entirely internal; the land’s quiet role in healing is contrasted with the violent physical transformation of desert into something other than desert. Williams discovered an innate capacity for personal strength and affirmation of the universe in accepting, not rejecting, these arid places: “If the desert is holy, it is because it is a forgotten place that allows us to remember the sacred. Perhaps that is why every pilgrimage to the desert is a pilgrimage to the self. There is no place to hide, and so we are found…” (1991: 148).

The desert has a rich history as such a testing-ground: a powerful, even dangerous space of personal purification, or of confrontation with the demons inside one’s head. Transplanted to southern California in the 1930s, the British writer Aldous Huxley fell in love with the crystalline landscapes that stretched east from Los Angeles. As befitting someone interested in the mystical dimensions of experience, Huxley found there a place in which to slough off the spiritual decay of a dystopian modernity. For him, the desert’s space, silence, and emptiness formed a holy trinity of perceptual insight. Here, one confronted both self and not-self: the manifold possibilities of being and the inevitable imminence of nonexistence. The latter was symbolized for Huxley by the atomic bomb tests then being conducted in Nevada.

Today, proposals to bury radioactive waste in that same state underline the continuing split between Americans who view the desert as blank – devoid of history and suitable only as a dumping-ground – and those whose personal connections to these places, when communicated to others in words, redeem them from generalization and devaluation. The resurgence of Native American story, for instance, has meant a renewed interest in the links between language and landscape.

Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Ceremony* depicts a struggle in contemporary Indian culture between preserving old ways that viewed the land as sacred, essential to the spiritual health of its inhabitants, and adopting white American values and lifestyles. Tayo, her protagonist, returns to the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico bearing the scars of war and despair. His eventual renewal comes about as a result of traditional rituals tied to the deserts and mountains in which he grew up. The novel is itself a ceremony, enacting the power of story to heal and make whole; and the tales, like the people telling them, are grounded in the places they call home. Silko explicitly juxtaposes Tayo’s healing with the return of rain to the drought-plagued region. With the completion of the ceremony, “the land was green again,” rich and complete in itself, defying another character’s spiteful reference to “this goddamn dried-up country around here” (1977: 234, 55).

Though they may reach certain limits in attempting to express the innermost mysteries of existence, words are a powerful force in bringing people together to defend what they love. As Silko writes, “You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories” (1977: 2). In the face of ongoing threats to America’s fragile deserts, writers of all backgrounds are continuing to forge spiritual connections to these beautiful and visionary places.

*Jonathan Cook*

**Further Reading**


See also: Abbey, Edward; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Huxley, Aldous; Silko, Leslie Marmon; Williams, Terry Tempest.

**Devi, Savitri (1905–1982)**

Savitri Devi, whose birth name was Maximiani Portas, was one of the most compelling figures to emerge from the wreckage of post-war National Socialism. More than any single figure, it was Devi who would carry the torch of...
occult National Socialism through the grim period following World War II. Through her writings and her personal example, she would inspire a new generation of National Socialists to explore the occult byways of racial mysticism that were once blazed by such nineteenth-century German figures as Guido von List and such Third Reich figures as Heinrich Himmler.

Originally a French citizen, Devi was born on 30 September 1905 of Greek and British parents. Educated in France and in Greece, Devi earned masters’-level degrees in philosophy and science in France in the 1920s, and received a Ph.D. in chemistry in 1931. Mathematics and science however, held less allure to Devi than did contemporary politics, religious speculation, and, of greatest import, the Aryan philosophical and religious traditions of ancient India, which would be her home for much of her life.

Before embarking on her spiritual quest, however, Devi took an active interest in politics. Even as a young girl, she was much attracted to Germany and to the German philosophical and intellectual traditions. Appalled by the betrayal of Germany at Versailles following the First World War, as well of the treatment of Greek refugees in the same period, Devi determined to learn more of what she instinctively felt were the deeper realities which determined the seemingly chaotic course of world events. It was during this youthful quest for hidden and suppressed knowledge that Devi acquired her lifelong aversion to Judaism.

In the 1930s, Devi moved to India and undertook what would prove to be a lifelong study of the classic Indian texts – the Vedas and the Upanishads. From these sources, and from their contemporary manifestations in the caste system, Devi felt that she had found the true sources of the once and future greatness of the Aryan race.

In 1940, Devi married a pro-Nazi Indian nationalist named A.K. Mukherji. This gave her a British passport and the possibility of deepening her work for the Third Reich. In Calcutta, the Mukherji home became something of a salon for Allied diplomats and military officers, and whatever intelligence that could be gathered quickly found its way to the German consulate. Devi felt her greatest service to the cause, however, would be in her ongoing research and the book which she was writing which would set out a blueprint for the new Aryan religion of nature which she believed would be instituted in Germany after the inevitable Nazi victory.

In the event, of course, Germany was defeated. Devi’s dream of a global Aryan racial paradise would now never be realized, but through considerable adversity, she held fast to her ideals until her death in 1982. She returned to Europe in 1945, settling in England where her book on the religious heritage of Ancient Egypt, A Son of God, was published and well received in British intellectual and occult circles.

It was the work that followed however, the Impeachment of Man, which was finished in London and published in 1946, that stands as a classic in the current world of National Socialism. A radical approach to environmentalism, amounting indeed to a religion of nature that has striking affinities with the nature-revering spiritualities of radical environmentalism, has always been strong in National Socialist thought, and with the wartime defeat, has become as much a trademark of the movement as anti-Semitism and racialist thought. The Impeachment of Man remains the strongest statement of the National Socialist nature religion that may be found today. Opening with epigraphs from Alfred Rosenberg (“Thou shalt love God in all things, animals and plants”) and Josef Goebbels, who in a diary entry quotes the Führer’s resolve to create a post-war society that would eschew the eating of meat, the book is a passionate treatise on the rights of animals and plants, as contrasted with humans’ egocentric consumption and destruction of the natural world. The argument is couched in religious terms and the proof texts are drawn from the Aryan Golden Age. The book, long out of print, underwent a revival with a new Noontide Press edition, which appeared in 1991.

In 1946, Devi moved from England to Iceland. There, the ancient Norse pantheon joined the ancient Indian heritage as a source for Aryan religiosity. Here too Devi anticipated by decades Odinism’s popularization of the Norse/Germanic pantheon as a fitting Aryan racial religion in the post-war movement.

Two years later, Devi undertook a more open pro-Nazi course of activism, traveling to occupied Germany and distributing propaganda leaflets. This resulted in her incarceration in 1949. While in jail, Devi expanded one of her leaflets into the book that she considered her magnum opus, “Gold in the Furnace”, which is at once an autobiography and a dreamy meditation on what could have been. In it, she states explicitly that until 1948 she had never dared to publicly utter:

...I love this land, Germany, as the hallowed cradle of National Socialism; the country that staked its all so that the whole of the Aryan race might stand together in its regained ancestral pride; Hitler's country...Because for the last twenty years I have loved and admired Hitler and the German people...I was happy – oh so happy! – thus to express my faith in the superman whom the world has misunderstood and hated and rejected. I was not sorry to lose my freedom for the pleasure of bearing witness to his glory, now, in 1948 (page number unavailable).

Devi was released from prison after six months, and then entered her most productive literary period. The autobiographical “Defiance” appeared in 1950. Devi's
example served as an inspiration to a new generation of National Socialists when a portion of the book was published in the Winter 1968 edition of William Pierce’s American Nazi Party intellectual journal *National Socialist World*. “Gold in the Furnace” came out in 1952, followed by *Pilgrimage*, another memoir, in 1958 (although some sources place the publication date as early as 1953).

Her most important work, “The Lightning and the Sun”, appeared in 1956 and a condensed version was published in the premier edition (Spring 1966) *National Socialist World*. “The Lightning and the Sun” is a remarkable exposition on occult National Socialism’s nature mysticism, which explicitly deifies Hitler as the savior of the Aryan people. The first words read: “To the godlike individual of our times; the Man against time; the greatest European of all times; both Sun and Lightning: ADOLF HITLER” (Devi 1966).

“The Lightning and the Sun” ranges through the ages, suggesting a religious and political history in which the Third Reich is the apex and the natural culmination of Aryan development. The book ends with at once a cry of despair and an affirmation of hope:

Kalki [Kali] will lead them through the flames of the great end, and into the sunshine of the new Golden Age ... We like to hope that the memory of the one-before-the-last and most heroic of all our men against time – Adolf Hitler – will survive at least in songs and symbols. We like to hope that the lords of the age, men of his own blood and faith, will render him divine honors, through rites full of meaning and full of potency, in the cool shade of the endless regrown forests, on the beaches, or upon inviolate mountain peaks, facing the rising sun (page number unavailable).

Devi’s last years were bleak. Much of this time was spent back in mother India with her husband, writing and corresponding with National Socialists throughout the world. She was an early convert to the field of holocaust denial, and it was under her influence that such well-known holocaust revisionists of the present day such as Ernst Zundel were introduced to the field. Her personal circumstances did not fare so well, however, and at her death in 1982 she was reportedly penniless.

In the course of her life, Devi’s achievements, if measured on the scale of her dream of the re-creation of a National Socialist revival, were meager. At her death, the world of explicit National Socialism was, if anything, more fragmented and powerless than ever before. But her writings, and the powerful dream of a religio-mystical Aryan Golden Age which they so eloquently convey, are having a powerful impact on the radical right.

**Further Reading**


See also: ATWA; Darré, Walther; Evola, Julius; Fascism; Odinism.

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**Devis Tower, Mato Tipi, or Bear’s Lodge (Wyoming)**

At the turn of the twentieth century, as Americans grappled with the anxieties and opportunities inherent in their tumultuous shift from rural to urban life, the United States Congress granted the president authority to preserve from development “objects of historic or scientific interest” found on public land. Accordingly, on 24 September 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed that Wyoming’s Devis Tower was “such an extraordinary example of the effect of erosion in the higher mountains as to be a natural wonder and an object of historic and great scientific interest.” In declaring Devis Tower the first national monument under the Antiquities Act, Roosevelt equated scenic beauty, scientific import and a significantly storied past as harmonious rationales for its preservation. In subsequent decades these rationales have also given rise to conflicting cultural, religious, and legal efforts to mark both the monument’s meaning and the kinds of human practice appropriate there.

Devis Tower, a phonolite porphyry monolith rising 1267 feet above the Belle Fourche River, is the westernmost outcrop of the igneous rock that thrust up beneath the ancient seabed to form the Black Hills some sixty million years ago. Erosion of the surrounding sandstone deposits by the Bell Fourche gradually exposed the outcrop to weathering, resulting in the vertical scars that mark the length of its surface today.

Many Plains tribes have a long, continuing history at Devis Tower, their members regarding it as a place manifesting sacred power. The malevolent sound of its name in English is due to Col. Richard Dodge, commander of the
1875 United States Geological Survey’s military escort. In most native languages, however, the name itself is more typically some variety of Mato Tipi or “Bears Lodge” – which hints at the presence there of powers upon which human beings are dependent. An oft-told story of the butte’s formation, with Lakota and Kiowa variants, tells of a group of sisters chased by bears. The girls jumped onto a rock and prayed “Rock take pity on us.” The rock grew rapidly as the bears tried to scale it and left their claw marks behind as they slid back down its side. The rock pushed the girls so far from danger that they became the Pleiades, visible in the winter night sky above the mountain.

Lakotas historically found on its sheltering side a good winter camp, and through a variety of ritual means turned to the butte to provide or restore individual and community well-being. Naming ceremonies, vision quests, healing rites, funerals and notably a summer solstice Sun Dance have all been performed at the Bear’s Lodge. Cheyennes regard the lodge as the resting place of Sweet Medicine, the heroic figure whose contact with superhuman beings there founded the Cheyenne way of life. The Bear’s Lodge is thus seen as a place where wisdom dwells, and might be obtained by human beings. Lakota and Cheyenne traditions speak of receiving important objects from the sacred beings at the Bears Lodge, such as the Lakota Pipe and the Cheyenne Four Sacred Arrows, which established their people’s religious and ethical identities. Other tribes with significant attachments to the mountain include the Crow, the Arapaho, and the Wind River Shoshone. All of the ritual activities associated with the Bear’s Lodge became harder to sustain in the years after the northern plains wars, as tribes were confined to reservations on marginal land, individual travel was policed, and federal law restricted the performance of the Sun Dance and other ceremonies.

White residents of the newly formed neighboring ranching communities were gathering at Devils Tower for recreation by the close of the nineteenth century. Summer camping, festivals and Fourth of July celebrations were all popular, some bringing people in from one hundred miles away – a long journey on buckboard. The 1893 Independence Day celebration featured the first formal climb of Devils Tower, by local rancher William Rogers, who scaled a 350-foot ladder and planted an American flag at the top. Not until 1937 was a technical ascent accomplished, by a team of New York mountainees. Given its remoteness and the absence of paved roads in the area, interest in the monument remained primarily local until after World War II, by which time it was being incorporated into the vacation routes of the middle class, and was being recognized as a notable destination for rock climbers.

Another interest in Devils Tower was marked by film director Steven Spielberg, whose 1977 Close Encounters of the Third Kind climaxed with the descent of an enormous alien spaceship onto the mountaintop. Spielberg’s film connected the benevolence of alien beings with the mountain’s mysterious appearance and storied past. Conspiratorial federal agencies seek to deprive the public of what amounts to an experience of supernatural wonder and interstellar travel at the mountain – in effect a modern gloss on the native story of the mountain’s mediating link with the stars. Although the New Age themes have certainly played an important role in shaping American expectations of this and other native sacred places, what the film expresses even more is the perceived role of the federal government in denying to Americans their public lands birthright.

In the years following Close Encounters annual visitation rose drastically, reaching half a million by the mid-1990s. At the same time, Congress had mandated in the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) of 1978 that federal agencies accommodate traditional religious practices as far as practically possible. Encouraged by this legislation, in 1984 some Lakotas resumed the June Sun-Dance tradition at the monument, and the park service began receiving complaints of visitors disturbing ritualists. Most troublesome to those natives who continued to engage in ritual activities at the monument was the increasing number of ascents, which grew in the twenty years after 1973 from three hundred to some six thousand. Not only the noise from climbers, but also the increased scarring of the rock surface from pitons and bolts up the two hundred climbing routes, registered as profaning the Bear’s Lodge’s sacred role in native history.

In 1995, as a result of challenges to administrative procedures made possible under AIRFA, representatives of several tribal and intertribal groups were able to influence the National Park Service to accommodate native religious practitioners at the monument. The NPS established an interpretive exhibit on native cultural history that included information on religious use of the mountain, and a series of trail signs asking visitors to remain on trails and not disturb native ritualists. In addition, the NPS implemented a voluntary climbing ban, effective during the month of June. The number of June climbs dropped dramatically – from twelve hundred to less than two hundred in each of the following years, but several individuals and one area outfitter saw the climbing ban as a significant restriction on their personal freedom. As a result, the Denver-based Mountain States Legal Foundation (MSLF) – an active defender of the private use of public lands – and the local Bear Lodge Multiple Use Association, brought suit against the Department of the Interior in 1996 in Bear Lodge Multiple Use Association vs. Babbitt et al.

The MSLF claimed that the climbing ban violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment, which enjoins the government from privileging one religion over another. In support of the suit, some climbers argued that since they saw climbing as a form of spiritual practice, the
climbing ban was an infringement on their religious freedom. In addition, the MSLF argued that a new interpretive exhibit focused on the mountain’s cultural history, and a series of signs asking visitors to remain on trails, coerced visitors into supporting native religions. For the MSLF the park service’s efforts to accommodate native religions reflected what William Perry Pendley – its president, and former assistant to Reagan-era Secretary of the Interior James Watt – has written of as acts of “war on the West,” conducted by “an increasingly tyrannical government that abuses federal laws” (Pendley 1995). The Wyoming federal district court was not swayed by the MSLF argument, however, concluding that it did not show legal standing in regards to the coercive impact of the park service’s accommodation to native religion, and that the voluntary ban passed the relevant tests conducted by the courts to ascertain whether government actions violate the establishment clause. On 27 March 2000 the U.S. Supreme Court also refused to hear the case, concurring unanimously with the lower court’s ruling that the monument’s Climbing Management Plan was not unconstitutional. The Court also refused to hear the case, concurring unanimously with the lower court’s ruling that the monument’s Climbing Management Plan was not unconstitutional. The higher courts’ uniform defense of native religious practice at the monument is especially significant given their more typical stance, as maintained in Lyng vs. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association [1991], that accommodation of native land-based religion is not a constitutional necessity on the public lands.

Matthew Glass

Further Reading
See also: Deloria, Vine, Jr.; G-O Road; Holy Land in Native North America; Indigenous Environmental Network; Law, Religion and Native American Lands; Manifest Destiny; Sacred and the Modern World, The; Sacred Mountains; Wise Use Movement.

Dharma – Hindu

Frequently translated as “duty” or “righteousness,” the word dharma has been used by Hindus since the nineteenth century to refer to religion in general and to their religion in particular. The term sanatana dharma (the eternal or perennial dharma) specifically, is used to designate the Hindu tradition. Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus use the term “dharma” to indicate a fairly wide variety of concepts and issues, and the word has some recognition in the Western world. In Hinduism, dharma has been used in many contexts including (1) a force, power, or value that sustains the cosmos; (2) one’s duty as incumbent on one’s caste/class of society and stage of life (varnasrama dharma); (3) as a code of conduct which includes and is not limited to regulations involving marriage, food, and religious observances; (4) virtues such as gratitude, non-violence, and compassion which are thought of as common aspirations of all human beings; (5) a word for “religion”; and (6) as a path to liberation from the cycle of life and death (moksha). Although this may sometimes fit into some of the earlier categories, it is also possible to distinguish it as a separate one. The texts on dharma also form the basis for formulating the administration of Hindu family law in India. Highlighting dharmonic virtues such as compassion and nonviolence, retrieving and giving prominence to textual passages and local practices which promote ecological welfare, as well as the relative latitude in the Hindu tradition in the interpretation of dharma to be relevant to changing worldviews are conceptual tools which can help us understand its significance for nature.

The meanings of dharma frequently depend on the context and some emphases have changed over the centuries. The Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English dictionary gives about seventeen meanings: dharma means religion, the customary observances of a caste, sect, law usage, practice, religious or moral merit, virtue, righteousness, duty, justice, piety, morality, sacrifice, and so on. This preliminary set of meanings gives us only the parameters of the concept and practice. Sanskrit and vernacular texts as well as oral traditions affirm the importance of dharma. The Tamil work Tirukkural (ca. 3rd–4th centuries) celebrates the importance of aram (dharma) thus:
What greater wealth is there than dharma? It gives heavenly joy and earthly happiness.
There is no greater wealth than dharma. There is no greater loss than to forget it.
Try to perform dharma in every way.
Don’t wait another day to perform dharma; it will remain with you on the day you die (Tirukkural 4:1–3, 6).

The many treatises on the nature of righteousness, moral duty, and law composed around the first few centuries C.E. were called the dharma sastras (texts on dharma). The most famous of these is the Manava Dharmasastra, or the Laws of Manu. These were probably codified around the first century and reflect the social norms of the time. The Laws of Manu (2.6), along with some other texts, list four sources as the foundations for our understanding of dharma: the Vedas (sruti); the epics, texts of lore called the Puranas; the behavior and practices of the good people (sadacara); and finally, the promptings of one’s mind or conscience.

In the early Vedic texts, “dharma” means “religious ordinances and rites” and in others, it refers to “fixed principles or rules of conduct.” In conjunction with other words, “dharma” also means “merit acquired by the performance of religious rites” and “the whole body of religious duties” (Kane 1968: 1–2). Eventually, the prominent meaning of dharma came to mean a human being’s privileges, duties and obligations to the community as a member of one of the castes and as relevant to a particular stage of life (Kane 1968: 3). Texts on dharma both described and prescribed these duties and responsibilities and divided up the subject-matter into various categories.

The earliest texts on dharma are the Dharma Sutras. These are part of the Kalpa Sutras, which is considered to be an ancillary to the Vedas. Thus, the earliest and preeminent source for dharma, at least in theory if not in practice, is considered to be the Vedic corpus. In addition to these texts, the more famous works on dharma is the corpus of dharma shastra texts, of which those written by Manu and Yajnavalkya are well known. The text of Yajnavalkya was commented upon by Mitakshara in the twelfth century. This text has, for the last few centuries, formed one of the bases in formulating Hindu family law in India and is seminal in understanding the legal structure in India.

The lofty ideals of the texts of dharma are made accessible in the stories of the epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and texts known as puranas. The main Puranas, texts of myth and lore, composed approximately between the fifth and tenth century, have wonderful resources on trees. Hindus in India and the diaspora know the epics and puranas better than the dharma shastra texts. They understand stories from these texts as exemplifying values of dharma and situations of dharma dilemmas. Some of these texts have encouraged the planting of trees, condemned the destruction of plants and forests, and said that trees are like children. For example, the Matsya Purana says that the goddess Parvati planted a sapling of the Asoka tree and took good care of it. She watered it and took care of it and it grew well. The divine beings and sages came and told her:

O [Goddess] . . . almost everyone wants children. When people see their children and grandchildren, they feel they have been successful. What do you achieve by creating and rearing trees like sons . . . ?” Parvati replied: “One who digs a well where there is little water lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops of water in it. One large reservoir of water is worth ten wells. One son is like ten reservoirs and one tree is equal to ten sons (dasa putra samo druma). This is my standard and I will protect the universe to safeguard it . . . (Matsya Puranam chapter 154: 506–12).

Parvati’s words about a tree being equal to ten sons has been lifted from the text and put on billboards by at least one major Hindu temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. Those sentences are seen to be particularly significant for the Indian context where more trees and a lower population are considered to be ideal. Having many children, particularly sons, is a traditional Hindu dharmic goal, and selectively valorizing statements which highlight the importance of trees rather than sons is significant in modern interpretations of dharma.

The Varaha Purana says that one who plants five mango trees does not go to hell, and the Vishnu Dharmottara (3.297.13) claims that one who plants a tree will never fall into hell (in Kane 1958: 415–16). The Puranas differ in the number and description of hells in the universe, and one may perhaps take the liberty of interpreting “hell” as symbolic of various levels of suffering, including a steamy planet where human beings make holes in the ozone layer. The Matsya Purana also describes a celebration for planting trees and calls it the “Festival of Trees.”

Virtues that are said to be common or obligatory to all human beings are called sadharana dharma (common dharma), sanatana dharma (eternal dharma), and samanya dharma (general or ordinary dharma). These include virtues such as gratitude nonviolence, compassion, generosity. Emphasis on and cultivation of these virtues would be particularly significant in the protection of nature and prevention of further harm to the environment around us. The term “sanatana” or eternal dharma has been used in the epics and Puranas to refer to these virtues, but since the nineteenth century it has been used to refer to the Hindu tradition which is perceived as continuous and eternal.
Dharma is also seen as one of the four aspirations or goals of human beings. The epics and classical texts of the period just before the beginning of the Common Era also recognized that there were certain aims for which human beings strive. The four “goals of man” (purusha artha/ purusartha) are said to be dharma, the discharging of one’s duties and responsibilities, artha (wealth, polity, power in many forms), kama (sensual pleasure in a narrow sense but referring to aesthetic experience as well) and moksha (liberation from the cycle of life and death). The goals of kama and artha are not good or bad in themselves, but the intensity with which one is preoccupied with them as well as the stage of life when one pursues them make them appropriate or a-dharma, that is, immoral. Thus, the gluttony for more wealth and power can be seen as the root cause of environmental degradation in all its manifestations.

Moksha was sometimes seen as being on a different plane and as having goals distinct from dharma, but several theologians have interpreted the Bhagavadgita and other texts as saying that dharma and liberation are contiguous and not contradictory. Devotion to the deity is sometimes seen as the highest dharma.

**Dharma and Moksha**

However, while dharma, in many contexts, focuses on order in this world, moksha leads one away from existence in this world. Dharma frequently refers to actions that promote righteousness, order, and well-being in this world; the realms of monetary success and power encompassed by the term artha as well as the sensual love denoted by kama are all also of this world. Moksha, on the other hand, generally refers to liberation from the cycle of life and death and is other-worldly in character. Is there a continuum between dharma and moksha, or are they fundamentally opposed to each other, pointing in different directions and having different aims? Books on dharma say that one is to be married at a certain age, beget children (especially sons), do acts of righteousness, ritual actions and so on. Many texts which show the path to moksha speak of renunciation and abandonment of attachments. Seen from this perspective, the path to moksha may imply a denial of ultimate value to the world and nature around us.

Modern reconstructions of the term dharma in environmental contexts can be perceived in many parts of India. The cleaning up of rivers, opposition to the building of large dams, and planting of trees are all proclaimed to be part of one’s dharma. Here the reference is both to the generic duty and the action incumbent on human beings to the specific situation. Institutions such as the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, which controls the wealthy and powerful temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, post signs all over the local town saying “Trees, when protected, protect us.” This is a deliberate reformulating of the traditional saying in the dharma texts: “Dharma, when protected, protects us.” From the Hindu perspective, appeals to dharma seems to be one of the most promising ways to relate to issues of environmental protection.

**Vasudha Narayanan**

**Further Reading**


_Numerous historians and scholars have written on the subjects of dharma and moksha_.

_See also: Bhagavadgita; Hinduism; India._

**Diana**

One of the animal deities that appear in religious culture of many societies, Diana is recognizable to Western culture as the Roman goddess of the hunt. She is one of several goddesses and gods in European mythologies associated with the full moon, the forest, and sexuality, fertility, and marriage (despite being male deities, Odin, Herne, Wodden, and the followers of the Wild Ride of the dead, all embody similar characteristics). As Diana, the goddess represents a host of archetypal associations: virginity, midwifery, fertility, domestic and wild animals, and the moon. She appears in myth under the Greek names Artemis and Cynthia, the latter deriving from Mount Cyntheos, the agreed birthplace of Diana. Artemis was one of the three Greek goddesses of the moon that indicated the cyclical pattern of life, time, and fertility. Artemis represented Virginity, while Selene was the Mother of the...
moon, and Hecate, the Crone, embodied the waning and dark moon. Furthermore, the moon is the governing symbol of the female menstrual cycle, whose regular waxing and waning is said to be caused by the orbit of the moon. Despite her variable name and her plural associations, it is clear that Diana appears as a constant in history as a goddess embodying the concerns of women.

In pre-Christian Rome, Diana was the figurehead of a cult and was associated with ceremonies in the grove of Aricia near Lake Niemi (which is also known as Diana’s Mirror). Here, the goddess was celebrated in a women’s festival of lights on 13 August each year. The goddess Diana was “explicitly connected with the lower classes, plebeians and slaves,” writes the post-colonial critic Homi Bhabha in his elegy for the more recent Diana, the Princess of Wales (1998: 107). As the figure of myth, her name and image worked their way into literature and art across the ensuing centuries. For example, the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was celebrated in Shakespeare’s early seventeenth-century play, Pericles, and the goddess watches over the virginal daughter of the protagonist through childbirth, shipwreck, and peril. The actual statue at Ephesus is recorded to depict Diana as a many-breasted pagan deity, thus emphasizing her ability to conceive and to nurture.

Marguerite Helmers

Further Reading
See also: Greece – Classical; Greek Paganism; Roman Natural Religion; Roman Religion and Empire.

Diggers and Levellers

During the English Civil War (1642–1649), between Charles I and Parliament, the Levellers emerged as the left wing of the Parliamentary forces. They advocated the levelling of society to create a classless democracy. The Diggers, in turn, called themselves the “true levellers” and voiced yet more radical demands. They were best known for putting their philosophy into action by establishing a series of short-lived communities across Britain where they occupied and farmed land. The most important of these was at St. George’s Hill, Surrey in 1649. As many as ten other Digger communities were established in southern England but all were broken up by the authorities.

Their best-known spokesman, Gerrard Winstanley, wrote numerous tracts outlining the movement’s religious and political beliefs. He advocated a pantheist philosophy, arguing that spirit dwelled in both humanity and the rest of nature. Such pantheism was shared to a greater or lesser extent with a range of seventeenth-century religious/political movements in Britain such as the Ranters but remained undeveloped and unemphasized by Winstanley. His overriding concern was with property, which he identified as evil. He argued that the real Fall occurred not when Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden but when Cain and Abel fought over property. Despite the Diggers’ belief that God resided in nature, they stressed the communal productive use of land through human stewardship, rather than any philosophical or practical commitment to the sanctity of the natural world itself.

The Marxist historian Christopher Hill suggests that Winstanley was concerned with political priorities and clothed his philosophy with religious metaphors. In contrast others have suggested he was essentially a religious millenarian awaiting a New Jerusalem who had little interest in worldly matters. In turn, the British historian E.P. Thompson argued that a long tradition that articulated theology and revolutionary thought can be traced from the Diggers to William Blake and beyond.

The Diggers’ communism, pantheism and direct action orientation made them a potent symbolic resource for later radicals, including ecological ones; many socialists, anarchists and greens trace their roots back to the Diggers. Typically, the British Labour MP Tony Benn, writing in 1980, noted:

The modern movements towards a more responsible attitude towards the environment, together with a commitment to the common ownership of the land, to be held in trust for future generations, can all be traced back to the influence of the Diggers (in Brockway 1980: xi).

In the 1960s a Diggers’ movement was established in California, which carried out acts of street theatre and gave away free food. In 1974 a Digger Party contested the Cambridge parliamentary constituency in the British General Election. The Diggers have been important to the direct action environmental movement in Britain, especially the land-reform campaign “This Land is Ours,” which reoccupied St. George’s Hill in 1999 on the 350th anniversary of Winstanley’s action. The Diggers’ Song based on Winstanley’s lyrics is often sung at environmental protest camps in Britain and the United States (lyrics in Taylor 2002: 51–2).

Thus, while Winstanley did not develop a detailed green theology, his campaign of direct action and his writings have acted as potent resources for later green movements.

Derek Wall
The Diggers’ Song
Commonly known in radical environmental subcultures in the United Kingdom and America as “The Diggers’ Song,” a song written by Leon Rosselson that is actually entitled “World Turned Upside Down,” has been recorded by a number of artists. Probably the best-known version was recorded by Dick Gaughan on *Handful of Earth* (Green Linnet, 1993; full lyrics in Taylor 2002: 51–2). The song, inspired by the Diggers and influenced by Gerrard Winstanley’s writings, expresses a radical critique of religious power and the way it sanctions private property and poverty, while offering an alternative vision where the land is shared equitably by all. Excerpts provide a sense of the song:

In 1649, To St. George’s Hill

A ragged band they called the Diggers
Came to show the people’s will
They defied the landlords
They defied the laws
They were the dispossessed
Reclaiming what was theirs

“We come in peace” they said
“To dig and sow
We come to work the land in common
And to make the waste land grow
This earth divided
We will make whole
So it can be a common treasury for all
“The sin of property, we do disdain
No one has any right to buy and sell
The earth for private gain

By theft and murder
They took the land
Now everywhere the walls
Rise up at their command

“They make the laws
To chain us well
The clergy dazzle us with heaven
Or they damn us into hell
We will not worship
The God they serve
The God of greed who feeds the rich
While poor men starve . . .

“You poor take courage
You rich take care
The earth was made a common treasury
For everyone to share
All things in common
All people one
We come in peace” –
The order came to cut them down

Bron Taylor

Further Reading


Dillard, Annie (1945–)

Annie Dillard is known for her attentiveness to the dramatic details of the natural world and for linking those minute details to divine mystery. She made a double impact with her 1974 Pulitzer-Prize winner, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, which has influenced contemporary musing on both nature and the sacred. In that first book she says, “Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery, like the idle, curved tunnels of leaf miners on the face of a leaf” (1974: 16). A quarter of a century later, in *For the Time Being*, she still looks unflinchingly at cruel minutiae, weaving natural horror along with delight on finely spun prose, perusing a manual of children’s birth defects. She muses on the flaw of all human life, “Ours is a planet sown in beings. Our generations overlap like shingles. We don’t fall in rows like hay, but we fall” (1999: 202).
In addition to her contemplative and introspective non-fiction (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*), she is a novelist (*The Living: A Novel*), poet (*Mornings Like This: Found Poems*), a self-reflective writer (*The Writing Life*), and memoirist (*An American Childhood*). Dillard has rejuvenated the old idea of nature as revelation or sacred book, has revived Emersonian nature mysticism, has quickened the sense of beauty at the heart of mortal experience. She is an exuberant witness of beauty in the minuscule and the macabre.

At Hollins College she wrote her master’s thesis on Thoreau and many readers and critics have been quick to compare her to him; *Tinker Creek* is a short literary distance from Walden Pond in terms of pensive nature writing. Dillard inherits from and replenishes that strand of the American tradition claiming nature as divine revelation and key to the awakening individual.

A distinguished name in American letters, she is often classified as a mystic or an environmentalist. Yet, one might be cautious about calling the work of this inquiring convert to Catholicism a pantheist or mystic. She has called herself a “Hasidic Christian” and casts her inquiry through ethical terrain to confront the role of a theologically Christian God: “Do we need blind men stumbling about, and little flamefaced children, to remind us what God can – and will – do?” (1977: 61). The burned child she names “Julie Norwich,” for Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century Christian mystic who experienced the passion of Christ. Dillard also makes lyrical statements detached from theism or its ethical dilemmas, more in line with the description of the mystical according to William James’s “ineffable” or Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*:

> It has always been a happy thought to me that the creek runs on all night, new every minute, whether I wish it or know it or care, as a closed book on a shelf continues to whisper to itself its own inexhaustible tale. So many things have been shown me on these banks, so much light has illuminated me by reflection here where the water comes down, that I can hardly believe that this grace never flags (1974: 68).

She seems to express a pantheism struggling with the theological problems of monotheism; she seems to express an immanent God in contradiction with a transcendent reality. Her writing is studded with paradox, but theologically she entertains multiple and contradictory perspectives.

One might be cautious, too, in classifying Dillard as an environmentalist. Her work is not a call to action, even though she has inspired environmentalists of her generation. Yet she has said,

> There is no one but us ... a generation comforting ourselves with the notion that we have come at an awkward time, that our innocent fathers are all dead – as if innocence had ever been ... But there is no one but us. There never has been (1977: 56).

She celebrates relentless nature,

> A golden female moth, a biggish one with a two-inch wingspan, flapped into the fire, dropped her abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, frazzled and fried in a second. Her moving wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the circle of light in the clearing ... (1977: 15).

But her interest in nature finally focuses inward, on the human observer. She makes parables of those details of weasels and eagles, and draws correspondences between human experience and the natural world, and between nature and an elusive, mysterious, divine. She had years ago opened her specimen box and saw that a carrion beetle had been for days “swimming on its pin” and Dillard transformed into incandescent prose the puzzle of suffering.

Finally her beautifully constructed language silences conclusions: “But the air hardens your skin; you stand; you leave the lighted shore to explore some dim headland, and soon you’re lost in the leafy interior, intent, remembering nothing” (1974: 2).

*Lynda Serson*

**Further Reading**


*See also*: Autobiography; Memoir and Nature Writing; Thoreau, Henry David.

**Diola (West Africa)**

The Diola of Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau number about 500,000 people and include the largest number of adherents to an African traditional religion in the Senegambia region. Living in well-watered coastal areas, the Diola inhabit the northern limits of the Guinean forest. This area has a dry season stretching from late October until late May and a shorter rainy season during the remainder of the year. Annual rainfall averages between
2000 mm in the southwest to about 1100 mm in the northeast, though droughts are frequent. The Diola are generally considered to be the best wet-rice farmers in West Africa. Before the colonial conquests of the nineteenth century, most of these communities governed themselves through councils of shrine elders and village assemblies and were considered to be stateless societies.

Diola religious traditions focus on a supreme being known as Emitai, who created the Earth and all living things. The name Emitai, or Ata-Emit, means “of the sky” and is closely associated with rain (Emitai ehlahl) and the calendar year (emit), which begins with the onset of the rains. Emitai may withhold precipitation when the community fails to live up to its ritual obligations or when witchcraft becomes pervasive. Reflecting a sense that the supreme being is primarily concerned with issues of broad significance, most Diola regard the supreme being as the creator of a variety of lesser spirits who serve as intermediaries with humans in regard to specific types of problems. Thus, there are spirit shrines (ukine) associated with the procurement of rain; the fertility of women, livestock, and the land; economic activities ranging from fishing to hunting; the ritual transformation of young people into adults; healing; and community governance.

Central to Diola religious traditions is a dichotomy between the settled community (hukin) and the bush (boudiale). The former is an area that is relatively harmonious and predictable; the latter is chaotic and amoral. Benevolent ancestors (kahoelra) live within the community, but are invisible to all but those with a special power of the eyes to see into the realm of the spirit. Phantoms, the unrighteous dead (kahoelra), reside in the bush, often revealing themselves to solitary travelers at dusk. Violations of rules established by Emitai and lesser spirits can transform otherwise fertile land, where an offense took place, into barren land, symbolized by the hard red laterite soil that lies exposed in many locations.

Because of the frequency of drought, the procurement of rain is a central concern of Diola religion. Some of the oldest shrines are primarily concerned with rainfall and fertility and are invoked at the time of the harvest festival and at the beginning of the rainy season. Diola historians trace the origins of these shrines back to a group of men who established the earliest settlements in the region, initially inhabited by Bainounk people who were conquered by and incorporated in invasive Diola communities. These men, often said to have originated with Emitai rather than with earthly parents, created spirit shrines for the procurement of rain, and then returned to Emitai. The most famous of these early “prophets,” Atta-Essou, fashioned wings out of fan palm leaves and flew up into the heavens (emit) to Emitai.

In the twentieth century a new type of prophet became central to Diola religion. These people, mostly women, are described in Diola traditions by the epithet, “whom God has sent” (Emitai dabognol). Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, three women, Weyah of Nyambalang, Djitabeh of Karounate, and Ayimpene of Siganar claimed that Emitai commanded them to create new spirit shrines, also known as Emitai, to be used for prayers to the supreme being for the procurement of rain and the healing of illness.

During the Second World War, a young woman named Alinesitoué Diatta believed that she was called by Emitai to introduce a new ritual for the procurement of rain, along with a series of teachings that rejected French colonial agricultural schemes. In the midst of a severe drought, Alinesitoué began work as a maid in the capital of French West Africa, Dakar. While running an errand in the Sandaga market, she felt the presence of Emitai who commanded her to go down to the sea and dig in the sand. As the hole she had dug filled with water, she realized that Emitai had wanted her to end the drought and renew the Diola religious tradition. In 1941, she summoned the elders of her township and told them about a new ritual called Kasila, which required community participation in the sacrifice of a black bull. She also taught that the Diola had to rework their observance of a Diola day of rest, (Huyaye) every sixth day. It was a day of rest for the rice paddies, not for people; so work outside of rice cultivation could be performed. Furthermore, she instructed her followers that they must continue to plant the varieties of rice that had been given to them by Emitai, expressly to be planted in their lands. These West African varieties (oryza glaberimma), she argued, were spiritually related to the land and to Emitai. While she allowed her followers to continue planting what they regarded as European rice (actually Asian, oryza sativa) she insisted that only African varieties could be used in ritual. She also prohibited the cultivation of peanuts, the major Senegalese cash crop, which the French were promoting throughout the Diola territories. Peanuts grew on the low plateau areas that normally sustained mixed forest and grasslands, which were sources of palm oil and palm wine, thatch, and herbal medicines, while providing vital habitat for game animals. Furthermore, men planted peanuts and, at least among the Muslim northern Diola, they abandoned most of the labor-intensive rice cultivation to women. This dramatically increased women’s labor, as men focused on cash crops, while undermining rice production.

Alinesitoué taught that the droughts were caused by Diola neglect of their religious traditions and conversions to Islam or Christianity; by their reliance on foreign rice; by their embracing of peanut cultivation and the resultant cutting down of upland forests. These changes undermined their duties as caretakers of a land given to them by Emitai. Unfortunately, the Vichy French administration decided, in 1943, that Alinesitoué constituted a threat to their authority. They arrested her and exiled her to Timbuctoo, where she died of starvation in 1944.
Other men and women claimed to be prophets in the tradition of Alinesitoué. Most shared her emphasis on the community sacrifice known as Kasila and her rejection of foreign crops. One of the more influential, Todjai Diatta of Djivent, expanded her teachings to demand the renewed cultivation of a wide variety of crops that Diola had once planted but were still only farmed in the most remote areas. Diola prophets have not only revitalized a Diola religious tradition in the face of the sustained challenges of the colonial and post-colonial eras. They have also provided a critique of agricultural development schemes, of a “Green Revolution,” based on divine revelation.

Robert M. Baum

Further Reading


See also: African Religions and Nature Conservation; Saro-Wiwa, Kenule Beeson and the Ogoni of Ogoni; West Africa; Yoruba Culture (West Africa).

Dirt

In both its literal and metaphorical associations, dirt is a central theme in religious discourse. Its primary dictionary meaning is something that contaminates or befools. The label dirty marks something as bad or taboo. Yet dirt also signifies the Earth or soil, the very ground of human being. Any consideration of the symbolic meaning of dirt must take into account all of these associations.

In many religions, “the mere existence of the soil was seen as significant”; the Earth is understood “as a religious form ... repository of a wealth of sacred forces” (Eliade 1958: 242). The beloved dirt, soil or Earth, sometimes eaten as an act of identification, has been understood as the very flesh of Goddess, the cosmic womb that begets us and to which we ultimately return. Conversely, in less Earth-respecting traditions, dirt becomes the core metaphor for sexual thoughts, words, and deeds, for demeaning labor, and for fraudulent practices.

In Purity and Danger Mary Douglas asserts, “There is no such thing as absolute dirt.” Rather, dirt, that which is perceived to be disorderly, contaminating or polluting, is “in the eye of the beholder” (1966: 2). Moreover, dirt is not always seen as profane, as it is in the now dominant moral system. Rather, worldviews that recognize suffering, disease, and death as ontological necessities frequently understand the dirt as sacred.

Arguably, the degradation of dirt and its ensuing association with impurity and obscenity is linked to the negation of the feminine that underlies many patriarchal religions, philosophies and civilizations. In some belief systems associated with Abrahamic religions, it is Eve’s original transgression that is believed to be “responsible for bringing bodily ‘dirtiness’ [defecation, sweating, menstruation, etc.] into existence” (Delaney 1988: 79). In such beliefs, a conceptual dualism separates the masculine from the feminine, culture from nature, spirit from matter. The identification of nature with the feminine serves not as a source of respect, but as a legitimation for the subordination of nature. The moral imperative is to transcend and/or control the “lower realms,” and to attain distance from nature in order to achieve spirituality, rationality, and control. Thus everyone and everything associated with the “lower” realms (of the body and the world) – including the land, the sexual flesh, animals, women, and ethnic “others” – are stigmatized and deemed dirty. Disgust, the emotion occasioned by contact with the dirt, functions as a touchstone for degrees of civilization.

Feminist ecological thinkers urge a reconciliation with matter, a rethinking of socially constructed disgust. Alienation from the dirt/land/nature enables gynocide, genocide, misogyny, body hatred, fear of diversity, negativity toward sex, and an inability to come to terms with disease and death. These factors underlie and interrelate sexism, racism, heterosexism, and environmental depredations.

Despised groups are stigmatized as “closer to nature” and inherently dirty. Alice Walker synthesizes this perspective:

Some of us have become used to thinking that woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of color is the nigger of the world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world. But, in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world ... While it is “treated like dirt,” so are we (1988: 147).

The English word “dirt” is derived from a word meaning excrement. Excrement, what Goethe referred to as our “remnant of Earth,” though obviously dangerous if it comes in contact with food and water, is intrinsic to the cycling and regeneration of nature. For just as the Earth bears, nourishes, and sustains us, humans are obligated to return gifts and energy to the Earth. We do this through prayer and ritual but also through our bodily functions, including respiration, sexual exuberance, defecation and urination, and ultimately death when our bodies return to the elements. These cyclic processes are represented by such divinities as the Aztec Tlalcuani, the “Filth Eater,” so
named because she is able to absorb the sins, ego, corruption, disease and waste of human beings. Tlaelcuani takes filth (pollutions of all types, psychical as well as material) back into herself and cosmically recycles it, transforming and energizing the cosmos, and rebirthing matter.

The word human derives from the Latin humus, Earth or dirt, signifying the basic equality of all humans, and the core connection of our flesh to the matter of Earth. Humus also is the root of humility, a virtue that is based in respect for the ways of the flesh and recognition and acceptance of human dependence on the Earth. Linda Hogan recognizes the madness of a worldview in which "the clay of creation has ceased to be the rich element from which life grows." Dirt-denying cultures promote "lives that are lived outside of life, without a love or respect for the land and other lives" (1995: 132). A healthy dose of respect for the land/dirt as well as for the permeable, sensual, fragrant, fluid, intelligent, excreting and finally mortal body is undoubtedly helpful to our survival (as is our humor around the subject). Yet, civilization has opted for a disassociating disgust and a suicidal pursuit of a monotonous purity, which is, of course, sterility, rather than revering the muck, diversity, darkness, and riot of fertility, which is invariably and exuberantly dirty.

In 1970, Lewis Mumford lamented that an egomaniacal technological culture, marked by a reigning “myth of the machine,” has idealized a “transcendent world of light and space, disinfected of the human presence” and “fit only for machines” (33). War against the dirt is ultimately warfare against ourselves. The desire to “disinfect,” to separate totally from the dirt/flesh motivates a panoply of related cultural practices and beliefs (e.g., violence engendering obsessions with sexual and racial purity; embalming; controlling wayward flesh with “botox” injections; silicone implants, and plastic surgeries; the proliferation of antibiotic soaps and lotions in everyday use; the promotion of virtual realities and/or a heavenly afterlife as superior to material existence). It is easy to empathize with the human desire to avoid suffering, diminishment of powers through aging, and death. Yet, the dirt-phobic and death-denying culture ultimately is a self-defeating one.

Earth cannot be cheated. The quest for transcendence, control of the wild, and purity produces not only temporary conveniences and comforts, but also long-term desensitization and loss of purpose as well as chronic and sometimes terminal diseases (from allergies through cancer). And while humans will not become immortal, our technologically engineered wastes (from plastics through nuclear droppings) will continue in perpetuity.

Louke van Wensveen identifies virtues associated with environmentalism, including humility, compassion toward animals, hope and frugality – ones that she personally thinks of as “dirty virtues” because they express “a preoccupation with the Earth” and also because, as she says, this juxtaposition points out that many of these virtues would be considered “vicious,” bad or taboo during most of Western history (van Wensveen 2000). Of course, the phrase “dirty virtues” also reclaims dirt as a metaphor for the good. Environmentally minded folks might seek actively to name and celebrate dirty virtues, as well as dirty thoughts, words, and deeds.

Jane Caputi

Further Reading
See also: Composting; Green Death Movement; Sexuality and Eco-spirituality; Sexuality and Green Consciousness; Tantrism in the West; Virtues and Ecology in World Religions; Wicca.

Disney

Like McDonald’s and Coca-Cola, the Disney brand name is now synonymous with American culture. The symbols and meanings of the corporation’s seemingly ubiquitous products maintain a strong presence in our minds and households. In 1994, Disney had the number one record, movie, video, and television show in the United States. The History Channel, ABC, ESPN, A&E, E!, Lifetime, SOAPnet, Miramax, Hyperion Books, Hollywood Records, Touchstone Television and Anaheim’s professional sports teams are all owned by Disney. More than a half a billion people have been to a Disney theme park. Walt Disney World is the most popular tourist destination on Earth, with approximately 20 million visitors per year. The company’s websites attract 28 million unique visitors monthly and rank in the top ten of all Internet properties, according
to Media Metrix and Disney’s 2002 annual report. The company owns 10 local television stations and 62 radio stations across the country. Disney has infiltrated Broadway, Times Square, and even, in 2002, the World Series, with a victory by its Anaheim Angels.

The Walt Disney Company’s pervasiveness puts it in a powerful position to perpetuate and shape beliefs and practices related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, international relations, and in many and important ways, with regard to the environment. From its early days in 1923 as an animation studio, the Disney Company’s creations have always been loaded with images and messages of nature and animals that were often not natural: Mickey Mouse and his barnyard pals, Jiminy Cricket’s I’m No Fool short films, Old Yeller, Davy Crockett’s exploration, and the synthetic hillsides and humannade lakes that hide the engineered infrastructure of Walt Disney World.

Critics have dismissed Disney’s presentations of nature, especially the tendency to anthropomorphize, to gloss over environmental degradation, and exploit the natural world for financial gain. Such criticisms, while insightful, can obfuscate other important activities, narratives and interpretations. Increasingly, researchers have questioned audiences’ reactions to and interactions with Disney’s portrayals of nature. Walt Disney, the person and creator of an entertainment empire, explicitly outlined and embodied what sociologists in the 1960s dubbed “Civil Religion” (Bellah 1968). Disney’s weekly television show, frequent movie releases, and theme parks provided opportunities for ritualized behavior, social cohesion, and emotional expression. These behaviors were linked to a thoroughly modern manifest destiny – a belief in social progress fueled by science and technology, the nuclear family and domesticity, wealth and leisure through practices related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, international relations, and in many and important ways, with regard to the environment. From its early days in 1923 as an animation studio, the Disney Company’s creations have always been loaded with images and messages of nature and animals that were often not natural: Mickey Mouse and his barnyard pals, Jiminy Cricket’s I’m No Fool short films, Old Yeller, Davy Crockett’s exploration, and the synthetic hillsides and humannade lakes that hide the engineered infrastructure of Walt Disney World.

Critics have dismissed Disney’s presentations of nature, especially the tendency to anthropomorphize, to gloss over environmental degradation, and exploit the natural world for financial gain. Such criticisms, while insightful, can obfuscate other important activities, narratives and interpretations. Increasingly, researchers have questioned audiences’ reactions to and interactions with Disney’s portrayals of nature. Walt Disney, the person and creator of an entertainment empire, explicitly outlined and embodied what sociologists in the 1960s dubbed “Civil Religion” (Bellah 1968). Disney’s weekly television show, frequent movie releases, and theme parks provided opportunities for ritualized behavior, social cohesion, and emotional expression. These behaviors were linked to a thoroughly modern manifest destiny – a belief in social progress fueled by science and technology, the nuclear family and domesticity, wealth and leisure through national supremacy, and corporate influence in all facets of public and private life. For example, Disney’s 1957 animated television broadcast, Our Friend the Atom, was a redemptive tale encouraging the baby-boom children of the Cold War 1950s – the same children who were taught to crouch under their desks during air raid sirens at school – not to fear the atom, but to take the optimistic view that it could be applied to solve the world’s problems. The message is that natural processes can and should be harnessed for human use and progress.

Another important Disney/religion/nature nexus has been the presentation of nature as a source of deep meanings and symbols sui generis – for its own sake. This can be seen as a modernizing of the Walt Disney Company’s presentation of nature and religion, and is most prominent in the Company’s more recent films and attendant theme park attractions. Disney’s version of nature as a source of deep meanings and symbols has developed over many years, emerging alongside of and at times overlapping with the civil religion and frontier narratives. For instance, between 1948 and 1960, Walt Disney studios produced a series of live-action nature films called “True Life Adventures,” beginning with Seal Island. With titles like The Living Desert (1953), The Vanishing Prairie (1954), and White Wilderness (1958), many of these films won Academy Awards in the “Best Documentary Feature” category. These stories, often in contradictory ways, reflected both civil religion and frontier myths: the primacy of the resourceful individual, but the sanctity of the family, and the success of cooperation; the inevitability of death, yet the possibilities of birth and renewal. What has made this developing narrative of nature celebration distinct, however, was the change from an attitude where Frontierland was a wilderness to be conquered to a view of wilderness as a place for inspiration and wisdom. Today Jiminy Cricket touts “Environmentality” in Disney hotel bathrooms and on brochures, while in the Land pavilion in EPCOT, Lion King characters Timon and Pumba decry the evils of development in Nestle’s The Circle of Life.

The question arising from this discussion is how people use Disney’s nature narratives to give their own lives meaning, order and ritual. We can only be sure that, like Disney’s treatments of nature, what people draw from them is filled with contradiction, irony, and inconsistency. At Disney the natural world and wilderness are simultaneously presented as dark and dangerous places, to be feared and controlled, but at the same time peaceful, beautiful, light, airy places, imbued with sacred meanings to be protected and enjoyed.

Rebecca Self Hill
Joseph G. Champ

Further Reading

**Disney Worlds at War**

Walt Disney’s theme parks, television productions, and motion pictures evoke strong feelings among those who attend and avoid them. These feelings are an indication that the narrative experiences conveyed in them are plural and contested. These reactions represent a canvas ripe for scholarly analysis—one that reveals not only a battle among devotees and critics of Disney, but also internal ambiguities and contradictions over what is a contested ideological and spiritual terrain. Put simply, there is a war over Disney Worlds, and Disney Worlds are at war. And as is usually the case when humans go to war, religion has a lot to do with it.

**Disneyland (California)**

Growing up in southern California, in the late 1960s I regularly visited the original “Disneyland” (which opened in 1955), taking advantage of a paperboy’s perk. I learned the place with an intimacy made possible by regular access and the energy of youth. Now, several decades later, perhaps I can be an un-Disney-like tour guide.

Upon entering Disneyland, one’s first encounter is with “Main Street USA,” and the initial glimpses it offers the park visitor is something I now consider (with my retroactive religious studies lenses) to be a model of utopian sacred space. Here one finds symbolized what Martin Luther King, Jr. hoped for, “the beloved community”; in other words, a utopian and sacred space reinforcing what Robert Bellah dubbed Civil Religion, and what others have labeled more negatively as “religious nationalism.” (American civil religion conceives of the United States as representative of sacred ideals and includes a divine mandate to protect—it if not extend globally—such ideals, including religious liberty and democracy.) An Opera House where visitors learn about Saint (Walt) Disney and from his childhood hero, President Abraham Lincoln, is featured prominently at the Mainstreet USA locale. (At Florida’s Disney World, Lincoln was moved to the Hall of the Presidents at Liberty Square, but his message remained the same.)

Lincoln is perhaps the central idol of American Civil Religion. He features prominently in Bellah’s *The Broken Covenant*, for his speeches express a conviction in the divine calling of the nation, as well as God’s displeasure and judgment when it does not live up to its ideals. The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. provides a classic example of such civil religion adorned with key quotations from Lincoln’s speeches, it provides visitors with an opportunity to sense the weight of Lincoln’s vision of the nation. Similarly, visitors at Disneyland attend “Great moments with Mr. Lincoln,” a presentation adapted from the 1964–1965 New York World’s Fair exhibit, where a robotic Lincoln extols upon the ideals of the Republic and the sacred trust of liberty, and recapitulates for thousands daily a key script from the nation’s sacred narratives. The message coheres well with early Puritan understandings in which the Atlantic Ocean was understood to be the Red Sea-like challenge to be crossed on the way to the promised land, a land whose sacredness depends not only on divine creative fiat, but on human labor establishing religious liberty and social justice. Lincoln acknowledged American imperfections (such as slavery), but his central message was that America had a God-given duty to build, from nature, a utopian sacred space. Of course, this space was to be carved out from that which was considered a “wilderness,” a notion increasingly contested, in part, because the continent was already well populated by indigenous peoples.

These peoples provide part of the backdrop at Disneyland’s Frontierland, where the American continent is presented as an exciting and dangerous place, full of Indians as well as pirates and other bandits, all of whom must give way to the advancing, implicitly Christian, Euro-American civilization.

My suggestion that this narrative has to do with the advance of an implicitly Christian civilization could be challenged. But Walt Disney himself, who died in 1966, implied that Christianity contributed to his vision for the Park. He insisted on strict moral codes for employees and even visitors, for years banning same-sex dancing while opening the park after normal hours for Christian special events. Moreover, he attributed his success in part to his “Congregational upbringing and lifelong habit of prayer,” according to “Crosswalk,” a website hosted by conservative Christians dismayed at what they considered to be the moral decline of the Disney Worlds after Walt Disney’s death. Indeed, an internet search with key words like “Walt Disney” and “Christianity” reveals that many Christians now believe Disney World propagates anti-Christian beliefs and practices, including sorcery, witchcraft, paganism and homosexuality; concerns that played a role in a 1997 Southern Baptist boycott of everything Disney. A smaller number of fundamentalist Christians believe Walt Disney himself promoted occult religion, in a secret conspiracy with Freemasons, Jews, Catholics, the Illuminati, and Satan himself, seeking to create a repressive One World Order.

Despite such perceptions, Disney’s mainstreams more clearly promote Christian religious nationalism than a nefarious world system. But the Christian ethos is partially obscured by Disney’s presentation of a “melting pot” theory of America. This pot coheres, of course, with the
assimilationist agenda of the predominantly Christian, Euro-American society, manifesting its "destiny" to control the land and its original human inhabitants. Many Disney Television shows and feature films, notably the Davy Crockett television shows of 1954 and 1955 (the first one was subtitled "Indian Fighter" and, combined with later shows, was released as a retitled feature film) reinforced this "progressive" narrative. At Disneyland, visitors could symbolically participate in the story by paddling "Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes," shooting imagined Indians in the river below the frontier fort's parapets, and by purchasing period guns and coonskin caps.

While Davy Crockett justified European-American domination of the American land it is worth underscoring that patriotism involves both "we feeling" and affection, if not reverence, for land. This can be seen, for example, in national hymns such as "America the Beautiful," in the long history of American art, such as that of the Hudson School and in the photography of Ansel Adams, which finds the sublime in the continent’s outstanding landscape features. Such patriotism is also found in the nineteenth-century emergence and subsequent evolution of tourism, especially to National Parks and historic landscapes, which John Sears and Edward Linenthal have shown powerfully (and often in ironic if not contradictory ways) fuse religion and nationalism as they invest the certain places on the American landscape with sacredness.

The Crockett stories reflected a kind of patriotic nature spirituality that has erupted in America. They conveyed the idea that a strong connection to wild American land is the ground of good moral character and political legitimacy. Davy Crockett, after all, "Goes to Congress" (episode #2), ironically perhaps, in part to help ensure peace with and the just treatment of the Indians he earlier went to fight. And later he would die heroically "At the Alamo" (episode #3), defending an outpost at the southern border of the expanding Euro-American empire. (Crockett was not the only American whose charismatic authority was grounded literally in wild land; with more time we could run a similar analysis on Abraham Lincoln and others.)

Historians would label these Crockett narratives fanciful, but at Disneyland Frontierland is no fantasy. Neither is Fantasyland, which is an adjacent realm, placed at the very center of the park. This placing is unlikely to be accidental. Sleeping Beauty's castle is there, modeled after Neuschwanstein Castle, which was built in the late nineteenth century by Bavaria's King Ludwig, who himself called "mad" by some in his day for creating a castle impractical for defense and fanciful of design. It was an excellent design to borrow for Fantasyland, however, which is populated by people and creatures drawn largely from European folk stories and Disney inventions drawing on such stories. Fantasyland is presented as both a fun and (playfully) dangerous place. There, European culture, and even European land, is symbolically central: Switzerland's Matterhorn Mountain is Fantasylad's sacred mountain, rising majestically above the entire park. If Disneyland is exemplar of the nation's civil religion, then here at its center is Europe, appearing as the new Fatherland's mother. Perhaps it is not fanciful to suggest that, at Disneyland, Europe is the implied ground from which European civilization could strong-arm its way to power in Frontierland, mustering its troops to secure the American future.

That future, labeled Tomorrowland, appeared opposite Frontierland and adjacent Fantasyland. With exhibits like the "Carousel of Progress," it painted an unambiguously positive picture of modern, industrial civilization. Its major venues were sponsored unself-consciously by multinational corporations, including those of the extractive, chemical, oil, and telecommunication industries.

The chemical corporation Monsanto, for example, took visitors on a journey inside of the atom, celebrating the science that was unlocking nature's secrets. This and kindred venues promised "better living through chemistry" and the peaceful if not utopian benefits of nuclear power. The oil giant Chevron presented "Autopia," giving youngsters a chance to drive pint-sized cars. This fusion of utopia with the automobile was more than linguistic optimism in technology and America's leading role as industrial civilization could strong-arm its way to power in Frontierland, mustering its troops to secure the American future.

Disneyland expressed unbridled, utopian optimism in technology and America's leading role as its developer. And the American mission was otherworldly as well, with venues expressing awe at rocketry, Apollo moon explorations, and an envisioned "Mission to Mars." Placed adjacent to Main Street USA, Tomorrowland has provided ever since the 1950s a physical connection between American sacred space and outer space, grounding civil religion and the future of religion both in the here and now in America, and above and beyond this world.

Disney World (Florida)

But the narrative could not end there, though it did require additional habitat. Disney had run out of room in Orange County, California. So, Disney World was created in Orlando, Florida, where Walt Disney secretly purchased seventy square miles of biologically diverse, wild land to secure control of the developments to come. Denounced as a desecration by radical environmentalists who positioned themselves in opposition to the Disney myth, Disney World repeated and elaborated the plot begun in California. But as this new Disney World was built, the story line became even more expansive, complicated, ironic, and contested. The "religion and nature" dimensions of this appear most clearly at two new developments there: Epcot Center and Disney's Animal Kingdom.
Epcot globalizes the mythic vision of a technological utopia presented more provincially at Disneyland. Its “world showcase” celebrates the cultures of eleven nations on Earth, which stand in for the world’s cultural diversity. Meanwhile, “Future World” continues Tomorrowland’s utopian technological optimism. There, a “Geosphere” labeled “Spaceship Earth” is Epcot’s axis mundi, towering 165 feet over visitors ever since the park opened in 1982. Located within the dome itself is “Spaceship Earth,” a ride that tells a story reminiscent of the Epic of Evolution; it is a newly invented narrative, inspiring diverse forms of nature-oriented ritualizing that consecrates cosmological and evolutionary narratives. Sponsored by American Telephone and Telegraph, the ride focuses on 60,000 years of human communicative evolution and signals wondrous new ways humans will communicate in the near future.

Keeping the original Disneyland’s fusion of corporate America and technical utopianism, the “Universe of Energy” venue was sponsored by ExxonMobil. “Mission Space” (which opened in 2002) superseded Disneyland’s “Mission to Mars” with a grander cosmovation. Other venues celebrated agricultural innovations, such as hydroponic plant cultivation – touted as a way beyond pesticides – and bioengineering, promising freedom from hunger. Meanwhile, “Living Seas” programs provided an opportunity to commune with sea life, including what many in the New Age movement today consider morally if not spiritually superior beings, the dolphins. These last two examples show that competing if not warring world-views are emerging, even at Epcot itself. The possibility of a pesticide-free agriculture implicitly acknowledged a shadow side to chemical-intensive agriculture, and the living seas programs reflected a growing concern for and valuing of the oceans and sea creatures, something not strongly represented in earlier Disney World incarnations.

This subtle counternarrative, present even at Epcot, broke out in a more full-scale counterrevolution at the nearby Animal Kingdom, which opened in 1998. Here a strong message in favor of environmental conservation was expressed, often wrapped in and reflecting a kind of nature-as-sacred religion that seemingly contradicted civil religion-baptized narratives of progress and beneficent territorial expansion.

At the “Kilimanjaro Safari,” where visitors ride a simulated Land Rover to view authentic African plant and animal life, poachers are identified as the villains responsible for endangering species. This is, of course, a simplistic explanation for the near-extinction of much African fauna; one chosen, little doubt, for its snug fit into Disney melodrama. But elsewhere in the park, admittedly in more museum-like exhibit panels that engage fewer visitors than the adventure rides, visitors can view scientifically credible exhibits on the diverse interplay of social and ecological factors precipitating Africa’s biodiversity crisis. When I first viewed these areas the month the park was opened, I found myself wondering if there was any place in America where greater numbers of ordinary people could be exposed to such an analysis of the challenges facing African conservation. It was a presentation standing in direct opposition to the corporation-friendly optimism that reigns almost everywhere else in Disney’s Worlds.

The first business of the Animal Kingdom, of course, was not environmental education. Disney Chief Michael Eisner, who took a tour of the “Kilimanjaro Safari” before the park opened, decided unilaterally that the lions could not be allowed to feed in front of the visitors, as the park’s planners had planned. This decision was to the annoyance of the Kingdom ecologist who told me that people should not be shielded from the predatory nature of the Animal Kingdom. On the other hand, another venue, the “Affection Section,” provides a place where children can, presumably, emotionally connect to (non-predatory) animals.

These exhibits and this experience, perhaps especially when compared to Disneyland and Epcot Center, suggest there are fault lines in Disney’s Worlds: they are not an entirely monolithic, hegemonic, and unchanging enterprise.

**Disney Movies in the Animal Kingdom**

Recent Disney movies, for example, have been adopted by the Animal Kingdom where they are given even more pointed conservation messages. This adoption further illustrates that some of the architects laboring under the Disney umbrella resonate with, and promote, a nature-as-sacred spirituality. Or at least, they have affinity with what I have elsewhere called “spiritualities of connection” to the Earth’s creatures and living systems.

Of course, even Disney’s classic animated film *Bambi* (1942) may be read as an early environmental film, one that expressed a kind of animistic nature spirituality that emotionally connected the viewer to the film’s non-human forest inhabitants. Few who saw it were unmoved by Bambi’s wrenching loss at the hands of a hunter, or could easily forget the fear of the forest creatures facing the anthropogenic forest fire. In this picture, nature untrammeled by humans is depicted as miraculous and sublime, but it is also revered as the very life cycle itself that envelopes all creatures. In this way, all creatures are kin and have reciprocal obligations.

Much of this formula was repeated in the *Lion King* (1994), where nature was again portrayed as sublime but threatened. The “Circle of Life” theme song celebrated a natural metaphysics of interrelatedness, and the moral of the fable was the need for the reharmonization of life on Earth by fitting into one’s proper niche in the natural order. At the Animal Kingdom’s “Festival of the Lion King,” these themes are re-presented daily before huge crowds of spectators.
The film *Pocahontas* (1995) is even more obviously an expression of contemporary nature spirituality if not eco-religion. Its transformation from the inherited story of the American Indian Princess who saved a European explorer and later died in Europe – which critics like Christian Feest argue provided a symbolic justification for European invasion – is remarkable indeed. In Disney's version, the princess and her people hear nature's spirits. At their receptive best, they learn from them (especially, in this movie, through Grandmother Willow), particularly of their sacred interconnections within the web of life. Meanwhile, though Europeans are largely portrayed as agents of desecration, the good-hearted among them learn to respect the indigenous peoples and their land. Like the best-known versions of the inherited story, Disney's *Pocahontas* saves a European explorer. But in Disney's version she does not die alienated from her sacred place in a foreign land. She stays with her people to help them to protect nature and learn to coexist peacefully with the newcomers.

According to many scholars and at least one band of contemporary Powhatan Indians “The film distorts history beyond recognition” (Powhatan Renape Nation, from their website, accessed June 2003). But it pleased many Native Americans, who found the portrayal of the Powhatan people respectful and authentic. Some of them were, apparently, consulted about the film, as was the (non-Powhatan) American Indian Movement activist Russell Means, who provided the voice for the animated Chief Powhatan character in the movie. He said afterward,

> I find it astounding that Americans and the Disney Studios are willing to tell the truth. It’s never been done before . . . and I love it. The cooperation I got with every suggestion I made, even the smallest little things about our culture, have been incorporated into the script (Anonymous, movie review at .movieweb.com/movie/pocahontas/pocprod1.txt, May 2003).

Not only were the film’s directors and Native American participants moved by the film’s depiction of Native American nature spirituality. So was Stephen Schwartz, the lyricist for the film’s signature song, “Colors of the Wind,” which challenged Euro-American understandings of land ownership, countering these with the claim that one ought not to “own” the creatures and spirit-filled entities that make up animate nature. In words sung by the Pocahontas character:

> You think you own whatever land you land on  
> The earth is just a dead thing you can claim  
> But I know ev’ry rock and tree and creature  
> Has a life, has a spirit, has a name . . .

The rainstorm and the river are my brothers  
The heron and the otter are my friends  
In a circle, in a hoop that never ends

Toward the end, to the question, “How high does the sycamore grow?” the song answers, “If you cut it down, then you’ll never know.” Here the environmental message is inescapable. Commenting about the process of writing these lyrics, Stephen Schwartz would later comment,

> It was just one of those magical things . . . We knew what we wanted to say and we knew who the person was. We were able to find the parts of ourselves that beat in synchronicity with Pocahontas on those particular thoughts. The image of a sycamore echoes Chief Seattle’s speech to Congress, in which he says, “No one can own the sky” and “What will you do when the rivers are gone?” (Quoted from the previously cited movie review).

It is certainly ironic that these words served as inspiration for the movie’s Indian nature spirituality, since the words attributed by Schwartz to Chief Seattle (more accurately Chief Sealth) are now suspected of being history-inspired fiction. Nevertheless, many would consider this speech, and these lyrics, to have captured well the nature spirituality of many Native Americans. Whether accurate or not, the speech and its resonance certainly reflect a nature-as-sacred spirituality that is increasingly common among a diverse spectrum of the American public. And lest anyone think I am reading too much into all this, it was not only the lyricist Schwartz who resonated with what he took to be the nature spirituality of Pocahontas and her people. The film’s directors Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg reported that in the film they also “tried to tap into her spirituality and the spirituality of the Native Americans, especially in the way they relate to nature” (Quoted from the same anonymous movie review).

The animistic nature spirituality and environmental kinship ethic of the recast story is not only clear in the movie, it is also clearly reiterated at an Animal Kingdom show entitled “Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends,” which reiterates the Disney version of the story, thus the moral quest for kinship among all creatures. The literature promoting the performance ends with the question, “Will you be a protector of the forest?”

Indeed, if we look at Animal Kingdom overall, commerce and conservation intertwine in complicated and contradictory ways. Certainly there are profound ethical questions surrounding the borrowing (some would say stealing) of stories and spirituality from Native Americans or other indigenous people for commercial purposes, even if there is also a motive to promote reconciliation between
different groups of people and between these groups and their wider relations. Such questions are properly debated in a wide variety of contexts. To acknowledge this part of the controversial nature of Disney's nature spirituality should not distract us, however, from recognizing that in this part of the Disney orbit, the conservation theme seems in some sense at war with its commercial logic. It also stands in direct opposition to the techno-utopian civil religion that is its dominant narrative, for in the Animal Kingdom, the sacred center is not a European point of divine origin, nor a technological utopia, but the Earth and her denizens interconnected in the circle of life.

Indeed, at the center of Animal Kingdom is a giant Tree of Life, standing nearly 150 feet tall, containing the sculpted images of more than 300 animals. In this sculpture the animals flow one into another, hybridized, in a way reminiscent of art sometimes created by indigenous peoples with shamanic traditions. The message could not be clearer: life is an interconnected web, worthy of reverence, and we must all eventually recognize that it is within this circle that we belong.

**Disney Wars**

Disney Worlds provide an excellent contemporary case study of how the salutary and shadow in contemporary nature religion become engaged and change over time. As Joseph Champ and Rebecca Self Hill suggest in their overview entry on Theme Parks in this encyclopedia, further study is needed into the experiences people have in such places. What do they bring to and take from such experiences in the area of religion, nature, and ethics? To my knowledge, there has been no in-depth scholarly study of the way Disney Worlds influence the millions exposed to them.

One thing is certain. Disney’s Worlds are at war. Or at least, they are hotly contested. And these battles have much to do with religion and nature.

This, of course, is a complex claim that depends on which enclaves within and beyond the Disney Universe we are focusing upon. While the dominant narratives place a sacred canopy of legitimation over a globalizing empire and a techno-utopian Tomorrowland, they are not immune from incursions. Some Disney World partisans subvert the dominant plot lines offering a nature-oriented spirituality that may provide a significant counterweight. These guerillas are themselves under attack, charged with eroding the moral fiber of the nation, which depends, according to the worldviews of the attackers, on the nation’s putatively Christian underpinnings. In short, Disney Worlds and the vehement nature of the reaction to them, provide one significant example that, in American culture and our globalizing world, religion and nature are contested, in play, and very much up for grabs.

**Further Reading**


See also: Adams, Ansel; Disney; Dolphins and New Age Religion; Indigenous Religions and Cultural Borrowing; Manifest Destiny; Mother Earth; Motion Pictures; Nature Religion in the United States; Seattle (Sealth), Chief; Theme Parks.

*Bron Taylor*
Divine Waters of the Oru-Igbo (Southeastern Nigeria)

The Oru-Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria perceive their waters animated by water deities – the goddess of Oguta Lake, Ogbuide also known as Uhammiri, and her divine husband, the river god, Urashi, among others. The corresponding worldview among the Oru-Igbo is thus diametrically opposed to the Western notion of water as a mere natural element, resource, or commodity.

The Oru-Igbo are a sub-division of the Igbo people, one of Nigeria’s major ethnic groups numbering 20–40 million people whose language, Igbo, is heterogeneous with many dialects. Also known as Riverine Igbo, the Oru live in and around Oguta and distinguish themselves from other Igbos on account of their institution of sacred kingship and their physical and spiritual affinity to major bodies of water (e.g., Oguta Lake) and rivers including the River Niger.

Igbo-land is among the most densely populated areas of Africa, with intense agricultural productivity and several large urban centers. Yet, despite their success in drawing on their natural resources to support a large population for centuries, pre-Christian Igbo religion regards the major forces of nature as divine and the environment as sacred. Moreover, the need for balance emerges as a major cultural value contributing to an ecologically responsible worldview whereby humans are accountable for their actions to their gods and goddesses, must constantly strive for equilibrium in their social and natural environments, and groom and re-conciliate various forces to maintain and perpetuate human existence spiritually and physically. The resulting goals of balanced gender relations, and a fruitful and respectful correlation of humans and nature manifest in Oru-Igbo religion, is expressed in everyday life and culture, economically, socially, politically, emotionally, spiritually, and in art and ritual.

The prime deity underpinning Igbo custom is the Earth goddess, Ani/Ala, as reflected in the Igbo word for custom, omen-ala / omen-ani, or laws of the land. Colonial administrators interested in territorial claims recognized the importance of the Earth goddess. But in addition, there are several other equally significant nature deities whose prominence varies from place to place in correspondence to the natural environment. One major deity besides the Earth goddess is the mother water goddess generalized as nne mmiri and locally known by different names (e.g., Ogbuide / Uhammiri in Oguta). A brief outline of Igbo cosmology illuminates this deity and spiritual significance ascribed to the natural element, water.

The Mother Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology

The Igbo supreme god is Chi-Ukwu / Chukwu, the great spirit of creation and destiny, an unlimited entity, beyond shape, age, or gender, neither male nor female, too vast to be contained in manmade images or temples, and traditionally addressed through the arishi, or messenger deities, an entire pantheon of nature deities, spirits, and ancestors below the supreme god.

Among the lesser deities, the supreme Earth goddess, Ani/Ala, the supreme water goddess, nne mmiri, and in some areas the god of thunder, Amadi Oha, take the lead. Antagonisms and tensions exist between more static forces on the one hand, and creative ones challenging tradition, on the other. This binary opposition has been equated to the antagonism of “water spirits” and “land spirits” and is a major theme in the religious beliefs of the Igbo, Kalabari and Ijaw people of the Niger Delta. The various manifestations of the divine forces of nature (Earth and water) and human achievement (ancestors) may either confront or support human beings, are at times antagonistic to human life, yet may also support life, and are potentially either beneficial or harmful. People must constantly balance these challenges in order to survive.

The Earth goddess, Ani/Ala, harbors the preservation of custom, but she is complex, manifesting herself in multiple antagonistic ways: firstly, Ani is the supreme Earth goddess of the town; secondly, the Earth goddess of the wild bush, Onabuluwa, represents the opposite of Ani; third, there are the many individual Earth goddesses of different compounds and farmlands, each commanding her own calendar of days of worship, or refraining from farming.

The water goddess, nne mmiri, is complementary to the Earth goddess. With her own set of rules she may either affirm custom, or challenge, renew and modify tradition. A fertility goddess, she may give life. Yet, a volatile force, she may also destroy and take life. Moreover, she challenges, and may even alter human destiny.

In the Igbo worldview each human being has his/her own chi, an individual force derived from and endowed by Chi-Ukwu. The individual chi leaves the human body at death, reunites with Chi-Ukwu, and may be reborn through reincarnation, albeit in another body, at a later stage of the eternal life cycle.

Before entering and exiting this world, the human being must cross a river. Because the concept of time is circular, the individual must cross a river twice, and forever – not only once, as in ancient Greek mythology. Each time a person is crossing the river to enter life on Earth he/she is challenged either by the water goddess, nne mmiri, or by the Earth goddess of the wild bush, Onabuluwa. At this point, the individual’s destiny, akarakara, and sacred pact with the supreme god are at stake. The person may either defend his/her destiny, or change its course by forming a pact with the mother water goddess. This pact not only alters one’s life and destiny, but also dedicates the person to the goddess as her devotee. If the individual later tries to evade both his/her original destiny and the water deity’s claim by refusing to fulfill her requirements
resulting from the pact to change one’s destiny, then, it is believed, this may cause illness, particularly mental derangement and even death.

Water Priesthood

Oguta’s mother water goddess is Uhammiri, also known as Ogbuide, or Mammy Water in pidgin English, a name that has caused much controversy. The Oru-Igbo ascribe vital importance to this volatile deity who may either grant or destroy life. Her beauty, power and threatening qualities are expressed in one of her names, Ogbuide, “She/ beauty that kills with excess.”

The worship of this awesome deity and her husband, the river god Urashi, is imbued with existential responsibility for the town’s well-being, and vested in several different types of priesthood and services. There are hereditary male priests for each water deity whose shrine is reserved to the oldest man of a designated clan. In addition, both male and female priesthood titles may be attained through possession, or water spirit calling. These priests/priestesses are often widely known as diviners, or mediators between humans and the spirit world who interpret the complex Igbo universe and its requirements to individual clients. Moreover, some of these priests/priestesses and diviners are renowned herbalists, many of whom have once suffered from either physical or emotional illness, were healed by a local herbalist and priest, and have attained their own special status through a complex personal history of disease, healing, initiation, training, and title-taking.

Everyone may seek a water deity’s assistance in times of need, or to pray for children, or wealth. Some individuals permanently dedicate themselves to a water deity as a priest/priestess, or as members of a congregation of followers, worshipping the water deity every four or eight days. The Igbo market week has four days and weeks are grouped in sets of two. The Earth goddess is worshipped on Eke, while Orie and Afor days are dedicated to the lake goddess, Ogbuide, and Nkwo to her husband, Urashi. In addition, the Owu priest, Omodi, and the town’s oldest woman, the Eze Nwanyi, address and invoke the water deities during the Oru towns’ major festivals, Agugu, New Year, and Omerife, New Yam festival, once every year.

Agugu, Omerife, the Art and Ritual of Balancing People and Nature

Oru-Igbo villagers describe the Agugu festival as “doing, acting out, or celebrating our custom” – a body of beliefs and activities representing, defining and reaffirming their culture and collective identity. In the absence of brute force, and different from our rules of law, the order of custom is a rather subtle agent compelling people to live up to society’s norms, keeping society together, and its culture and values alive. Oru custom is based on a body of sanctions and religious beliefs encoded in myths and celebrated in the annual Agugu festival. Individual practices may change, but the complete erosion of custom threatens the very integrity of a people’s culture, identity, and social cohesion, together with their emotional and economic well-being and environment.

The Agugu festival is a multi-layered, complex event: a ritual, it addresses the religious beliefs in the divine forces of nature and teaches respect rather than mere exploitation of the environment; an event of economic importance, it signals the beginning of the planting season, and an occasion and venue for the accumulation and subsequent distribution of surplus staples; a major educational and social event, it initiates boys into the ranks of men, whereby the initiates are taught esoteric knowledge and also the most essential existential skills necessary to live and flourish in their social and geographic environment; an occasion for festivities, recreation and play, Agugu entertains, educates, and unites the townspeople with their fellow humans, custom and identity, their beliefs in the gods and goddesses of their land and water, local knowledge and survival skills, the necessity of balancing power and complementary gender, and the distinction between the wilderness of nature and civilization created by humans.

Only if the Agugu festival is properly performed and the order of custom maintained, can a good harvest follow with Omerife, the New Yam festival in due course. For, only if people observe nature properly – in this case, the flooding and recessing of the water levels of rivers and lakes – and plant accordingly, can they enjoy a rich harvest. Based on this belief and wisdom, Agugu promotes an environmental strategy of respect, observing nature and acting accordingly, rather than interfering and attempting to dominate.

Agugu reenacts sacred myths and celebrates the indebtedness of successfully farming and procreating to the forces of nature and to the mysterious force of Owu, “something mysterious from the water, good, and life giving.” The Owu myth celebrated during the festival encodes custom (e.g., paternal rights) and is reenacted in a masquerade, initiation ceremonies and other rituals performed at that time. All of these events illustrate how religious beliefs, the local environment, knowledge, practical skills, and the economy are closely interrelated.

The Oru farmer knows very well that an accurate observation and analysis of the water levels of the lake, rivers, and local creeks are basic to his success. He also knows that male and female must complement each other step by step, just as “you cannot walk on one leg alone.” During the festival, young men are initiated into adulthood. They become men who may soon plant their seeds to grow and yield fruit, yam and children. Men must eat to survive, but without women, there are no children, and there is no cooked food. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to eat without one’s hands, or handiwork.
These are some of the practical lessons taught to the initiates during initiation, in the informal “university of the village,” rather than in formal education. All of Aqugu’s lessons are highly relevant to the local life and environment. Preparing the graduates of initiation to confront and master life at home, they learn to respect while making use of the gifts of nature/water. This education is for living locally, rather than feeding into or stemming from a body of Eurocentric or merely utilitarian knowledge whose benefit to society and the natural environment is highly questionable in Africa as elsewhere.

Contrary to Western models, but equally striving for maximum emotional and existential benefit, Aqugu promotes an environmental strategy of observing and respecting, rather than merely exploiting or dominating nature. The religious beliefs underpinning Oru-Igbo custom provide additional safeguards toward protecting the environment.

Sacred Groves
Uhammiri/Ogbuide and Urashi, and other water deities, are worshipped in multiple locations. Priests, priestesses and their followers privately maintain shrines for these deities in their homes, some built on demand, and specific clans own other shrines in or near the town. In addition, major communal shrines to the water deities are located far from town, hidden in the wild thicket near the shores of rivers and lakes. These sacred groves can only be reached by canoe. In these semi-secret, special places nature must not be disturbed and not one branch cut, according to the water deity’s rules. The requirement to respect nature’s sacred integrity is strictly observed, for the python, sacred avenger of divine anger, is believed to keep watch and punish transgressors. From an ecological point of view, sacred groves sustain the natural environment as sanctuaries for diverse species of plants and animals threatened by cultivation and destruction of their natural habitat (Nyamweru).

Totem Animals and Other Creatures
Because of their association with the water deities, certain animals are sacred to the Oru-Igbo, including the python, crocodile, tortoise, and Iguana who must not be killed under any circumstances. If accidentally trapped and killed, a python is buried like a human being. Additional creatures are taboo to part of the population, for whenever a human is born in town, an animal is believed to be born in the bush, considered a totem animal of the clan in question, who must not harm but instead protect this creature under any and all circumstances. The killing of another animal, “beautiful Asa,” the “fatty fish without eyes,” is taboo to worshippers of Ogbuide. If accidentally caught, the fisherman must report this to his elder and share his spoil with his entire clan. These and other religious rules protect the natural environment and its flora and fauna, partially threatened with extinction due to the dismantling of indigenous religious beliefs and the resulting erosion of African culture.

Behavioral Codes
A host of behavioral codes indebted to Oru-Igbo custom and religion, particularly the belief in divine water and the sacredness of nature in general, regulates how much and when people may take from their environment (e.g., fishing near the lake shores where the young ones hatch is permitted only at certain times of the year, allowing for the fish population to restore itself). Moreover, custom requires reciprocity, a balance of give and take not only between people, but also between man and nature (e.g., manifest in the notion of water deities and the need to sacrifice to them in return for divine gifts); offering an animal’s life may be necessary to show gratitude for receiving the gift of life (e.g., the birth or survival of a child).

Pre-Christian Igbo religion and cosmology acknowledge human indebtedness to nature and the need to maintain equilibrium with her divine forces (e.g., Earth, water and thunder). All life, human and animal alike, is sacred, and traditionally domestic animals were slaughtered only in ritual, not for profane greed. Even the seemingly unimportant lizard’s life must be respected, as Obiadinbugha, the hereditary priest of the lake goddess Uhammiri, said in his prayer, “He who kills the lizard for nothing, let the war of lizards encircle him.”

Sabine Jell-Bahlsen

Further Reading
Dogs in the Abrahamic Traditions

The widespread practice of pet-keeping in modern society is in line with ancient traditions that elevated dogs to the epicenter of the harmonious relationship between animals and humankind. Greek and Roman literature offer ample evidence of dog-keeping, with all its emotional weight. Faithfulness, memory, intelligence, love – all the rich spectrum of human virtues – were attributed to dogs, which in many cases were said to excel the average human being in these qualities. This highly positive approach, however, stands in complete discordance with the tenets of all monotheistic religions, which at best developed ambivalence toward dogs, and, at worst placed a strong emphasis on their negative nature. This religious antagonism, though, lacks clear dogmatic validation, similar to the found in Genesis against the snake, for example, and isomism, though, lacks clear dogmatic validation, similar to the found in Genesis against the snake, for example, and raises questions that are still open to further research.

The Bible mentions dogs 32 times, mostly in a deprecatory form. When God adopted the Children of Israel to become his chosen people and, as such, regulated their diet, he commanded, “And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs” (Ex. 22:31). During the week of Passover, as well, Jews were allowed to throw forbidden leavened food to their dogs (Deut. 11:15). Medieval homilies explain this command as a kind of reward for the good behavior of canines during the Exodus when they supposedly refrained from barking, thus facilitating the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Ex. 11:7). Still, their connection with carrion and carcasses turned canines into despised animals, and the Bible records many instances of dogs lapping human blood (1 Kgs. 14:11; 16:4; 21:19, 23–24; 2 Kgs. 9:10, 36; Ps. 68:23). To their essential impurity – which, according to Jeremiah, will burden dogs with carrying the dead on Doomsday (Jer. 15:3) – the Book of Proverbs adds their stupidity: “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly” (Prov. 26:11; cf. 2 Peter 2:21–22). The Bible also uses dogs as a common metaphor to hint at the unfortunate status of men (2 Kgs 8:13; Job 30:1) or at the negative elements of society, whether the enemy (Ps. 22:16, 20), renegades in general (Ps. 59:6, 14), or false prophets (Isa. 56:10–11). The apocryphal Book of Enoch, as well, utilizes canine symbolism to describe the Philistines, Ammonites, and Edomites – all of whom posed a danger to the Chosen people. No wonder, therefore, that Deuteronomy proscribes the admittance of dogs along with whores into the House of the Lord: “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow; for even both these are abomination unto the Lord thy God” (23:18).

Rabbinical literature effectively provides the long-range development of biblical tenets and some explanation of their enigmatic nature. Although the rabbis differentiated between “evil” and “good” dogs, they advised taking a cautious attitude toward “good dogs,” as well. These dogs had to be securely chained during the day and could be freed only at night, when decent people remained in their houses. The ownership of an “evil” dog – that is, one that bites and barks – was completely forbidden, since it could cause its owner to violate a biblical prohibition: “Do not place blood in your home” (Deut. 22:8). The equation gradually became clear: a good Jew had to avoid the presence of dogs in his home, since a pet could turn into a public danger. Among the three “objects” that a wise Jew was to evade, dogs stood alongside women and snakes, all three being suspected of sorcery and malevolence (Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 111a).

On the other hand, rabbinical literature also acknowledges canine loyalty and courage, which justified a charitable attitude to pets. Following Deuteronomy 11:15, the Talmud states that Jews may not eat before feeding them (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 40a, Gittin 62a); it also acknowledges the meritorious behavior of canines in defense of their owners, thus earning them recognition for life. Stories of this kind were used to emphasize God’s omnipotence, which in times of danger may turn the “natural enemies of men” (i.e., dogs) into their allies. Thus, after exiling Cain from paradise, God furnished the first criminal in the history of humankind with a dog, to defend him from the attack of savage animals (Babylonian Talmud, Bereshit Rabba, 22, 12). The apocryphal Book of Tobit, as well, refers to Tobit’s dog, which faithfully accompanied its owner on his journey to Media (5:16, 10:14). One rabbi further commented that “there are three distinguished in strength: Israel among the nations, the dog among the animals, [and] the cock among the birds” (Babylonian Talmud, Beizah 25b).

Biblical and rabbinical tenets heavily influenced the prevailing attitude toward dogs in the New Testament and early Christian theology. In his eschatological vision, St. John perpetuated the biblical connection of dogs to whores: “For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whore-mongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev. 22:15). Together with the most despicable strata of human society, and as the only representative of the animal kingdom, dogs were therefore excluded from heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus, as well, corroborated their dishonorable status when he decreed: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under
their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matt. 7:6). Both Matthew (15:26) and Mark (7:27) testified that Jesus had requested of the Greek woman: “Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.” No wonder, therefore, that Paul advised the Philippians: “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision” (Phil. 3:2).

Receptive as it was of the Classical heritage, Christendom was not immune to the worthy aspects of dogs, which left their mark on patristic literature. Commenting upon the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–25), Ambrose of Milan, one of the four recognized Doctors of the Latin Church in the fourth century, blessed dogs “that represent those who guard the flock and protect it against the wolves…keep guard for their masters’ safety…and display noteworthy smelling skills” (Ambrose in Springer 1931: 29–32). He also reported in detail the genealogies of several dogs – carefully established in patterns similar to those that served the aristocracy – and described birthday parties celebrated in their honor.

The ambivalent attitudes toward dogs found in Christian and Jewish traditions, further strengthened by ecological challenges, found a fruitful arena in the emerging Islam. Faced with a plague of stray dogs, Muhammad at first made a categorical decision to exterminate all dogs. He moderated his decree afterwards, reasoning that God had created the canine genus and that people needed certain species of dogs. The Prophet thus decided to exterminate only black-coated strays, particularly those with light patches, the indisputable mark of the devil. Muhammad further established that a woman, a donkey and a black dog interrupt the prayer. The widespread belief that dogs, especially black dogs, were in fact a demonic emanation of evil spirits created the ground for a biased approach toward dogs in Islam. According to Moslem exegetes, any place where the eye of a black dog is buried will fall into ruins. Everything a dog touched or licked was rendered impure, and the place where it had lain had to be purified with water, following the practice of the Prophet on one occasion. A dog prowling close to a believer in prayer invalidates his prayer, and its presence prevents angels from visiting a house. Ultimately, any believer who keeps a useless and vicious dog lessens his final reward, a categorical conclusion very similar to that reached in the Babylonian Talmud. No wonder, therefore, that the Arabic word for dog, *kalb*, became a biting insult and appears pejoratively in numerous proverbial sayings.

All useful dogs that obey their master are freed of divine condemnation, however. This category includes trained hunting dogs and watchdogs, which guarded houses, flocks, crops, or vineyards; their killing was punished with heavy fines, which varied according to the species and the functions that the dogs fulfilled. Though useful dogs were socially tolerated, they remained unclean with respect to religious practice. On the other hand, there was a widespread belief in the therapeutic value of dogs, as scape-animals against intestinal and stomach disorders, the disease being transmitted to them through physical contact. There are also some indications of attachment to dogs, even from the Prophet himself. It was said that Muhammad had promised a divine reward to an old woman for her act of charity to a thirsty dog. Moreover, a dog by the name of Kitmir will be allowed to enter paradise (Qur’an C?XVIII:17), because of its praiseworthy behavior toward some youngsters whose lives were in danger.

In sum, all three monotheistic religions seem to promote an ambivalent attitude toward dogs, one that embraces different emotions: love and hate, power and submission, depravity and honesty. All kind of polarized attitudes were projected on dogs, thus turning “man’s best friend” into a faithful reflection of the history of humankind itself.

Sophia Menache

Further Reading
See also: Animals; Animals in the Bible and Qur’an; Dogs in the Islamic Tradition; Hyenas – Spotted.

Dogs in the Islamic Tradition

Islamic discourses on the nature and function of dogs are representative of a range of tensions regarding the roles of history, mythology, rationality, and modernity in Islam. In fact, the debates surrounding the avowed impurity of dogs, and the lawfulness of possessing or living with these animals, was one of the main issues symbolizing the challenging dynamic between the revealed religious law, and the state of creation or nature. In addition, certain
pre-modern Muslim scholars challenged this orientation. Of traditions hostile to dogs, for a variety of reasons, many negate their prayers. Muslim jurists ruled that this tradition is not authentic, demeaning implications for women. As a result, most association between dogs and women because of its Prophet’s wife Aisha, strongly protested this symbolic prayer. Interestingly, early Muslim authorities, such as the tradition attributed to the Prophet asserted that a prostitute, and in some versions, a sinning man, secured their places in Heaven by saving the life of a dog dying of thirst in the desert.

Most jurists rejected the traditions mandating the killing of dogs as fabrications because, they reasoned, such behavior would be wasteful of life. These jurists argued that there is a presumption prohibiting the destruction of nature, and mandating the honoring of all creation. Any part of creation or nature cannot be needlessly destroyed, and no life can be taken without compelling cause. For the vast majority of jurists, since the consumption of dogs was strictly prohibited in Islam, there was no reason to slaughter dogs. Aside from the issue of killing dogs, Muslim jurists disagreed on the permissibility of owning dogs. A large number of jurists allowed the ownership of dogs for the purpose of serving human needs, such as herding, farming, hunting, or protection. They also prohibited the ownership of dogs for frivolous reasons, such as enjoying their appearance or out of a desire to show off. Some scholars rationalized this determination by arguing that dogs endanger the safety of neighbors and travelers. For the majority of jurists, however, the pertinent issue was not whether it was lawful to own dogs, but the avowed impurity of dogs. The majority contended that the pivotal issue is whether the bodies and saliva of dogs are pure or not. If dogs are in fact impure then they cannot be owned unless there is a serious need for doing so.

As to the issue of purity, the main point of contention concerned whether there is a rational basis for the command to wash a container if touched or licked by a dog. The majority of jurists held that there is no rational basis for this command, and that dogs, like pigs, must be considered impure simply as a matter of deference to the religious text. A sizeable number of jurists, however, disagreed with this position. Jurists, particularly from the Maliki school of thought, argued that everything found in nature is presumed to be pure unless proven otherwise, either through experience or text. Ruling that the traditions mentioned above are not of sufficient reliability or authenticity so as to overcome the presumption of purity, they argued that dogs are pure animals. Accordingly, they maintained that dogs do not void a Muslim’s prayer or ritual purity. Other jurists argued that the command mandating that a vessel be washed a number of times was
intended as a precautionary health measure. These jurists argued that the Prophet's tradition on this issue was intended to apply only to dogs at risk of being infected by the rabies virus. Hence, if a dog is not a possible carrier of rabies, it is presumed to be pure. A small number of jurists carried this logic further in arguing that rural dogs are pure, while urban dogs are impure because urban dogs often consume human garbage. Another group of jurists argued that the purity of dogs turns on their domesticity – domestic dogs are considered pure because human beings feed and clean them, while dogs that live in the wild or on the streets of a city could be carriers of disease, and therefore, they are considered impure. It is clear from the evolution of these discourses that as nature became more susceptible to rational understanding, complex and potentially dangerous creatures, such as dogs, became less threatening for Muslim jurists.

Aside from the legal discourses, dogs occupied an elusively position in Muslim culture. On the one hand, in Arabic literature dogs were often portrayed as a symbol of highly esteemed virtues such as self-sacrifice and loyalty. For example, Ibn Al-Marzuban wrote a fascinating treatise titled *The Book of the Superiority of Dogs over Many of Those Who Wear Clothes*, which contrasts the loyalty and faithfulness of dogs to the treachery and fickleness of human beings. Dogs were also widely used for protection, sheep herding, and hunting. On the other hand, dogs were often portrayed as an oppressive instrument in the hands of despotic and unjust rulers. Similar to the medieval European practice, in the pre-modern Middle East region, as an expression of contempt or deprecation, at times dogs were hung or buried with the corpses of dissidents or rebels. Furthermore, in popular culture, unlike cats, dogs were considered filthy or impure animals that ought not share the living space of the pious or religiously observant. This cultural anti-dog prejudice survived into modern times, and as a result, the ownership of dogs continues to be socially frowned upon. In the contemporary Muslim world, dog ownership is common only among Bedouins, law enforcement, and the Westernized higher classes. As a matter of fact, it is rather striking that, to a very large extent, modern Muslims are unaware of the pre-modern juristic determinations that vindicated the purity of dogs. Nevertheless, this in itself is a measure of the ambiguous fortunes of the dynamics between Islamic law and nature in modernity. In the pre-modern age, Islamic law evolved in near proportion to the advances achieved in the human knowledge of nature. But as the institutions of Islamic law were deconstructed by European Colonialism, and with the rise of puritanical movements in contemporary Islam, Islamic jurisprudence has ceased to be a forum for creative thinking or dynamic interactions with the vastness of nature.

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**Dolphins and New Age Religion**

Dolphins have become an important icon in the New Age movement, and a large number of publications and websites testify to this. Book titles like *Dolphins into the Future*, *Journey into the Dolphin Dreamtime* and *Dolphins*, *ETs & Angels* are typical of the genre, as are websites like The Divine Dolphin, Dolphin Connection and DolphinHeart.

At least two lines of thought are brought together to form this icon. One is inspired by pre-modern myths and legends about dolphin–human relations. The other is inspired by high tech, modern science and space travels. Common to both is a notion of a highly intelligent and social animal.

Dolphins have fascinated people in many societies throughout the world. In Australia, for example, a tribe calls itself the “Dolphin People” and believes their shamans to be reincarnated dolphins, whereas on the Butaritari atoll in Kiribati, people believe that spirits living beneath the ocean shed their human form to become dolphins and other small whales when invited to village feasts by hereditary “callers.” Upon arriving at the beach, they are slaughtered and eaten. Dolphins have both in Australian and in Northwest Coast Indian cultures been regarded as totem animals, which imposes prohibitions against hunting and consumption of dolphins by the groups having these animals as their totem. (Totemism is a taxonomic system by which animals, plants, and other natural phenomena are used to divide people into groups [e.g., clans], and where the group members have a ritual relationship to their natural phenomenon/totem.) And in the Brazilian Amazon numerous tales are told about dolphins transforming themselves into human beings to take part in village festivals. But it is to the ancient Greeks that modern dolphin enthusiasts most often turn in their quest for inspiration. Dolphins had a semi-divine status in Greek cosmology and they figure prominently in many of the ancient myths. Moreover, a number of legends tell about friendly dolphins capable of assisting people in a number of ways and even saving their lives.

Since the 1960s new elements have been added to these myths and legends. The friendship between people and dolphins of antiquity has become a symbol of an idyllic, primordial relationship between human beings and nature, a relationship allegedly destroyed by modernity. The dolphin stands for nature as a whole, and being good to dolphins has become a yardstick of human evolution. In much New Age literature dolphins are given important
roles to play in our struggle to reunite with nature as well as with our fellow human beings. In this cultural critique, which blames development of modern technologies and the market economy for both our environmental and social problems, dolphins appear as a noble teacher able to guide humans back to sustainable living in harmony with nature. Such views may even be found within more mainstream environmental organizations. A former leader of Greenpeace in Denmark, Michael Gylling Nielsen, for example, asserted that because they are without hands, dolphins are not distracted by mechanical objects and can concentrate on their social skills, emotional self-control and humor, and even develop their intelligence in a spiritual direction. Many writers on dolphins see this pre-tech dolphin as a champion of values and knowledge that people have lost along the road to modernity, such as playfulness, kindness, and caring.

Interspecies communication is a strong element in the dolphin cult. Dr. John Lilly, a psychiatrist, inaugurated research on dolphin language to learn from dolphins their ethics, laws and knowledge that have allowed them to live sustainably for millions of years. Others think that it is possible to communicate telepathically with dolphins. It is claimed that it is particularly beneficial to infants to be born among dolphins, as it is believed that similar brain waves facilitate transmission of dolphin wisdom to the infants through telepathy. A dolphinarium in Eilat, Israel, is among those that have been sought by pregnant women who wanted to deliver their babies among dolphins.

The discovery that dolphins – like bats – navigate and locate their prey by the aid of echolocation or sonar has helped to create an image of a sophisticated, high-tech animal. Dolphins are believed to be able to scan each other in order to diagnose ailments in their comrades and even to cure tumors and cancer (both ideas are taken from the use of ultrasound in modern medicine). From here it is only a short step to the notion of the dolphin as a healer, and a number of swim-with-dolphins programs now offer dolphin therapy. For those unable to meet dolphins in the water, Horace Dobbs – a British psychiatrist and founder of International Dolphin Watch – has for years distributed what he calls “audio pills” consisting of an audio-tape with music combining Westernized versions of Aborigine didgeridoo music and dolphin sounds. According to Dobbs, people with a variety of ailments have been cured by listening to this vibrant Dolphin Dreamtime tape. Echolocation is also seen as a means of communication in a three-dimensional mode by which ultrasonic pictograms build up holographic images. The difference between this way of communication and human languages is like the difference between 3D TV broadcasts (not yet invented) and radio broadcasts.

The image of a pre-tech dolphin of a nostalgic past has in the dolphin cult merged with an image of a high-tech dolphin that may even have contacts with galactic forces. In this cosmology, the dolphin takes on the character of messiah and serves as an instrument or a medium for a divine or cosmic mind. The dolphins have been sent on a mission to save the Earth. The science fiction writer Douglas Adams has in his The Hitch Hikers’ Guide to the Galaxy popularized this belief. In his novel, the dolphins return to space after giving up their attempt to alert human beings to the impending ecological destruction of the Earth. New Age writers have developed this idea, such as Joan Ocean, who via the internet and in a series of seminars invites people to swim with dolphins and meet “our Extra-terrestrial, galactic neighbors” and share their latest messages. Opinions are divided whether the messages are rooted in profound dolphin wisdom or in a cosmic or divine mind outside both dolphins and human beings. Their messages can be received in different ways, not least through “dreamtime,” a concept inspired by literature on the Australian Aborigines. Others may feel a resonance between dolphin crystalline energy fields and cosmic vibrations, bringing them to a higher level of awareness and thereby making contacts with the divine possible.

Despite their engagements with dolphins, organizations promoting mainly a spiritual connection with these animals have played only minor roles in the campaigns against dolphinariums, dolphin hunting and dolphin by-catches in fisheries, campaigns that are led by environmental or animal rights activists. Activists seldom contest views in fisheries, campaigns that are led by environmental or animal rights activists. Activists seldom contest views expressed in the dolphin cult, however, and many may in fact be influenced by spiritualism themselves. Indirectly, such spirituality may therefore have considerable impact.

Arne Kalland

Further Reading
See also: Animals; Celestine Prophecy; Cetacean Spirituality; New Age; Power Animals; Watson, Paul – and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society; Whales and Japanese Cultures; Whales and Whaling.
Domanski, Don (1950–)

The titles of Don Domanski’s seven poetry books – such as Heaven (1978), Wolf-Ladder (1991), and Parish of the Physic Moon (1998) – indicate the roots of his poetry in both nature and spirituality. For over three decades, his poetry has tried to balance the belief (once quoted from Novalis by Domanski) that “All that is visible clings to the invisible” (Domanski 1986: 7) with the feeling expressed in one of his poems that “the human heart is still / three ribbons tied to a belief / in flesh and form” (from an unpublished poem).

Born in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, in 1950, Domanski has lived most of the past thirty years in Halifax. His poetry is richly original, with influences ranging from Baudelaire and twentieth-century Surrealists to Wallace Stevens, from ancient Chinese poetry to Rilke, from Buddhist scriptures and Sufi teachers to Hindu, Christian, and Jewish mystics. During an interview conducted in 2002, Domanski humourously called himself “a spiritual free-range chicken, pecking here and there, finding what suits the hunger of a moment” (Domanski 2002: 247). He has also read extensively in the sciences, and collected fossils for many years. He sums up one of his core beliefs in the interview just cited: “The wonder is that anything at all exists” (Domanski 2002: 246). His poetry is also permeated by his sense of the interconnectedness of all things.

Domanski’s poetry is less likely to record stages in human history than to hint at the vastnesses of biological, geological time; less likely to describe natural phenomena in their full idiosyncratic detail than to present them as seen by a transforming eye energized by both reason and intuition. Domanski’s experience of nature is one of restless, unusually fertile metaphor-making. The shortcomings of language fully to express both the immediate and the ineffable are reflected in his metaphors, his constant renaming and redescribing. Though his poetry includes images of wolves, bears, and whales, it has been especially drawn to small creatures such as ants, moths, snails, mice, and bats. A spider “prays that its buckle / of flesh will last out this night” (Domanski 1978: 34). A finch is “surely not Lucifer / yet in the quick climb / a true competitor for Man” (Domanski 1975: 23).

For all the sustenance his poetry finds in myth and dream, even when Domanski uses words like “heaven,” “angels,” and “gods” he does so with a startling physicality. His “heaven” is not conventionally palatial and golden, but something that “sprawls its unearthly hulk / an inch above the pond / to finger its brainwork of flies” (Domanski 1978: 60). Elsewhere, heaven is “miserable,” “lonely / for wooing / for the dolphin’s / sensual flesh” (Domanski 1978: 25). This is poetry in which a god of creation “put on a wool sweater / and felt the tupping of sheep / down the back of it” (Domanski 1986: 67), and in which angels have “pen-names / like Michael and Israfel / but know themselves as larvae / twirling in a man’s ear” (Domanski 1975: 54). It is a poetry that delves deeply into the borderland between the visible and the invisible.

Brian Bartlett

Further Reading


See also: Canadian Nature Writing.

Domestication

Among the seminal processes that characterized the evolution of human culture, one of the earliest was human-kind’s developing awareness of the surrounding physical world. This led, inevitably, to attempts to explain this world and the human relationship to it, attempts which found expression in the emergence of philosophical and religious belief systems. All such systems, whether relatively simple and localized in character or the subsequent complex, institutionalized structures of the world’s great religions, contain elements that focus on these concerns. Among tribal peoples, for example, “nature” (in its broadest sense) provides sustenance, and is inextricably linked with fertility and fecundity, and the mysteries of birth, life, and death; the elements of nature that direct these forces have to be dealt with – controlled, where possible, or propitiated or appeased through ritual and sacrifice. Among more advanced philosophical and religious traditions, however, humanity’s place in the world is formalized in doctrine and dogma. In religions originating in South Asia, for instance, humans are a part of nature and subject to the same guiding principles. This is quite different from Western views of the world, which place humans apart from nature and in dominion over it.

One aspect of this “dominion” over nature is seen in the domestication of plants and animals. Precise definitions of what “domestication” actually involves is a matter of considerable scholarly debate, but the concept invariably encompasses human control of the reproduction of plant and animal species, usually for utilitarian purposes and commonly to provide sustenance – a process that
invariably results in genetic differentiation between wild and domesticated forms of the species involved. Domestication has occurred in many locales and with many different species and at many times in the past, but the domestication of cereals and of herd animals that occurred in the ancient Middle East around 8000 B.C.E. is widely seen as the *sine qua non* of the beginnings of agriculture, the rise of the earliest urban civilizations, and associated emergence of complex social structures and formal religious systems.

The origins of agriculture, along with the motivations for, and the processes of, domestication represent important themes in Western thought. Numerous theories have been put forward to explain these origins, from the cyclical Golden Age theory of classical times to the “Three Stages of Man” theory of the nineteenth century, to various hypotheses of the modern era. The latter include the evolutionary thinking of Robert Braidwood and David Rindos (domestication is the result of natural evolutionary processes involving contact between humans, plants and animals), environmental challenges (e.g., the climatic change proposed by V. Gordon Childe and Charles Reed), economic factors (e.g., the population-pressure theory of Mark Cohen), social mechanisms (Barbara Bender and Brian Hayden) and the ecological model of Kent Flannery.

A common thread underlying many of these theories of agricultural origins is that domestication was undertaken for the purpose of developing food supplies. Such interpretations, however, have been challenged by scholars who argue for non-utilitarian motives for domestication. In the late nineteenth century, the German geographer, Eduard Hahn (1896) proposed a religious motivation for the domestication of herd animals, especially cattle. He noted that the usefulness of wild cattle for labor or milk could not have been foreseen until after they had been domesticated, and that initial interest in them was as sacrificial animals. Hahn specifically proposed that common cattle were the first herd animals to be domesticated; and that they were domesticated in Mesopotamia to provide animals for sacrifice in fertility rites dedicated to the lunar mother-goddess.

Hahn’s ideas were taken up and elaborated by the influential cultural geographer Carl Sauer and others during the middle and later decades of the twentieth century. Animals were often domesticated, Sauer argued, less as a food source than for ceremonial or ritual purposes (1952). Erich Isaac restated Hahn’s view that the motive for domestication of cattle in western Asia was religious rather than economic (1962). In their study of the *mithan*, a free-ranging, domesticated bovine of the northeastern hills bordering the Indian subcontinent, Frederick and Elizabeth Simoons, concluded that the animal was probably domesticated for sacrificial purposes. The Simoons suggest similar processes at work in the domestication of common cattle in the ancient Near East, though there – unlike in South Asia – economic functions subsequently came to dominate the initial ritual role of cattle.

Religious motivations for the domestication of cattle in the Ancient Near East have come to be challenged in the light of the archeological record. However, some scholars see religion playing a significant role in the process by which stable, sedentary agricultural societies (i.e., societies whose economies were based on domesticated plants and animals) emerged in Southwest Asia. Jacques Cauvin (2000), for example, notes the explosion of religious symbolism associated with the Neolithic in this region and argues that a religious revolution preceded the shift from hunting and gathering to farming. Çatal Hüyük, an important archeological site near Konya on the Anatolian plateau of Turkey, shows remarkable evidence of thriving fertility cults dating to as early as 6500 B.C.E. embracing a mother-goddess, a bull-god, and cattle. The site also shows the presence of both wild and domesticated forms of cattle at approximately the same time. Such evidence has led Ian Hodder (1990) to speculate that agriculture, surrounded by ritual, was adopted not for the purpose of ensuring food supplies, but as a metaphor for human domination over nature.

Whatever the validity of arguments for religious motivations for the domestication of cattle in the Ancient Near East, there are other instances where religious or ritual motivations for the domestication of specific plants and animals have been proposed. Some scholars have suggested that cereals were domesticated to produce beer for ritual purposes prior to their use as food. Turmeric and other dye plants may have been domesticated for religious reasons. Isaac (1970) has argued that the citron was domesticated for ritual purposes, and that its spread through the Mediterranean region was tied to the Diaspora and the citron’s role in Jewish ritual. He also cites the domestication of the cat in ancient Egypt as being the clearest case of religious motivation in the domestication of an animal (the cat was the epiphany of the Egyptian goddess Bast). Sauer proposes that the chicken was originally domesticated in Southeast Asia for cock-fighting purposes, representing, perhaps, a ritual reenactment of some mythological divine combat. Certainly, the association of the cock-crow with sunrise and the identification of the poultry egg with death, rebirth and fertility (e.g., the “Easter egg”) are ancient ideas held in widespread areas of the Old World. Similarly, the pigeon played a significant role in the religious conception of early farming communities in the ancient Near East, becoming a symbol of the mother-goddess. This symbolism appears to have been adopted in Christianity, and even today the dove continues to be a universal sign of peace.

Examples of domesticates from the New World, with its different fauna and flora and history of human settlement are more limited, though they do occur. Raúl Azúa has suggested, for example, that in MesoAmerica, macaws,
some parrots and several songbird species were domesticated for religious purposes, while howler monkeys, hares, quail, and woodpeckers were maintained in captivity for ritual purposes.

Domestication is a process by which humans have extended their control over nature, bringing certain plant and animal species under their direct control. The first domestication of cereals and herd animals in the Ancient Near East nearly 10,000 years ago led to a significant change in the nature of humans’ relationship with their environment, one that had remained relatively unchanged since the species Homo sapiens first appeared on Earth.

The more assured food supply permitted the emergence of permanent settlements, population growth, the rise of cities, social stratification, religious systems, technological advances – indeed, all the features commonly identified with “civilization.” Traditional views propose that domestication was undertaken for utilitarian reasons, but these views have been challenged by those who argue that a religious revolution preceded the emergence of agriculture and that religious belief and practices may have played a critical role in this process. Whatever the validity of this view, numerous examples exist where religion and ritual may have been involved in the emergence of specific domesticates. Religion has, in a sense, acted as an arbiter between humans and nature. It has allowed humans to explain their place in the natural world, but has also allowed them to dramatically change the character of this very same world. The domestication of plants and animals has been one means by which the latter has been accomplished.

Deryck O. Lodrick

Further Reading

See also: Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Goshalas (Home for Aged Cattle); Hinduism; India.

Donga Tribe

The “Donga Tribe,” as they came to be called, were a group of 15–20 young people who lived for most of 1992 directly on Twyford Down in an effort to stop the land from being destroyed for the M3 (Southampton–London) motorway. Twyford Down was apparently “the most protected site in Britain,” its chalk downland the habitat for a number of rare species, ensuring that several areas were designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Twyford Down had long been an area of human habitation; a barrow containing excavated skeletons was just one of several Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The whole Down was an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Another Scheduled Ancient Monument on part of the Down was the iron-age trackways where the Dongas had their camp. These trackways were first called “Dongas” nearly a century ago by the two ex-Winchester private schoolboys who left Twyford Down in the protection of Winchester College in their wills. Dongas is the Matabele word for the same type of humanmade gullies and remained the local word for the trackways. The group of
people who came together to protect and live on the land “acquired” the name the Donga Tribe, and this self-identification with the land itself quickly became explicitly tied to their political and spiritual beliefs.

The Dongas, Earth Firsters, and other activists (needless to say, these identities blurred) who, over the course of the protest, delayed the motorway construction through their direct actions, were the catalyst that sparked a decade of roads’ protest and related direct action in the nineties, and up to the present day. The Dongas were, to borrow Sidney Tarrow’s term, “early risers” in this protest cycle, and thus their actions and worldviews had a significant influence on the wave of activists who followed. In turn, many of these ideas had diffused down from Greenham Common women – whose long-lived anti-nuclear protests became a model for the Dongas activists to emulate.

In the first stages of the protest (autumn 1992), the primary action strategy was to defend the land from “attacks” by the contractors and their machinery; a regular occurrence was the arrival of bulldozers on the Donga end of the Down, activists lying down in front of the machinery, and the retreat of the bulldozers. This changed on “Yellow Wednesday” (9 December 1992 and, ominously for the Dongas, the date of a full moon lunar eclipse) when for the first time security guards were hired to forcibly remove the Dongas and other activists from the site. The three-day eviction sparked accusations of security and police violence, national media coverage, and a resurgence of protest at Twyford in 1993. “Site invasions” – charging onto the increasingly vast (40 meters deep, 250 meters wide, a mile long) scar through the Down and stopping the machines working – became a regular occurrence, sometimes attracting hundreds of people.

Underpinning the political direct actions of the Dongas was an ethical framework, an explicit spirituality – or to be precise, a political paganism. The Dongas explicitly articulated a sense of connection to nature; nature was seen as sacred. Crucially, the Dongas saw themselves and all life as part of this web: nature was not some “other.” These concepts (most people were familiar with Lovelock’s “Gaia” theories) were linked to ideas about significant landscapes and Earth energies. The Down, and the nearby hillfort St. Catherines’ Hill, were “powerpoints,” markers for currents of Earth energy or leylines. The Dongas were not alone on this; the founder of Winchester College, also a Mason, was also a keen sacred geometer, and to this day, Winchester College schoolboys hold a service on the Hill on summer solstice morning.

The Dongas felt that these beliefs would have been shared by the Bronze and Iron Age people who had lived on the Down. Identifying with sacred landscape thus meant identifying with these earlier “tribes.” They felt such a connection to the place and its history that they produced stories, poems, songs and myths about wheels come full circle, new tribes, old ways. Conscious parallels were also made with the beliefs and political land-rights struggles of indigenous tribes worldwide.

Magic reality, myth-weaving and sympathetic magic melded into direct action. Believing themselves protected by the land that they physically defended with their bodies, they symbolized this protection and called it into being with the use of significant images and objects. Music, especially drumming, and invoking protection through chants and songs, often preceded action, and went on during it. The Dongas would stop work for the day by running onto a worksite at the other end of the Down, dressed in a wicker and cloth dragon and sitting on the machines. They would meet the advancing bulldozers with (for example) goddess chants, faces smeared with chalk from the Down, sage sticks – the purifying herb used in ritual by the North American Indians – and hazel pentacles (the pentacle symbolised protection and the five elements – Earth, air, fire, water and spirit). Their camp was protected by a ditch that they dug in the shape of a dragon (the dragon symbolized Earth energy), runes, and a hawthorn hedge. Women on the camp would go out on moonlit nights and make very personal magic, planting (for example) garlic bulbs (as a purifying herb, garlic symbolized protection) and other objects of personal importance on the boundaries of the land. They would sing, invoke (most often) the moon, and ask for the land to be protected.

Simply on the level of group psychology, this meld of ritual and direct action worked well, uniting and empowering the group and making the digger drivers (and later the security guards) very wary. In the early days, it was significant how the bulldozers always stopped at the dragon ditch boundary at the edge of the camp. On the first night of “Yellow Wednesday,” when the lunar eclipse started and the (outnumbered) Dongas broke back onto the land now defended by security guards, the guards huddled around their fires as the Dongas danced. Dozens quit their jobs the following day.

Donga paganism was of a very earthy, “hedge-witch” nature (i.e., closer to country herbalism than anything else). Thus plant identification, noticing what was in season and making herbal remedies with the results such as comfrey root ointment for bruises and rosehip syrup for colds was a mainstay of Donga paganism. Everyday nature, the facts of life, growth and change, were at the heart of what was seen as magical. Similarly, the Dongas observed and celebrated natural cycles such as full moon and winter solstice with fire, music, drumming, circle-dancing and often the ingesting of “magic mushrooms,” an indigenous hallucinogenic mushroom which, whilst “recreational,” also enabled shamanic connection to the Earth/universe, increasing the sense of sacredness. On such nights (and on many others), protection “spells” for the Down were made up on the spot during drumming and chanting sessions like performance poems, very
differently from formalized ritual. "Male" and "female" energies present in living things were celebrated, articulated in archetypal ways – the Green Man, the Triple Goddess (maid/mother/crone; also linked to the moon, new/full/waning). One such "spell" sung straight out went: "green man of sap springing / moon lady water flowing / both bound together / protect the land around us."

It should be emphasized that the Dongas did not claim to see these essences actually manifesting (unless they had eaten many magic mushrooms). Rather, they were symbolic ways of reestablishing connections to nature, and, as importantly, to history.

Such everyday "cookbook" eco-magic was tied into ideas about living lightly on the Earth through living communally and sustainably. The Dongas lived in benders (like rounded tepees) made from saplings and tarpaulins, ate communal simple meals, buried their feces, etc. Such alternative lifestyles were seen as providing at least partial solutions to overconsumption and an anthropocentric alienation from nature, viewed as the modern (Western) condition. Critiques of Christianity’s role in creating cultures/structures of patriarchal anthropocentrism and dislocation from nature, viewed as the modern (Western) condition. Critiques of Christianity’s role in creating cultures/structures of patriarchal anthropocentrism and dislocation from nature were a common thread, concentrating on such manifestations as the power implications of burning village midwives and herbalists as witches, the loss of animism, and the like. Such discourses, and the political paganism, link Donga spirituality to ecofeminist, deep ecology, and social ecology perspectives, as such distinctions often blur among and within individuals.

Alexandra Plows

Further Reading
See also: Anarchism; Deep Ecology; Dragon Environmental Network (United Kingdom); Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Ecofeminism (various); Eco-Paganism; Radical Environmentalism; Social Ecology.

Dragon Environmental Network

Dragon was founded in London in 1990 to link environmental action with a magical practice called "eco-magic." Founding members sought a practical expression of the pagan belief that "the Earth is sacred."

Dragon’s practical work began with woodland conservation, but within months we became involved in the campaign to save Oxleas Wood. Dragon worked closely with other campaign groups providing practical as well as eco-magical support. We initiated a postcard campaign and petition, published a school information pack on the Wood and helped organize fundraising events.

Dragon initially kept our magical work secret, but allowed it to become public knowledge once our practical worth was proved. Oxleas Wood became a major campaign success when the road project was shelved in July 1993. As Dragon became more widely known, the need arose to establish basic principles that allowed flexibility but clearly established our identity.

We agreed that:

1. Dragon believes that the Earth is sacred.
2. Dragon is a decentralized network – a web of people working together on local, national and international issues.
3. Dragon combines practical environmental work with eco-magic. Each is as important as the other and it is through this synergy that we focus our vision for change.
4. Dragon is committed to nonviolent direct action.
5. Anyone who shares our principles and aims is welcome to join, regardless of their religion or spiritual path.

Our aims were defined as to:

1. Increase general awareness of the sacredness of the Earth.
2. Encourage Pagans to become involved in conservation work.
3. Encourage Pagans to become involved in environmental campaigns.
4. Develop the principles and practice of magical and Spiritual action for the environment (which we call "eco-magic").

With Oxleas Wood safe, Dragon became more involved with the M11 road protests in East London and the Twyford Down campaign. The Dongas Tribe, who were encamped on the Down, were natural allies, although Dragon remained an essential urban pagan group.

Dragon grew throughout the early 1990s reaching a membership of over 300 in 13 local groups. The organiza-
tion was particularly active in road protests and nature conservation, and published a regular newsletter discussing environmental issues and eco-magic.

The mid-1990s marked a peak of activity. Dragon became involved with many campaigns including protests against the Criminal Justice Act, road building at Solsbury Hill and Newbury, and the Manchester airport campaign. Conservation work continued, and the Essex Dragon group started to manage woodland for the regional Wildlife Trust. Positive media coverage of Dragon improved public perception of Pagans, while environmental concerns proved to be fertile ground for interfaith work. But despite, or perhaps because of, this success, Dragon needed to change.

The influence of eco-paganism meant that by the mid-1990s eco-magic had become common at campaign sites in Britain. Some Dragon members felt that eco-magic had become a movement that was beyond any one organization, so Dragon increasingly adopted a networking role.

Meanwhile, internal concerns that Dragon had become a campaigning rather than a magical organization led to an increasing focus on eco-magic. Dragon now encourages the development of eco-magic through conferences and a journal. The Dragon website has a selection of eco-magic workings and a links to an email discussion list.

Dragon has become part of a global movement and, instead of membership, holds a register of eco-magic practitioners. Joining the Network is free and open to all. Although Dragon welcomes people from all magical traditions, we have evolved an eco-magic that is strongly influenced by Starhawk. Dragon rituals, which typically include drumming, dancing, chanting and simple ritual, blur the distinction between ceremony, performance and political action. Dragon has organized open ceremonies at protest sites, during the illegal “Reclaim the Streets” street parties, and at nightclubs.

The Dragon World Tree Rune, a central symbol for the Network, is a sigil combing several runes. The Dragon Rune has been drawn onto machinery, buildings and trees, used in ritual and meditations and worn as a talisman.

Mainstream campaigners typically show a skeptical tolerance of eco-magic, while grassroots protesters often invite it. Dragon works mainly with grassroots groups, although there has been constructive cooperation with Friends of the Earth, Surfers Against Sewage, the Wildlife Trust and local councils.

Several campaigns illustrate Dragon’s commitment to social protest as well as narrowly defined environmental campaigning. The M11 campaign, for example, was as much about the destruction of an urban community as the environmental impact of a road.

The Network has specific principles, it encourages constant reinterpretation and ultimately belongs to whoever practices eco-magic.

Adrian Harris

Further Reading


See also: Deep Ecology; Donga Tribe; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Eco-magic; Eco-paganism; Paganism; Radical Environmentalism; Starhawk.

Druids and Druidry

Contemporary Druidry, notionally derived from the ancient religion and philosophical system of the Celts as described by classical authors and later Christian commentators, is a highly eclectic phenomenon. There is considerable variety within Druidry (Pagan Druids, Christian Druids, New Age Druids, CyberDruids, syncretistic Zen Druids and Hassidic Druids) and differing levels of commitment, formality and seriousness among Druids.

The earliest references to Druids come from classical authors, who remark upon their level of learning (acquired over many years of study), and their ritual use of mistletoe, oak trees and groves. The social and religious position of the Druid described in classical literature is often equated with that of the Brahman in Hinduism, a tradition with which Druidry is frequently compared. Bards (concerned with poetry, genealogy and music) and Ovates (specializing in healing) were also part of this system. Classical accounts of human sacrifice are rejected by some modern Druids as a slur by hostile outsiders, while others explain that for a willing victim acting for the good of the community it would have been a great honor.

Although for centuries Druids were depicted as the pagan enemies of Christianity, their image underwent considerable rehabilitation in the eighteenth century. Antiquarian and Anglican cleric William Stukeley characterized Druids as proto-Christians who had come to Britain “during the life of Abraham, or very soon after,” with a religion “so extremely like Christianity that in effect it differ’d from it only in this; they believed in a Messiah who was to come, as we believe in him that is come” (in Piggott 1989: 145). Welsh patriot, freemason and Unitarian Edward Williams – better known as Iolo Morganwg – presented and promoted what he claimed was an authentic, ancient Druidic tradition of the British Isles which had survived in Wales through the bardic system, a distinctive Welsh language poetic tradition. He held his first Welsh Gorsedd (assembly of bards or poets) in 1791 on Primrose Hill in London. In 1819, Morganwg’s Gorsedd became affiliated to the Welsh Eisteddfod (itself an eighteenth-century revival of a medieval literary and
musical competition), which promotes Welsh language and culture, and is still held annually in Wales. Morganwg claimed that ceremonies were to be held outside, within a circle of stones (at Primrose Hill he carried stones in his pocket for the purpose) and “in the eye of the sun”; they were to start by honoring the four directions. He also taught the Gorsedd Prayer, which he attributed to an ancient bard:

Grant, O God! thy refuge,
And in refuge, strength,
And in strength, understanding,
In understanding, knowledge,
In knowledge, knowledge of right,
In knowledge of right, to love it,
In loving it, the love of all essences,
In love of all essences, love of God,
God and all Goodness

(in Morgan 1975: 51)

Morganwg’s claims and writings were accepted as genuine at the time, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that they were denounced as imaginative elaborations or forgeries.

Many modern groups trace their roots to the eighteenth-century Druidic “revival,” particularly the Ancient Order of Druids which in the nineteenth century spread widely in America, Canada, Australia and Europe. A number of those involved with the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Celtic revival (such as W.B. Yeats) were involved in Theosophy, which in turn had an impact on how Druidy was envisaged. Broadly speaking, three main strands of Druidry emerged in the nineteenth century: cultural Bardism on the Welsh model, with its linguistic, literary and cultural focus; “mutualistic” Druidry, primarily concerned with its members’ welfare; and esoteric or religious Druidry. This third strand developed and flourished in the twentieth century, with a great proliferation of new Druidic groups in Britain, Ireland, Europe, America, Australia and New Zealand, in parallel with the growth of paganism, alternative spirituality and Celtic religiosity.

Modern Druids generally observe the Celtic or eightfold calendar, although nowadays some ceremonies (particularly relating to Imbolc, Beltane, Lugnasagh/Lammas and Samhain) may be held on the nearest weekend to allow more people to attend. Rituals are held “in the eye of the sun” (i.e., usually in the middle of the day), the spirits of the four directions are honored, and Morganwg’s prayer is said (sometimes adapted to include God and Goddess, gods, or whatever is appropriate to the group). Ceremonies tend to reflect on the time of year, the passing of the seasons, and connectedness with both the land and the ancestors. Some groups are keen on what are regarded as “traditional” long white robes, while others innovate or leave dress style to individual taste. Becoming a Druid in some groups involves instruction, initiation and a cumulative three-stage process, from Bard through Ovate to Druid; other groups regard these three as distinct and complementary roles, and are less formal or completely informal about membership criteria.

The connection between Druidry and Stonehenge, popularized by Stukeley in the eighteenth century, continues to be articulated and acted upon by Druids in England, for whom the issue of access to the site for ritual purposes has become a matter of religious and civil liberty. While some Druids believe that Stonehenge and similar monuments were built by or for Druids, others argue that although their building may predate the arrival of “historical” Druids, they are of such obvious sacredness and significance that Druids would have used them as ritual sites. The “archeoastronomy” of writers such as Thom (1967), Hawkins (1965) and Hoyle (1972) has reinforced views of the importance of the solstices and the advanced scientific knowledge of the ancients. Numerous new stone circles have been and continue to be built for ritual purposes by Druid groups in the British Isles, Europe, America and the Antipodes. While many prefer to perform ritual at ancient sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury where possible, some Druids argue that rather than traveling to distant sites, people should be honoring and sacralizing their local landscape.

As some regard Druidism as the original native spirituality of the British Isles, the incorporation of elements from “other” indigenous traditions seems logical; thus didgeridoos and drumming are commonplace at Druid rituals, there are Druidic sweatlodges, and Druidry is commonly equated with shamanism. Some Druids resident in countries such as North America and Australia use Druidry as a means of expressing their Celtic heritage and practicing what they consider their ancestral religion; others strive to make creative links between Druidry and the land, spirits, people and religious practices of the places where they now reside.

The close connection between Druidry and the land is frequently articulated. One of the aims of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) founded in 1964, is “to work with the natural world, to cherish and protect it, and to co-operate with it in every way – both esoterically and exoterically.” The Charnwood Grove of Druids in England declare,

We believe that people working together are capable of raising power which can balance and heal the Earth. We focus our energy at local sacred sites and we honour the Celtic god and goddess forms as personifications of the land and the seasons (1997: 33).

Many Druids are committed to schemes for planting woodland, and some have been involved in protest action
against the destruction of ancient sites, landscapes or forest. The various courses that orders and individuals now run on Druidry tend to include instruction on sacred trees, animals and plants, and herbal lore. “Awen,” traditionally understood as the poetic or creative inspiration particularly associated with Bards, is more broadly interpreted by the British Druid Order as “the divine inspiration that flows, spirit to spirit, between the people, the land and the ancestors.”

Just as Stukeley considered Druids proto-Christians, there are Christian Druids who see Druidry as both precursor of and complementary to Celtic Christianity. Indeed, many feel that Celtic Christianity became the repository of Druidic wisdom, accounting for what are seen as its distinctive features, such as awareness of nature and holism.

Modern Druidry is symptomatic of the flexibility and creativity of contemporary spirituality generally, and the ways in which people look to the past to create something meaningful for the present. While aspiring to continuity in relation to ideas and practices from earlier periods, Druidry becomes ever more diverse and globalized in its beliefs and praxis.

Marion Bowman

Further Reading
See also: Celtic Spirituality; Paganism; Stonehenge.

Drums and Drumming

Rhythm is a repeating pattern of beats marking the passage of time. It is embodied in the cycles of nature: of life and death, evaporation and rain, the sequencing of ocean waves and tides, the inhalation and exhalation of animal breath, the donning and shedding of leaves. Earth is a planet heavily influenced by the recurrent phases of an orbiting moon, dependent upon and defined by its steady pace around the sun. The consistent heartbeat of the mother is the first sound a fetus hears afloat in the womb, and a child is born into a rhythmic world. In a sense, the health of an individual or ecosystem is the result not only of its diversity, but also of the polyrhythmic interaction of its constituent parts. Taking this metaphor a step further, it is as though in its practiced separateness civilized humanity has gotten “off beat,” out of synch with the overall composition of greater creation.

Rhythm can be an aid to reconnection, and the drum is an instrument of rhythm. Drumming has the potential to lead both the player and the engaged audience into deep sensory and emotional contact with their natural selves, each other, and the natural world of which they are an integral part. Played rhythms can reflect and at times entrain with the rhythms of the body, suspending normal cognition and intellection and leading to an expansive feeling of connection or oneness. The result may not only be musical but religious.

Ethnomusicologist Fredric Lieberman and Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart have written in their book Planet Drum,

Our word religion comes from the Latin and means “to bind together.” A successful religion is one that binds together all the fundamental rhythms that each of us experiences: the personal rhythm of the human body, the larger social rhythm of the family, tribe, or nation, and the enveloping cosmic rhythms of the planet and universe. If a religion “works,” its followers are rewarded with a new dimension of rhythm and time – the sacred (1991: 17).

For “primitive” indigenous peoples the meaning and success of human affairs is often held to be determined by nature spirits or forces. The drum is a vehicle for the shaman to access the realms of these spirits, in order to bring back to the people the wisdom and songs found there. The medicine elders of many tribes and traditions – such as the Inuit of Canada, the Huaraorani of Ecuador and the Siberian Buriat employ distinct mesmerizing rhythms for the purpose of encouraging an altered state that can lead to sacred visions, heroic spiritual assignments or miraculous cures.

Drums produce the low-frequency “steep fronted” sonic impulses that most strongly affect the auditory cortex.
Commercially available biofeedback machines indicate that the psychically aroused “alpha/theta border” occurs when the electric brain waves are pulsing at a rate of six to eight cycles per second – the predominant tempo of Haitian Voudo music and African trance dancing. The theta state occurs after sex and right before sleep, the twilight phase when linear thought succumbs to free-form images, and awareness of the narrowly defined self is supplanted by identification with the shifting fields of an organic whole.

Drumming and ecstatic dance are common elements not only of primitive land-based tribes, but also of many contemporary gatherings featuring a synthesis of spirituality and nature including Eugene, Oregon’s Environmental Law Conference, the annual Earth First! Rendezvous, the Rainbow “tribal gatherings” in the U.S. and Europe, and pagan festivals such as Starwood in Ohio or the solstice and equinox events at Stonehenge, Great Britain.

The drum’s purported ability to provoke personal religious experience was understandably threatening to various state churches and their far-flung missionaries, as was its tendency to excite behavior that the Christianized Roman Empire ruled “licentious” and “mischievous.” Portuguese colonizers in Brazil in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries enforced laws against the percussive music of their African slaves. The sound of Native American drums was sometimes enough to trigger a violent response from the U.S. Cavalry during the messianic religious revival of the late 1870s known to historians as the Ghost Dance. Since the 1960s drums have been a regular feature of environmental protests throughout the world, from efforts to save the Daintree Forest in New South Wales, Australia, to “drum-ins” at the Nevada nuclear test site. Ecoactivist drummers include Starhawk, an acclaimed author and Wiccan priestess known for her spirituality and nature including Eugene, Oregon’s environmental law conference, the annual Earth First! Rendezvous, the Rainbow “tribal gatherings” in the U.S. and Europe, and pagan festivals such as Starwood in Ohio or the solstice and equinox events at Stonehenge, Great Britain.

Further Reading


See also: Music (various).

Dualism

Dualism refers to a view of reality as divided into two incompatible parts. Early forms of dualism focused on the division of good and evil, embodied in two divinities. The religion of Zarathushtra for instance, emerging approximately 600 B.C.E. and located in the area of what is today eastern Iran, identified a good and an evil spirit who are locked in battle. Since no middle ground exists between good and evil, humanity needs to decide on which side to stand. This divine dualism, however, does not imply a dualism between spiritual and material reality or between religion and nature. The good spirit is seen as the creator of the material world, and even though the evil spirit has
Dualism – A Perspective

Religious reflection instigates resistance to the exploitation and devaluation of nature in its critique of dualism as separation of spirit and matter, and where it locates God not only in relation to humanity but also in relation to nature. This position finds support not only in the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but also to a certain degree even in Zarathustra’s ancient religion which promoted its own kind of dualism. The difference between Zarathustra’s dualism of good and evil and the dualism of spirit and matter promoted by the Gnostics shows that dualism as such is not in itself a problem for the relation of religion and nature. A clear distinction of good and evil that does not shy away from naming destructive forces and dares to call for open resistance may well help in resisting the exploitation of nature. An insistence of God’s otherness not in terms of the tension between spirit and matter (or transcendence and immanence) but in terms of the tension between liberation and oppression/exploitation may indeed strengthen the relation of religion and nature. Not dualism in general but the dualism of spirit and matter and the related dualism of humanity and nature are, therefore, at the root of the problem. These latter dualisms endorse a devaluation of matter and nature and are thus unable to resist the increasing exploitation of nature and the material world which has acquired a whole new dimension with modernity and the industrial revolution.

At the dawn of the new millennium, one more step in the metamorphoses of dualism needs to be mentioned. In the world of the postmodern global market there is a new shade of dualism that takes on quasi-religious legitimacy due to the fact that it is considered as rooted in ultimate reality. This dualism poses new challenges. Here the increasing pace of commodification – of turning more and more of reality into commodities whose value is determined by the market – extends ever further beyond nature and the material world to human beings and even to what might be considered the “spiritual world.” In this situation, the dualism between humanity and nature (anthropocentrism) is no longer the primary issue. A new form of dualism, between a world of pure economic value (venture capital, stocks and bonds, the fiscal “bottom line”) and a world in which most of humanity and nature are lumped together as subservient to the economy (defined by economic value for instance as raw material, as producers of commodities, as commodities, or as without value due to lack of employment or use for the economy) poses new challenges to religious reflection and invites new forms of resistance.

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also had a hand in the creation of things like demons and “noxious creatures,” the material world is not bad in itself or inferior as such.

The later religious systems of the Manicheans (a group that also originated in Iran) and of the Gnostics in the early centuries of the common era expanded their divine dualisms to include a dualism between spiritual and material reality. Here the material world is no longer the creation of the good spirit; rather, the material world is the work of an inferior spirit, often called the “Demiurge” in Gnostic systems. The material world, including nature and the human body, is thus less than perfect. Perfection can only be found in the spiritual world. In the Manichean and Gnostic dualisms, salvation no longer aims at living a harmonious life in the material world and in nature in accordance with the will of the good spirit (Zarathushtra’s religion, by contrast, even included reflections on the divine quality of the sowing of grain). Salvation now aims at finding ways to sever one’s ties with the imperfect material world and to find refuge in the perfect spiritual world. Dualism now includes the incompatibility of the material and the spiritual, a position that has wide-ranging implications for the relation of religion and nature.

In the modern study of religion and nature, this latter dualism between the material and the spiritual seems to be invoked in the argument of medieval historian Lynn White and others after him that Christianity, particularly in its Western form and in contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions, established a dualism of nature and humanity that made it “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.” This dualism has been used to endorse the mastery of humanity over nature. In light of this often repeated critique, however, it is well to recall that such a strong dualism does not seem to be warranted by Jewish and Christian beliefs that Godself is the sole creator of the world and that this creation is good in God’s eyes (Gen 1:31). In Islam, too, Allah is seen as the creator of the world, a conviction that does not allow for a strict dualism of matter and spirit and implies a positive view of the world and the imperative to preserve it.

Nevertheless, it is true that followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have not always managed to resist dualistic images. Christianity, in particular, has often harbored a residual dualism between humanity and nature that is paralleled by other dichotomies between spiritual and worldly things and between mind and body (frequently based not only on Gnostic influences but also on internal developments, such as misreadings of the Pauline dichotomy between “flesh” and “spirit” – a dichotomy that does not necessarily refer to a dualism of matter and spirit but to two different ways of living in the world [Gal.
5:19–22]. With the Enlightenment and the industrialization of the West, these dualisms have been further extended to dualisms of producer and product, of culture and nature, and of subject and object, all of which have had detrimental effects on the relation of humanity and nature.

In recent history there has been increasing awareness of the connection between dualisms that have led to the exploitation of nature and other exploitative relationships. Feminists and feminist theologians have exposed links between the dualism of matter and spirit and the dualistic images of maleness and femaleness. Ecofeminists have taken this critique further and located dualism in three phenomena, including (1) classical thought and certain aspects of the Jewish and Christian traditions, (2) the Enlightenment emphasis on human autonomy, objective knowledge, and mechanistic thought, and (3) the dichotomy of Earth and a transcendent God. Similar arguments are now also made from a Latin American point of view, where Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff identifies the core problem of religion and nature as the dualistic separation of people and nature.

Dualism, it has been argued, has contributed to the economic exploitation of nature, justified the depletion of natural resources, and led to the destruction of nature. The main problem with the dualisms in question is not merely that they divide reality, but that this division leads to subordination and to a structure of service according to which one part of reality must serve the other: nature must serve humanity, women must serve men, and the body must serve the mind. Dualism, therefore, results in a form of anthropocentrism where everything is subordinated to the concerns of humanity, which is seen as a manifestation of the spirit, and – as feminists would add – in androcentrism (male-centeredness) where everything is subordinated to the desires of men.

If dualism is thus identified as the problem, the remedy is often seen in establishing unifying relationships. Notions like “organism,” “community,” “wholeness,” “interdependence,” “connectedness,” and “mutuality” are considered to provide antidotes to dualism and separation. Process theology has promoted a natural theology on the basis of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, which relates nature, humanity, and the divine without giving up the distinctions between them. In this way, process thinking counters the often overly mechanistic worldview of modern science (mirrored in industrial and other economic developments), which relegates nature and the world to a lower level of existence and shows little concern about its well-being. New Age spiritualities, incorporating insights from multiple religions, have rediscovered mystical and cosmological traditions in order to heal the gaps (see, for instance, the work of Matthew Fox and Western efforts to incorporate Eastern spirituality). Others, like the Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara have talked about relatedness as “primary reality.” The North American theologian Sallie McFague praises ecological thought because it transforms the division of subject and object in modernity into relationships between subjects and proposes to rethink the world as nothing less than the “body of God.” Ecofeminism adds an understanding that relationship is not uniform but permits diversity and a complex web that respects differences of race, class, and national boundaries.

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Further Reading


See also: Boff, Leonardo; Dualist Heresies; Ecofeminism (various); Gebara, Ivone; Holism; McFague, Sallie; New Age; Smuts, Jan Christiaan.

Dualist Heresies

Dualist heresies, beginning with Gnosticism, basically held that there was a fundamental antagonism between the world of matter and the world of spirit. Good was posited in the spiritual sphere and Evil in the natural. Some systems held that the evil, created world came into being because of a revolt against a primordial spiritual god. Others believed that there were two coeternal and equal gods and that the material world was a product of the evil supernatural being. These views came into sharp conflict with an orthodox Christianity that saw the natural world as the creation of a good God and a place where salvation could be realized. Ironically, the dualist emphasis on personal knowledge, pacifism, the equality of women and simplicity – over against institutional religion, power, conformity and doctrine – set the stage for later perspectives on the environment as sacred.
In the second century, Gnosticism presented a considerable challenge to orthodox Christianity. The Gnostics said that Christ had a body only in appearance and that his death on the cross was a show. At this time, a new type of Christian theologian arose to address the challenge. Called apologists, they were frequently converts well versed in the philosophies of the times. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202) set the stage for the orthodox refutation of Gnosticism and subsequent dualistic heresies. His basic position was simply that Gnosticism contradicted the experience and teachings of the Apostles who knew and wrote about the historic Jesus and the events surrounding the Resurrection. Christian orthodoxy consists of this traditional teaching of the Church handed down in large part by bishops. The orthodox position stood in sharp contrast to the direct and personal experience of the Gnostics and their view that the resurrection of the body was symbolic.

Gnosticism existed before Christianity and functioned independently of it. Manicheism began in the fourth century as a distinct religion that incorporated elements of Christianity. Mani, the founder, saw three stages in the world’s development. In the First Time, Light and Darkness comprised two kingdoms. In the Second Time, the two kingdoms clashed and produced a mingling of the two substances. Adam and Eve begin the Second Time. The end of the world will inaugurate the Third Time. The great ambassadors of revelation were Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus. The definitive revelation comes to Mani.

Mani’s purpose was to recover the light imprisoned in the world. Knowledge and understanding are the first conditions of salvation. Light resides in knowledge, revelation, spirit, soul, heaven, the heights, repose and endurance. Darkness is found in ignorance, matter, body, depth and unrest. Light will be free and pure after the final destruction of the cosmos by eschatological fire. Each person is a microcosm of the struggle. Therefore, one should withdraw from the darkness of meat, wine, sex and property and eat luminous foods such as melons and fruit.

The Manicheans had two types of members; the Elect and the Auditors. The Auditors brought food to the Elect. With the Auditors, marriage was tolerated, concubinage was permitted, but procreation should be avoided. They believed in a transmigration wherein the soul could move down to become an animal and, beyond that, move to hell. The Emperor Justinian (r. 527–565) joined with the Christians and drove Manicheism east. It was virtually gone by the end of the ninth century.

The Cathars

After the Manicheans, the Paulicians, a dualist group, emerged in Armenia in the sixth century. Bogomilism, another dualism, started in the Balkans in the tenth century. The Bogomils believed that God the Father had two sons, Jesus and Satan. This heresy influenced the Cathars.

The Cathars arose in the Middle Ages as the strongest dualistic heresy since the Manicheans. Its principle hubs were in Northern Italy, Southern France and Bosnia. The most dramatic conflicts occurred in Southern France during the early years of the thirteenth century.

Languedoc is the area of present-day France that stretches from Avignon west to Aquitaine and south to the Mediterranean Sea and the Spanish border. It was a prosperous land, rich in troubadour poetry with a reputation for tolerance and a significant number of Jews. The Jewish Cabalist writings from this area and period show dualistic influences.

The Great Cathar Council met at St-Félix-de-Caraman sometime between 1166 and 1176 to establish the tenants and design the infrastructure for the new movement. The Cathars began with a doctrine of an absolute dualism that posed the inexorable opposition between two co-eternal and coequal powers; a good god and a bad one. They believed that matter was evil and that one should live an ascetic life without sex. The community was divided into The Perfect and the Believers. Ideally, the Believers would go through the rite of Consolamentum before they died. This rite was administered by the Perfect and it alone assured salvation. The Cathars had no use for the Christian sacraments or a belief in the resurrection of the body. The soul was imprisoned in the body and the object of redemption was simply to release it. The Cathars found dualistic meanings in the Bible and in nature. One Cathar theologian said that morning dew and honey were the fluids that flowed from the coitus of the sun and moon. Therefore, humans should not eat honey.

The Perfect were black-robed monks-in-the-world. They lived lives of great simplicity, abstinence and serenity that were in marked contrast to the opulence of the Catholic clergy around them. Unlike the Manicheans, women could be Perfects. There was real gender equality here. The approximate number of the Cathar Perfect at the beginning of the thirteenth century has been estimated at between 1000 and 1500.

Strong opposition to the Cathars began when Innocent II became pope in 1198. He called for a crusade against the kingdoms of Languedoc. Called the Albigensian Crusade after the town of Albi, the movement quickly became very violent. The crusaders used the occasion for plunder and personal gain. The word “Albigensian” was originally used to denote the Cathars of Southern France. It later became loosely synonymous with all Cathars.

The procedure for dealing with the Cathars was to put them on trial and, if convicted, burn them. Deceased Cathars were exhumed and their bodies burnt. The Albigensian Crusade and its aftermath gave rise to the notion of a permanent papal heresy tribunal as opposed to a local episcopal one. In 1231, Pope Gregory IX established the Inquisition, which continued to search out and try...
suspected Cathars. The newly founded Dominicans had little success preaching in Languedoc before the Albigensian crusades. Afterwards, they and the Franciscans were involved with the Inquisition. The Inquisition quickly went from being an undertaking of a fanatical few to a proficient bureaucracy employing hundreds and interrogating thousands. Their process included a pervasive system of informants. On the other hand, the Cathars lived simple and frugal lives. They abhorred violence, and were fine doctors and herbalists.

The Inquisition slowly eliminated the Albigensian threat. Some pockets survived for a while in the Pyrenees and Alpine mountains, Verona, Sicily and Bosnia. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, only a heroic few dared to say aloud that the world was evil. By the middle of the century, the Inquisition had virtually eliminated any residual traces of the Albigensian heresy from the landscape.

But today, the Cathars are still remembered. Driving south into Languedoc, there are signs that read, “Entering Cathar Country.” In the 1930s, Simone Weil looked to medieval Languedoc as a moral utopia. French Protestants have recalled the Cathars with sympathy, as have advocates for a more decentralized France. Romantic tales were written linking the Cathars with the Holy Grail. A Nazi-Vichy spin on these stories prefigured “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” After the Second World War, a Ku Klux Klansman in Michigan named Robert Miles, influenced by the Cathars, called for a new religion named dualism as a way of attracting white racist followers.

Later Developments of Dualism
The Protestant Reformation showed some dualistic elements. Roman Catholics referred to the Protestants as “heretics” and the reformers had the same opinion of the Catholics. Martin Luther (1483–1546) emphasized the sinfulness of human nature and claimed that it was only the sheer grace of God that could save humanity. John Calvin (1509–1564) added the notion of predestination, which held that before someone was born, they were predetermined to be saved or damned. No human effort could alter the consequences. In this arrangement, God’s complete power was manifest.

Jansenius (1510–1576) gave Calvinism a Catholic twist. According to Jansenism, the supernatural and preternatural gifts (i.e., immunity from death and sickness) were natural to Adam and Eve. These gifts were “lost” in the Fall and consequently everything purely natural is evil. Humanity is powerless. If God gives grace, sin can be avoided. Further, God gives the grace only to a few. Jansenius saw himself as a man raised by Providence to save the Church from the Jesuits. The Jesuits preached prayer and the sacraments as ways humans could cooperate with grace and avoid sin.

Quietism was later developed by Michael de Molinos (1628–1696), a Spanish priest who worked primarily in Italy. Quietism advocated a passive rather than an active approach to the spiritual life. An individual’s will should be lost in God. If one committed sin, they would then do so without offense. One should annihilate all his or her powers. The desire to be active in one’s spiritual life is offensive to God. Temptation should be ignored because resistance involves activity.

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Further Reading
See also: Christianity (5) – Medieval Period; Holism; New Age.
The fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was born in the Amdo region of eastern Tibet in 1935. Recognized at age six as the reincarnation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, he was brought to central Tibet, where he began his formal education. Dalai Lamas traditionally are invested with full temporal power at age eighteen, but due to the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 the date was moved up by two years. The 14th Dalai Lama (religious name: Tenzin Gyatso, shortened from Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso; born Lhamo Thondup; 6 July 1935) is the current Dalai Lama. Dalai Lamas are important monks of the Gelug school, the newest school of Tibetan Buddhism, which was formally headed by the Ganden Tripas. From the time of the 5th Dalai Lama to 1959, the central government of Tibet, the Ganden Phodrang, invested the position of Dalai Lama with temporal duties.