

Ecospirit: Religion and the Environment

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"Ecospirituality": a Word that Unsettles

From time immemorial, nature and the sacred have been deeply intertwined, be it in animist and pantheistic beliefs, in the Christian view that the “Book of Nature” complements the Holy Scriptures, or in Far-Eastern philosophies of compassionate non-duality which envision the divide between S/self and O/other as illusory. Only relatively recently in human history has the link between nature and piety been weakened by the development of post-agrarian, global, and consumerist-driven economies. Even the advent of Western-style empirical science could not completely sever the connection between mysticism and enquiries into nature: Francis Bacon and his heirs may have transformed the Earth into a feminised and exploitable “subaltern”; but, conversely, humans have also been awed by the natural sciences and the glimpse that they offer into the patterns of creativity and communication of natural systems whose complexity continues to surpass our understanding. As rightly pointed out by specialists of “nature spirituality” like Bron Taylor, eco-biological models like James Lovelock’s Gaia theory have also given rise to new non-theistic, postmodern “ecopieties” (13-41). Thus, to borrow Taylor’s terminology, whether one talks of the current “greening” of institutional world religions or of the emergent forms of “dark green” spirituality sacralising nature and rooted in holistic ethics (Taylor 12), the non-human realm of creation, its primacy, mysteries, and elusive “language” continue to inspire spiritualities old and new worldwide.

Yet, whether it be of the milder green or more radically dark green variety, “ecospirituality” has unsettled and continues to do so, not just outside the confines of the ecocritical community, but also in its very midst. Whilst ecocritics tend to concur in attributing social, economic, political, and ethical causes to the current environmental crisis, not all would go as far as to see it also in terms of a “spiritual crisis” and to the point of considering that the “religions of the world may have a role to play” in addressing climate change (Sullivan xvi-xvii). The unease with the latter position is probably even more tangible amongst ecocritics in Europe than in North-America, owing to the greater secularisation of European society since World War II and the far more violent history of religion on this side of the Atlantic (including the more bitter struggles

to establish a wall between Church and State in certain countries).¹ Thus, Lovelock's Gaia theory may be more acceptable to some as a *biological* paradigm than as a *cosmological* one (see R. J. Berry 109-111).

The discomfort generated by the move from science to spirituality that diverse versions of ecopieties entail has multiple sources. To begin with, the concept of the "ecospiritual" actually yokes two equally problematic areas of experience, namely "Nature" and "Religion," concepts which not only prove notoriously resistant to easy definitions, but which also touch upon deeply personal, psychologically constitutive facets of existence. Besides the many uncertainties lurking behind the deceptively simple lexical surface of these two words, delineating where one stands as against "Nature" and "Religion" often implies doing away with social masks and false pretences to the point of psychological exposure and vulnerability. In addition, at a more purely intellectual level this time, the ecospiritual dimension inherently supposes the acceptance of some kind of holism. It is precisely this built-in holism that renders ecospiritualities of any ilk suspect to a number of ecocritics wary of the theorisation of ecosystems in terms of harmonious networks (see Garrard). Likewise, the ecospiritual propensity towards holism proves difficult to embrace too for ecocritics contesting the assumptions of "Romanticism" regarding Mind and Matter, on the one hand, and those of "Deep Ecology," on the other (Barnhill, "Relational Holism" 79-83). However, if ecospirituality and "Deep Ecology" are indeed intimately associated, the *relational holism* (Barnhill, "Relational Holism" 98-100) mostly implied in ecotheologies or nature religions² may, paradoxically enough, perhaps act as the necessary corrective to the Deep Ecological subsuming of particular selves into the biotic whole (Barnhill, "Relational Holism" 79-80). Finally, a third but important objection to the ecospiritual stems from the rather mixed record of categories like the "natural" and the "sacred" in human history: whilst certain constructions of "Nature" and "Religion" may empower men and women towards a fuller realisation of their potential on the road to becoming truly "human," other conceptions of these terms have played a far more dubious role,

¹ When it comes to the unease and divisions felt by a segment of the ecocritical community at spirituality and climate change discussed together, the ASLE-UK 2008 meeting provided a case in point which I personally witnessed. A keynote by a (rather progressive) divine generated a genuinely stormy session contrasting with the otherwise civil debate that had characterised the conference. The commotion was all the more remarkable in view of the rather advanced time of evening at the close of an already rather full day. Interestingly, there seemed to be a divide not only along religious lines—believers as against non-believers—but also cultural and regional ones: whilst some English members of the audience strongly objected to bringing "G/god" remotely into the discussion, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish listeners found that it was a perfectly legitimate approach, one that pleased rather than offended their "Celtic" sensibilities.

² In his typology of approaches to the "Self," Barnhill defines "relational holism" as being able to combine both a holistic and particularistic view and as thus denying ontological primacy of the whole over its parts ("Relational Holism" 99; 101). The paradoxical view of the Self associated with "relational holism" is that of "Selves-with-selves-in-Selves-as-selves" ("Relational Holism" 99).

and have required a subjugation incompatible with basic individual freedom(s).³ Not only do ecospiritualities enlist these controversial categories of the "natural" and the "sacred"; at an even more fundamental level, they also force ecocritics to ponder to what extent some expressions of environmental consciousness sacralise nature, and, for that matter, to question whether they legitimately do so. In other words, ecospiritualities raise the uncomfortable possibility that much of environmentalist and ecocritical practice/discourse might be, or at least partake of, mutating forms of the religious.⁴

A Constellation of Perceptions: Dark Green Spiritualities versus the Greening of Religions

Dark Green Religiosity

If the sources of discomfort attached to ecospiritualities are multiple, so are the manifestations of "dark green" expressions of the spiritual or the religious.⁵ For Taylor—one of the foremost and clearest experts on religion and environmentalism, who therefore deserves to be quoted at some length here—dark green religion goes beyond just "posit[ing] that environmentally friendly behavior is a religious obligation" (10): it holds that "nature is sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore owed reverent care (10). It also "contrasts markedly with the world's predominant religions, which are generally concerned with transcending this world or obtaining divine rescue from it" (3). Depending on whether they incline more towards naturalistic or supernaturalistic elements, Taylor distinguishes between four types of dark green religion, with porous boundaries between some of them. On the one hand, under the heading of "Animism," Taylor makes the difference between "Spiritual Animism" and "Naturalistic Animism," though no watertight demarcation line separates them (14-15). On the other hand, under the heading of "Gaian Earth Religion," Taylor identifies "Gaian Spirituality" and "Gaian Naturalism," categories which again retain some permeability from one to the other (14-15). Whether of the more "vertical" or "horizontal" kind, Animism "involves a shared perception that being or entities in nature have their own integrity, ways of being, personhood, and even intelligence" (15). Taylor also adds that in both its varieties, Animism "postulates that people can, at least by conjecture and imagination, and

³ One only needs to think of the naturalisation of racist arguments in ideologies like Nazism, or of the role of the sacrificial victim in religion, "sacrifice" and "sacred" being etymologically linked.

⁴ See, for example, Tarjei Rønnow's extensive study of the environmental movement in Norway, a study which precisely develops such an argument (119-256).

⁵ In using the terms "religion" and "spirituality," I here subscribe to the distinction often made between organised, institutional religion and more personal, subjective mysticism. Again, Bron Taylor's clear definitions are very useful: "Spirituality is often thought to be about personal growth and gaining a proper understanding of one's place in the cosmos [...]" (3).

sometimes through ritualized action and other practices, come to an understanding of some of these living forces and intelligences in nature and develop mutually respectful and beneficial relationships with them" (15-16). Conversely, be it "skeptical of supernaturalistic metaphysics" (Taylor 16) or open to the possibility of a "superorganism—[...] the biosphere or the entire universe—[having] consciousness" (16), Gaian Earth Religion is above all characterised by organicism and holism (16). Furthermore, says Taylor, in its supernaturalistic version, this form of dark green spirituality "defies the naturalistic fallacy argument in ethics (the assertion that one cannot logically derive a value from a fact) by suggesting that nature itself provides models and natural laws to follow" (16). As becomes readily apparent, Taylor's schema makes room for a mix of older religious sensibilities with much newer ones, a blend that immediately calls to mind the characteristics of some emergent and alternative religious movements—such as neo-paganism and "New Age" mysticism—at odds with the theistic legacy of the Abrahamic traditions. Taylor himself is actually positing the hypothesis that the four forms of dark green religion may be contributing to the "emergence of a global, civic, earth religion" (180), which he also calls "Terrapolitan Earth Religion" (180-199).

What Taylor calls dark green religion presents major overlaps with what R. S. Gottlieb terms "Spiritual Deep Ecology," which the latter theorist not only sees as being "at once the oldest and newest of world religions" (Gottlieb, "Spiritual Deep Ecology" 31), but whose traits also repeatedly brush against those of emergent and alternative spiritualities. Gottlieb's "*spiritual orientation* of intimacy with and reverence for the earth" (Barnhill & Gottlieb, Introduction 6) rests on a number of distinctive features of Deep Ecology as nature philosophy (Barnhill & Gottlieb, Introduction 5), which again usefully illuminate the type of syncretic holism and organicism at work in many forms of dark green ecospiritualities: besides "biocentric egalitarianism" and an ecocentrism emphasising "the intrinsic value of nature" (Barnhill & Gottlieb, "Introduction" 6), the following components are also identified as characterising the stance of interrelationship between humanity and a sacralised natural world:

[...]

- an identification of the self with the natural world;
- an intuitive and sensuous communion with the earth;

[...]

- a tendency to look to other cultures (especially Asian and indigenous) as sources of insight;
- a humility toward nature, in regards to our place in the natural world, our knowledge of it, and our ability to manipulate nature in a responsible way ("nature knows best");
- a stance of "letting nature be," and a celebration of wilderness and hunter-gatherer societies. (Barnhill & Gottlieb, Introduction 6)

One important difference between Gottlieb and Taylor seems to be that the former perceives dark green, holistic tendencies to be fundamentally at work within major world religions as well as within newer, more radical strains of religiosity (Gottlieb, "Spiritual Deep Ecology" 17), whereas the latter theorist associates these more exclusively with spiritualities outside the mainstream.

To some, radical environmental consciousness is thus linked to cosmology, instead of just to biology, constituting a form of alternative, emergent spirituality, a proposition as rich in possibilities as in dangers—both Taylor and Gottlieb do not see the sacralisation of nature as immune from the dangers of fundamentalism that may beset any other type of religious persuasion (Gottlieb 24-25; Taylor 217-220). To others, however, the problems of dark green ecospirituality range even further. As already mentioned earlier, the Deep Ecological holism pervading much dark green religion has been attacked for its erasure of "the concrete world of particulars and relationships" (Barnhill, "Relational Holism" 80) and its privileging of an undifferentiated self that identifies with a biotic community more than it engages with individual beings (Marti Kheel, qtd. in Barnhill, "Relational Holism" 79). A far more unforgiving criticism sees dark green ecospirituality as automatically synonymous with fundamentalism and antirationality *per se*, a position most recently voiced again in France by the philosopher (and novelist) Pascal Bruckner. *Le fanatisme de l'Apocalypse. Sauver la Terre, punir l'Homme* (2011) has little to say about the danger of recuperation and commodification of ecospirituality; by contrast, though, this polemic essay has much to assert about what it considers to be "apocalyptic fanaticism" informed by the fear of climate change combined with a naive, idealised "New Age" vision of the non-human world as more benign in relation to the human one than it actually is. In short, Bruckner sees dark green ecospirituality and its—in his eyes, undue—reverence for nature as a form of asceticism that substitutes one oppressive, personal god for another, more impersonal deity, while surreptitiously maintaining the patterns of penitence and punishment of conventional religion (Bruckner 201-238).

The Greening of Traditional Creeds

Precisely in response to the challenges set by dark green forms of ecospiritualities, traditional religions have seriously begun to interrogate their stance towards the natural world, especially seeking to ascertain whether their mitigated record at environmental preservation is really linked to inherent flaws in doctrine and fundamental teachings. Christian theologians have particularly been keen to re-assess the foundations of their faith as against Lynn White's denunciation of Christianity as supposedly the most anthropocentric of all religions (White 9-10). This effort within the different strands of Christianity has also found parallels in the endeavours of Judaic

and Islamic specialists to clarify the position of their tradition *vis-à-vis* the world of nature. The reactions to Lynn White tend to develop in two different—if at times complementary—directions. On the one hand, certain scholars seem to remain very wary of the neo-paganist orientations taken by dark green spiritualities and wish to re-affirm the distinctions between their tradition and pagan and animist creeds (from which, after all, Judaism and Christianity sought to distance themselves at their respective historical starting points). Scholars adopting such an approach do not seek to deny that their belief system does indeed privilege humans as against non-human creatures, while hierarchically ordering Creation (Palmer 35-37). However, this re-assertion of "unashamed anthropocentrism" is very often mitigated by an equally strong re-affirmation of the duties of earth stewardship also contained in foundational texts. Granted that this stewardship model may have served in the past as the ready-made, "glib" excuse to avoid looking at how Judeo-Christian faiths may have been complicit in the spoliation of the natural world. However, even from a secular, non-Judeo-Christian perspective,⁶ objectivity forces one to admit that this stewardship model appears nowadays less used in religious studies as an "easy way out" of environmental ethics than as a serious "way into" it. Indeed, if writers across the board repeatedly emphasise the special place of humans in the divine scheme conceived of by the Abrahamic faiths, they also stress the extent to which the human relationship with God can only truly unfold *through* respect for His Creation; in this light, therefore, the desecration of the natural world actually mirrors the moral corruption of humankind (Palmer 39-40). Though Deep Ecologists would resent this instrumentalisation of Nature towards metaphysical ends, the renewed examination of the stewardship model seems, nevertheless, to lead to an appreciative rediscovery of the central importance and priceless beauty of the non-human world—a message that may always have been there, but to which some Christians may have tended to stay unduly—if not conveniently—blind [Wendell Berry 305-306]).

Next to the affirmation of a more strongly ethically-binding and richer model of earth stewardship, the other direction taken by commentators coming from the vantage point of Christianity is that of a more radical attempt to incorporate the relational holism characteristic of "Spiritual Deep Ecology" into their creed. From this perspective, the Biblical text and the Biblical world view are understood less as definitive revelation than "revelation-in-becoming," so to speak. Thus, this particular wing of exegesis goes one step further in its endeavour to "green" traditional teachings: what it proposes is not merely a more environmentally aware decoding of fundamental texts, but instead the genuine development of an "eco-theology" and "eco-pneumatology" based on a re-interpretation of them. This "reformation and reinventing"

⁶ This is the perspective from which I am writing.

of the Biblical story (Dalton and Simmons 46) has been undertaken from a variety of angles, amongst which: Joseph Sittler's re-interpretation of Christology and the concept of grace; Thomas Berry's attempt, in the wake of Teilhard de Chardin, to fuse the story of evolution with Christian theology; Rosemary Radford Ruether's ecofeminist theology; the process metaphysics of John Cobb and Jay McDaniel; and Sallie McFague's and Denis Edwards's respective versions of eco-pneumatology, which seek to integrate theology and modern scientific cosmology (Dalton and Simmons 39-52; Butkus and Kolmes 149-163).

Precisely with regard to the integration of the physical with the metaphysical, it has been generally assumed that East-Asian belief systems offered more ready-made, built-in models of relational holism—an assumption often inherited from the embrace of non-Judeo-Christian creeds by the twentieth-century Counterculture. Yet, even on the terrain of Hinduism and Buddhism, more cautionary voices urge us not to fall prey uncritically to the enthusiasm accompanying the novelty of these belief systems that have but recently penetrated the West. Undoubtedly, systems like Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, for instance, view the self as far more porous in relation to his/her environment than the subject would be in dualist Western thought: it is actually more of a "non-self" that is attuned, respectively, to the all-pervading energy of the *Dao*, the Confucianist *Qi*, or to the plane of Buddhist "Emptiness."⁷ Likewise, permeable boundaries prevail in traditional Hinduist cosmology, in which "the world exists as an extension of body and mind" (Chapple 62), and in which given parts of the human body correspond in microcosm to different aspects of the universe on a macrocosmic scale (Chapple 61-62). Yet, despite world views in which all selves—both human and non-human—are at the same time their own centre and at the periphery of other creaturely centres, with which they ceaselessly interact in the web-like, net-like texture of reality, the actual environmental record of societies infused by these Far-Eastern systems proves perhaps as mitigated on the ground as the record of Judeo-Christianity does in the West.⁸ Moreover, if a number of Asian systems put

⁷ The natural cosmologies of Daoism and Confucianism cannot possibly be exposed here in all their complexity; nor can the variants of Buddhist "Emptiness" or "vacuity." Readers interested in Confucianism may wish to turn to Mary Evelyn Tucker's "Touching the Depth of Things. Cultivating Nature in East Asia" (*Ecology and the Environment: Perspectives from the Humanities* 49-64). Volume 2 of *Religion and the Environment* (2010), edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, contains detailed and instructive contributions on Confucianism (159-180; 195-214), Daoism (181-194), Hinduism (89-158), and Buddhism (213-215), respectively. A useful complement to these can be found in Gottlieb, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and* 160-206, 220-235. The reader may also wish to consult Barnhill and Gottlieb 59-152; and Cooper and Palmer 1-29.

⁸ Again, if I am allowed to invoke personal testimony here for a moment, back at a seminar in Toronto in 2004, I remember being in conversation with a Taiwanese specialist of environmental studies, who told me that the Buddhist monks on Taiwan may be very receptive to the principle of non-harming of other

considerable emphasis on the principle of non-violence and non-harming, from which they derive the value of compassionate behaviour towards all sentience, what is included in the latter concept is not always uniform and hierarchy-free.⁹ In addition, some theorists wonder whether the non-violent, compassionate approach to be cultivated by a self "porous" within his/her environment is not actually counteracted by other tenets of Asian belief systems, such as the considerable stress put on the illusory nature of the material universe and on the end goal of extinguishing the self to extricate it from the cycles of existence in the physical world—"mind" winning over "matter," so to speak (Tanner & Mitchell 210-211).

Whether in theistic or non-theistic space, ecospirituality past and present is thus anything but a monolithic phenomenon, its multi-dimensional character being further complicated by the fact that religious belief does not merely revolve around teachings, but also around performance and ritual. Though covering this aspect would go far beyond the remit of this introduction, how religious ritual may reflect, on the one hand, and help foster, on the other, environmental awareness and action also forms an important part of the ecospiritual equation.

Multiple Facets of the Ecospiritual Mosaic

The diversity of ecospiritual formations recalls in part the variety of organisms found in nature and the complexity of ecological matrixes. By analogy, the religious and the sacred may perhaps be seen as "mutating organisms" embedded in the open systems of culture and society. The present Special Focus section does, therefore, certainly not presume to exhaust the many facets of the ecospiritual mosaic, but rather aims to give at least a sample of its variegation.

Thus the articles collected here engage with ecospirituality not only from a variety of angles, but also of traditions: whilst some contributors write from a Christian, theistic perspective, others approach the ecospiritual from within the non-theistic space of Buddhism, or from the one of so-called negative theologies deeply suspicious of religious foundationalism and the dualisms of Western thought. Others still examine ecospirituality from the vantage point of minority faiths or displaced belief systems. Furthermore, to reinforce the fact that the "ecospiritual" is not a static phenomenon, but one which, like organisms, lives, morphs, dies, and evolves, an attempt was also made at maintaining some balance between past, present, and future. Whereas some articles

life forms, but that due to sheer ecological ignorance, they continued to build temples in mountains, even at great erosional cost.

Moreover, even if colonisation indubitably did leave its mark on a number of Asian eco-systems, not every assault against them can be attributed to this cause.

⁹ For instance, if sentience in Buddhism readily applies to animals, the status of plants remains more debatable in certain texts (Hall 10, 87).

explore lost ecospirituality, others show its potential for resurgence and renewal. An effort was also made to include several disciplines: whilst some papers are more philosophical in orientation, others privilege history or cultural anthropology; others still are rooted in literature and ecopoetics. Hopefully, the different perspectives gathered here show that there is perhaps less to be feared than to be gained by keeping the dialogue between ecocritical and religious studies going: though ecospirituality is linked to a Deep Ecological paradigm, it does not simply fit into a uniform mould; its study, therefore, benefits from greater interdisciplinarity, which actually coincides with one of the original promises of ecocriticism.

These articles also illustrate that ecospirituality does not deserve the charge of naivety often levelled at it. Far from being the outgrowth of a "'New Age' fad," the ecospiritual tree does not only have very old roots in the religious development of humankind, but also in the latter's intellectual soil: for what transpires from these pieces is not so much dogma and certainties as ongoing reflection and questioning, together with a recurrent, dynamic refusal to evacuate ethics and its vexed complications from the existential equation. In this respect, the nine contributions selected do indeed remind us that ecospiritually-minded humans cultivate not only humility before the natural world, but also humility in connection with their own capacity to know this world and to superimpose the maps of intellectual systems upon it. In fact, what links many of these papers is their inclusion of some form of "unknowing" as a desirable, ethical path to understanding. Deeply intertwined with this *via negativa* towards learning about self and other, we also find a recurring preoccupation with *narrative*: instead of religion as unshakable belief, most of these papers concentrate rather upon religion as (evolving) discourse, suggesting that it is precisely in their interrogation of how to *narrate interconnection* that environmental and religious studies meet.

Moreover, in their preoccupation with how the "ecology of the text" may perform the task of "*religere*," of yoking the human and the non-human to each other in an ethical relationship, several articles also deal with ecospirituality as a form of "prayer/meditation in action"—be it of the theistic or non-theistic kind. In the process, one of the many hues of ecospirituality is as a *practice of attentiveness*. As several contributors imply, ecospirituality does not just concern itself with re-establishing a severed bond with the non-human, but also with healing the rift with interior space and non-mechanical time. It is through this retuned attention that the self may realise that it is always already *in* nature and part and parcel of his/her environment. As repeatedly suggested in this Special Focus, without such a re-attuning between interior and external space (or space-time), environmental consciousness and its yearning to preserve and sustain an enchanted universe risk remaining shallow.

In the first article, "From The Enchantment of Nature to Fashioning a Persuasive Planetary Ethic," Whitney Bauman precisely questions the attempt to re-enchant

Nature through a *place*-based as opposed to *pace*-based ethic. In so doing, the opening article transcends conventional religious boundaries and highlights the many built-in residues of dualism to be found in conceptions of the ecospiritual which are exclusively rooted in a reverence of place. Furthermore, the author also critically examines spiritual and ethical foundationalism and their accompanying dangers. Borrowing from the insights of fashion studies and from Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "nomadism," Bauman here investigates how a truly postmodern ecospirituality could take hold without ending up in ethical relativism or denying any power of religious awe to desecrated nature. For Bauman, such an ecospirituality would have to accommodate the rhizomatic nature of both Creation and immanent experience in a globalised world.

The second article also seeks to incorporate the dimension of Immanence in a cosmopolitan and global reality, but this time by concentrating more on the syncretisms operating in it. Indeed, in "The Triumph of Eywa: 'Avatar,' Pantheism, and the Sign of an Ecological Ecumene," Anthony Lioi not only engages with one of the most popular films in recent cinematic history, but also with the fundamentalist Christian attack on "Avatar" that equates the latter with a surreptitious re-introduction of pantheism. Not only does Lioi refute the argument and demonstrate that the syncretism at work in Cameron's film actually recycles not pantheistic, but Christian mediaeval conceptions of *Natura*. In addition, Lioi also shows a syncretic, recycling form of ecospirituality accommodating the technological realities of our time and in which the notion of the "network" becomes pivotal, to the point of not only proposing an ecosystemic view of the planet, but also of spiritual knowledge.

Moving from ecospirituality mutating to reverence for nature lost, the next article takes us from philosophical and eschatological speculation to historical documentation. In "The Christian Environmental Ethic of the Russian Pomor," Stephen Brain introduces the reader to a little known ethnicity at the edge of the European continent and to their form of Christianity—one which not so much suppressed paganism as successfully incorporated it. Brain shows us how their particular brand of "sacral geography" helped the Pomor to maintain over centuries a sustainable relationship with the ocean. Brain then goes on to explain how this efficient implementation of Christian stewardship got eventually destroyed by Communism and the technological changes that it enforced upon the region. In documenting a particular example of Christian earth stewardship and its annihilation, Brain challenges Lynn White's claims by highlighting the need, on the one hand, to take into account the non-monolithic character of Christianity and, on the other, to discuss its anthropocentrism in relation to its actual historical, social context.

The next article, mainly based on actual field work, equally stresses how this historical and social environment affects the ecospiritual potential of a given religion. This time, however, instead of a case of thwarted earth stewardship, Peter Collins

documents a blossoming and newly invigorated one. In "The Development of Ecospirituality among British Quakers," Collins shows how far from being fixed, ecospirituality also constitutes a "reality-in-becoming" and behaves like an organism receptive to the influences of its social environment. Though, as Collins explains, some of the main texts of Quakerism were couched in an era that did not possess the adequate vocabulary for the expression of ecological consciousness, the built-in potential for such an awareness is now fully coming to life through contact with a society that has the right vocabulary and which can no longer ignore ecological imperatives.

Taking us into a secular, non-theistic space, the next article also foregrounds the interaction of organisms with their social environments, but this time by examining the interconnections between subjective, social, and physical ecology. With its focus on recent contemporary US fiction, this is also the first contribution privileging the written text. In "Ecospirituality in the Age of Technological Overkill: Body-Time Reclamation in the Fiction of Alan Lightman and Don DeLillo," Jonathan Butler discusses how the pace of today's capitalist, technology-driven society clashes with the elemental rhythms of the universe. Butler suggests that it is only through re-attunement to the latter that our bodies and minds can heal from the "insanity" that passes as "sanity" in much of our quotidian. This piece not only brings ecopsychology and ecospirituality together, but also reminds us that, like other forms of religion and spiritual contemplation, ecospiritualities involve the whole individual and are also about *praxis* in daily life, not least by opening up a different way of experiencing time and "creatureliness."

A different sense of "creatureliness" and an attempt at reconnection with some of its more elemental forms also course as leitmotifs through the next three pieces. The first of these actually examines some of the obstacles to this reconnection, whilst the next two explore the possibilities of overcoming such hindrances. Directly engaging with the Biblical text and once more looking at the body of religion in interdependence with the social body, "Le christianisme et l'animal: une histoire difficile" examines how the status of the animal has mutated in Christianity over time. In an impressive historical and textual survey, Eric Baratay again challenges Lynn White's claims. Besides contrasting certain developments within Catholicism and Protestantism respectively, Baratay also proposes a Durkheimian interpretation, showing that the gradual demeaning of the animal in Christianity and the more recent efforts at rehabilitation have been less dictated by scripture than by the social environment in which religions both mirror and legitimate human needs.

The next article steps into the breach opened by Baratay's survey, this time by bringing the Biblical text and the notion of sacrificial, redemptive presence into dialogue with contemporary poetry. In "'Bitter to your Stomach, but Sweet as Honey in Your Mouth': Vegetarianism, Animals and Working Towards an Ecospiritual Poetry," Hester Jones questions the dualism between human and non-human animals, examining not

only the recent attempts by Christian ethicists and ecofeminists to challenge the assumed dominion of humankind over the animal realm, but also claiming a vital role for the arts in deconstructing our acquired sense of superiority over different, more elemental forms of "creatureliness." The poetic space explored by Jones enables both poet and reader to achieve some kind of temporary, immanent "wholeness" by substituting mutual "creaturely attention" for dominion over the non-human. Interestingly too, like Butler, Jones highlights a different kind of "place-based" ecospirituality, one anchored in how human bodies relate to non-human ones.

The next contribution also foregrounds shared "creatureliness," re-anchoring in one's immediate environment (including the body), and poetry as a sacred space of reconnection at the immanent level, but it does so through the lens of Buddhist ethics and epistemology as well as through increased poetic attention to language. In "The Question of Evolution in the Buddhist Ecology of Thalia Field's *Bird Lovers, Backyard*," Gillian Parrish not only introduces us to this US poet's multi-layered textual tapestry, infused by Tibetan Buddhism, and to its challenges to dualistic conceptions of self and other. In particular, Parrish discusses how the complex textual ecology of Field's writing enacts on the page the mental ecology proposed by Buddhism. In the process, the author highlights how this Western-Buddhist essay/prose poem bridges species in a way that replaces a "hierarchy of oppression" with a "hierarchy of compassion," and thereby invites humans to conceive of the narrative of evolution not just in biological but also ethical terms.

Leaving the non-theistic space of Buddhism behind, the final piece returns to Catholic doctrine, but does so by likewise engaging with "hierarchies of compassion," old and new. In "The Vatican and Ecospirituality: Tensions, Promises and Possibilities for Fostering an Emerging Green Catholic Spirituality," Chistopher William Hrynkow and Dennis Patrick O'Hara take issue with the Vatican's current condemnation of ecocentrism as a stance that devalues humankind. In a last challenge to the Lynn White position, the authors here particularly stress that the "greening" of Catholicism would not entail a process artificially imposed from outside. On the one hand, Catholic theology itself offers a number of ecocentric visions; on the other hand, this ecocentrism genuinely intersects with the preoccupations developed in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a textual corpus that hinges on notions such as the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, the protection of human rights, and the so-called "option" for the poor. Not only are these principles compatible with an ecocentric environmental awareness, Hrynkow and O'Hara argue, but they can also contribute to an ecospiritual approach that would not ignore the challenges of environmental justice on a global scale. With these two authors, the Special Focus section thus comes full circle, examining from a different angle what the opening contribution had also reflected upon, namely the need for viable and meaningful forms of ecospirituality in a globalised world. Alternating as

they do between different, implicit shades of dark green ecospirituality (Bauman, Lioi, Butler) and various green(ing) facets of traditional faiths (Brain, Collins, Baratay, Parish, Jones, Hrynkow and O'Hara), the spectrum of articles collected here tries, in one way or another, to contribute a renewed understanding of what a considerably more far-reaching model of earth stewardship could be. In the process, doctrinal and/or transcendental "purity" matters less in the end than the choice not to sacrifice Immanence for Transcendence and to deepen the *relation to*—as well as the *interrelationships on*—this immanent plane.

Coda: Ecocriticism and Religious Studies or the Need for a Two-Way Conversation

In testing different perceptions of and possible modes of "enfleshment" (Wallace 57) of the ecospiritual in the "here and now" of material Creation, these nine contributors certainly remind us of the need for religious studies to turn to the insights of ecocriticism. Indeed, if emergent spiritualities, old religions, and even atheist or agnostic positions¹⁰ are to develop a discourse relevant to the times—one capable of interrogating species boundaries and addressing the reality of acute climate change—the religious studies community could do worse than engage with the ecocritical one. However, the reverse holds true as well: no matter the degree of comfort or discomfort that they may feel towards given forms of the ecospiritual—be those conveyed through affirmative or negative theologies—ecocritics ignore the possible conversation with religious studies at their own peril. Indeed, as Lawrence E. Sullivan reminds us, "[n]o understanding of the environment is adequate without a grasp of the religious [spiritual] life that constitutes the human societies which saturate the natural environment" (Preface xiii). Whether they are atheists, agnostics, or believers, ecocritics need some understanding of the religious phenomenon—and of what might potentially distinguish radical environmentalism from it—if they are to counter effectively the attacks made by those who, like Bruckner, are prone to equate radical environmentalism with a new form of oppressive, secular piety. Crucially too, if ecocriticism is serious about studying humans as part and parcel of nature, of bringing the three ecologies outlined by Félix Guattari in interrelationship—environmental, social, and subjective ecology¹¹—it cannot

¹⁰ It should indeed not be forgotten that even atheists and agnostics live in an "environment," and that some of the secular metanarratives of the twentieth century (like Communism, for instance) did not exactly achieve a better environmental track record than the religions which they sought to eliminate.

¹¹ Guattari defines his "*écologie*" as "une articulation éthico-politique [...] entre les trois registres écologiques, celui de l'environnement, celui des rapports sociaux et celui de la subjectivité humaine" (12-13) [an ethico-political articulation ... of the three ecological registers, the one of the environment, the one of social relationships, and the one of human subjectivity—my translation].

be forgotten that humans tend to remain "religious animals,"¹² this also being a symptom of how Nature and Culture are indeed inextricably enmeshed with one another from the start. If ecocriticism does not imply the study of the non-human world at the expense of the human one, and if, contrary to what Pascal Bruckner asserts, radical environmentalism does not amount to a redemption of Nature through the punishment of Humankind, then some injection of "ecospirit"—of whatever hue—may not only be a possible corrective to some of the more undifferentiated aspects of Deep Ecology, but may also usefully sustain the intellectual pilgrimage of trying to better situate the Human in Nature ...

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¹² Whether humans run after a truth or an illusion in living out their existence as "religious" animals matters here less than the fact that they continue to behave as spiritually-minded creatures, whatever the philosophical conclusions they eventually reach. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that secular societies have not eliminated the religious instinct and exude a number of "para-religious" features, the veneration of the invisible hand of the market being just one example.

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