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categorically cannot be expressive of it. To use the term in the singular allows it to be applied to any religious group, on the basis of criteria that are not dependent on any particular religion.

Nature religion can be distinguished from other religion on the basis of its understanding of transcendence. Nature religion can then be constructed as a type of religion in which nature is the milieu of the sacred, and within which the idea of transcendence of nature is unimportant or irrelevant to religious practice. By this definition, not only contemporary Paganism and indigenous traditions, but practices and beliefs of any religion can be expressive of nature religion. This definition recognizes that a religion can be expressive of nature religion without being exhaustively defined by nature religion. For example, not all contemporary Pagan religious traditions are expressive of nature religion by this definition, since some posit divinity transcendent of nature, as in the panentheism of Gus diZerega (2001).

Transcendence, in nature religion, tends to be lateral rather than vertical. Spirits and deities are of this world rather than beyond it, and can be contacted through the natural world. Nature religion is this-worldly religion. Contemporary expressions of nature religion are often explicitly this-worldly, with the hope that a valuation of this world and none beyond it will encourage us to respect and preserve it. In nature religion it is more often culture than nature that is transcended. This is to be expected in phenomenon that are often seen as countercultural, as are many of the phenomenon of nature religion, such as the Christian folk singers discussed by Albanese, and modern British witchcraft as described by Ronald Hutton (1999).

The usefulness of the term "nature religion" lies in the broadness of its applicability. It is limited in being applied only to the United States, or only to contemporary Pagan religious traditions. It is useful to look at wider social and cultural developments in terms of nature religion, and to look for expressions of nature religion in mainline religious traditions, such as creation spirituality in Christianity, and Thich Nhat Hanh's practices in engaged Buddhism, and to look for this-worldly expressions of mainstream traditions. However, it remains to be seen how useful the term might be in understanding indigenous traditions. There have been no in-depth studies of specific groups or spiritual traditions in indigenous cultures in terms of nature religion, probably in part because "nature religion" is yet another Western category, but also because it is a relatively new area of research in the study of religion.

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**Further Reading**

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*See also*: Bioregionalism; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Celestine Prophecy; Deep Ecology; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Nature Religion in the United States; Paganism (various); Radical Environmentalism; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Romanticism (various); Snyder, Gary.

## Nature Religion in the United States

(This article is adapted from material previously published in Catherine L. Albanese, *Reconsidering Nature Religion* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002) and is used with the permission of the publisher.)

What does it mean to speak of nature religion? For a general audience in the Western and English-speaking world, probably the first reference that comes to mind is land-based and environmental. Nature means grass and trees, panoramas and vistas, mountains and lakes and oceans. So nature religion means beliefs and practices that involve turning to God in nature or to a nature that is God. For a smaller, largely self-identified group in the same Western and English-speaking world, nature religion signals Goddess more than God, and nature is the principal trope for a religiosity that calls itself pagan or, alternately, neo-pagan. To invoke nature religion becomes a way to call attention to one's pagan/neo-pagan spirituality and, also, group commitment. For still others who have a familiarity with Western religious and theological history, the term nature religion is teasingly close to two others – natural religion and natural theology.

These last are designations that arose in an eighteenth-century Enlightenment context under the guiding star of deism. For the Enlightenment, natural religion made sense in contradistinction to supernatural religion – the revealed religion of Christianity based on the inspired word of scripture. Natural religion therefore meant the religion of reason alone; or, in tandem with human reason, the religion that looked to nature as its holy book of inspiration. It ranked inferior or superior to Christianity, depending on prior belief commitment and point of view. Still more, if it was counted superior, it was thought to be grounded in the essential order of the universe and of all things. In a distinctly Christian understanding, natural theology became the system of religious thought constituting knowledge of God and divine things that one could obtain by reason alone. It was suspect and generally rejected in Protestant theological circles of Reformation provenance (because of their view of the fallen nature of humanity) but more warmly received by Roman Catholics and, later, by liberal Protestants.

In light of all of the above, what other way or ways can there be to invoke nature religion, and that in a United States historical context? The answer to this question (or, really, set of questions) leads as far back as the early coalescence of the culture that later came to flourish in the United States, and it leads, too, through a multiple canon of religious meanings, ranging from Idealist philosophical statements that show clear marks of European influence to popular cultural practices that have come together in new ways in our own time. The answer leads us, too, to an extremely fragile world – a world that is deconstructing itself even as it comes to be.

As an Idealist philosophical statement at its broadest, consider the definition announced by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) in his Transcendentalist manifesto *Nature*:

> Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE.

Here Emerson invoked "both nature and art" to define nature, and then he went on to explain that the term had both a "common" and a "philosophical import." "*Nature*, in the common sense," he wrote, "refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. *Art* is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture." Yet of this latter – of "art" – Emerson was dismissive. Human operations collectively considered were "so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result" (Emerson: 1971, 8). Many, of course, would be less speedy to relegate human constructions to a cosmic recycle bin. Yet in the space between Emerson's two definitions – his "philosophical" sense and his "common" one, there stands an American definitional and historical territory that may fruitfully be explored under the rubric of nature religion.

Since the rubric is distinctly nature *religion* and not simply nature *theology*, let it be clear that any American historical survey must move beyond beliefs regarding nature, however reverent and profound. Rather, the rubric must encompass cultural practice that is intimately connected with belief both in condensed symbolic settings (i.e., in ritual and devotional situations) and in more broad-gauged and general ones (i.e., in everyday behaviors that act out ethical stances and convictions). It helps to remember, too, that to engage in such an American historical survey of nature religion is hardly a minor exercise or an add-on from the point of view of the Western religious tradition. With theology or religious thought as its strong suit, this tradition has placed nature near the top of its short list of major categories by which to make sense of religion. God and humanity comprise the first two categories. Nature, however culturally diffuse and evanescent, forms the third.

Shaped then by an Emersonian space between philosophy and common usage and a Western religious space, in which nature counts for major consideration, what does a hypothetical cultural narrative regarding nature religion in the United States look like? We are back, in effect, at a more reflective version of the initial question: how do we speak with definitional and historical inclusiveness of nature religion in the United States? How do we name and narrate nature religion? And, again, what are the limits of such speaking? How, in other words, do we construct a past that may be useful in the twenty-first century? The beginning of an answer and a narrative may

be found in the seventeenth century – in the time when the different players who would assume leading roles initiated the series of contacts and exchanges that produced the dominant culture of the land.

Among these players, Anglo-Protestants assumed hegemonic importance in terms of a public and religiously inspired culture, but their views and behaviors were affected subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) by other groups with whom they shared space. Numbered among them were Native Americans and native Africans, English and French Catholics, continental European immigrants of both Protestant and Roman Catholic backgrounds in general, even a small community of Jews when the Dutch New Amsterdam colony became New York. Of all of these groups, it was Native Americans (or American Indians) who engaged in the series of cultural attitudes and activities that could be most clearly linked to nature religion. Working on the bases of accounts that must be pieced together from hostile English sources, from archeologically derived remnants, and from narratives collected as much as several centuries later, the general lines of an encompassing religion of nature may be sketched. Ironically, this religion of nature was never identified as such by native Indian peoples: in Indian cultural circles and communities there was no abstract "nature" to which or whom to relate. To say this another way, both word and abstraction are Western European designations for referents named and understood differently among Native Americans and also among others. Yet considered generally and collectively Native American beliefs and practices point to sacred objects and subjects residing in, or manifest as, aspects of the material world that Europeans have called nature.

With spatially oriented and environmentally shaped perception, Native Americans have honored their kinship with sacred Persons – e.g., thunder grandfathers, spider grandmothers, corn mothers, and the like – who represent (and, for them, are) the powers of nature. They have elaborated etiquettes of relationship with these Beings, for instance, when killing game and/or harvesting crops. Indians have noted their own placement on land-based terrains by paying acute attention to directional points in ritual practice and by according symbolic and theological import to the directions (for example, seeing the east as associated with sunrise, the color yellow, and new life and growth, while the west was linked to sunset, darkness, and death). Although Indians have certainly been aware of the vicissitudes of the seasons and the uncertainties of the weather, overall they have found a harmony in nature that, historically, they chose to imitate in practical ways. This meant everything from taking cues from nature in the construction of housing and bodily adornment to living out convictions that Western Europeans would regard as ethical directives.

When Africans entered what Europeans claimed was the "new world" in the early seventeenth century as indentured servants or – very quickly the norm – as slaves, they, too, brought nature-based forms of religiosity with them. West African tribes, from whom blacks had been forcibly separated, revered their ancestors but, also, revered Persons who came out of nature – again, without a generalized overarching concept of the same. While exception must be made for a significant number of Muslims among these native Africans, the local religions of West Africa tended to support theological visions of distant creator deities but also of other spirit powers and gods who were seen as close at hand. These nearer sacred beings embodied the elements of nature and could come intimately close to the bodies of devotees in rituals of trance and possession. They functioned at the center of religious life and tied their devotees to a sense of self and environment alive and holy.

Among Roman Catholics both from England and the Continent, nature occupied a relatively prominent place in theology and ritual practice as well. By the thirteenth century, scholasticism had reached new clarity in the work of Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274) and had articulated a comprehensive understanding of natural law, based on older Greek categories but reordering them in Christian terms. Nature here was not only land-based but encompassed, too, the orderly pattern of the heavens and the stars as well as the inner and mysterious workings of animal (including human) and vegetable bodies. Moreover, nature stood at the core of cultural practice within the Church both in a natural-law ethic that arose from the scholastic category and in a sacramental system culminating in the mysteries of the Eucharist. In this sacramental understanding, pieces of the material world became force-filled conduits for spiritual power, so that as representational signs they themselves were transmuted into the sacredness they signified. In the most graphic illustration of the proposition, the bread and wine of the Eucharistic sacrificial meal at the Mass became, for medieval and modern Catholics, the actual physical body of Jesus the Lord. Nature was exalted, indeed, as it became the body of God.

Nor was the religious importance of the material world lost on the small Jewish community residing on American shores. Jewish religious practice, in fact, privileged natural categories and sites. Much more than in versions of Christianity, for example, the home functioned at the center of Jewish ritual life – to the degree that it stood beside the synagogue as sacred space. The liturgy of Shabbat, or the Sabbath, took place in the home and featured agricultural products transmuted into food and family fare, in a ritual that accorded women places of ritual honor and also clearly connected natural life and products to transcendent sacred meanings. Jewish religiosity put its premium on the embodied spirituality of ritual and of ethical directives for life in this world, in relation to human communities. Jewish notions of the afterlife, by

contrast, came off as vague and trailing – afterthoughts and underthoughts in Jewish theological explication. That there were no ordained Jewish rabbis and few synagogues in the Atlantic colonies only emphasized these general tendencies in Jewish belief and practice.

What did all of this mean for Anglo-Protestants in the British North Atlantic colonies? On arrival, literate New England Puritans alternately feared the wild country of their new landscape as a wilderness in which their souls and spirits would be tested and, by contrast, celebrated it as a garden of God's good, especially when planted in new Puritan towns. Meanwhile, in the common culture that elites shared with others, English country tradition already supported a world of cunning women and men who used the products of nature in magical practices that existed alongside of and, sometimes, intermixed with Protestant church ritual. If colonial libraries can be taken as evidence, alongside these cultural manifestations an elite magical and metaphysically oriented tradition, influenced by continental Hermeticism that had been subsumed into Paracelsan, Rosicrucian, and Jewish Kabbalistic forms, flourished in early America.

Although we know all too little regarding the interactions of the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture with Indians and blacks as well as with Catholics and Jews, we gain brief and provocative glimpses as, for example, in the much-recorded Salem witchcraft epidemic of 1692. Here Tituba, a female Caribbean slave from Barbados of African or, more probably, South American Arawak Indian ancestry, stood accused of corrupting a group of young Puritan girls by introducing them to pagan practices of sorcery. In a well-known narrative, this was only the beginning of a series of "discoveries" of practicing witches in and around Salem. The communication of cultural practice, of which Tituba stood accused, must have occurred many times over in the informal connections and exchanges between Anglo-Protestant elites and their servants. In her book *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, 1987), Mechal Sobel explored the process for whites and blacks in eighteenth-century Virginia, demonstrating the subtle ways that blacks helped to shape white planter culture, as for example in attitudes toward space and the natural world. Meanwhile, among elites themselves of different religious backgrounds, there was often more social interaction than might at first be expected. In her doctoral dissertation "Early Modern English Women, Families, and Religion in the New World" (University of Rochester, 1997), for instance, Debra Meyers has documented the culture of intermarriage between Catholics and Arminianized (stressing free will) Anglicans in the Maryland colony from 1634 to 1713, and she has also shown the parallel track that Quakers followed compared to these first two groups. For all three, when "nature" meant human nature it could be more or less trusted given the prior work of Christ, so that these groups tended to support more egalitarian family structures and downplayed patriarchy and hierarchy in general.

Examples such as these, of course, add up only to tantalizing suggestions of what common sense already argues. At any rate, by the late eighteenth century and the time of the American Revolution, nature became explicitly linked by elites who were establishing the new political culture with their expansive republican venture. They understood nature in at least three senses, and each of the ways of signifying nature led to the patriotic ideology they promoted (suggesting already a nature religion in the process of unraveling?). First, nature meant "new-world" innocence – a freedom from the corruptions of old England that was symbolized in the purity of country living beside clear streams and fertile soil and also symbolized in the lack of social formalism and affectation among new Americans. Such new-world innocence brought with it a reinvigoration of the social and political project unlike what patriots viewed as the tired and effete political culture of old England with its stilted hierarchies and aristocracies.

This sense of collective freshness and vigor led to a second meaning of nature, which came with distinctly Enlightenment credentials. Akin to the affirmations that accompanied natural religion and deism, this meaning of nature pointed away from Earth and toward the heavenly bodies in order to make its point for the Earth. Nature now meant the law that turned sun and stars in their orbits, ordering the regular motion of the planetary bodies. Brought back to Earth, this universal law became the ground for all human rights and, among them especially, for political rights. Like the planets in their contained and lawful motions, the individual states that comprised the new United States would operate in their individual orbits but also cooperate in a grand symmetry of order and form. So, too, would individual human beings: nature pointed toward the egalitarian social and political patterns that were idealized in the "new order of the ages" the patriots aimed to create.

Finally, as a third meaning accompanying patriotic affirmations, nature signaled the growing practice of venerating a distinctly American landscape. Already in the late Puritan culture before the American Revolution, thoughtful religious leaders like Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and Cotton Mather (1663–1728) had, in different ways, found God in nature. After the war, in prose and poetry that linked the republican experiment with, literally, the ground that supported and accommodated it, nature became a new aesthetic trope. The "spacious skies" of the young nation, the seeming boundlessness and expansiveness of its landscape, became the divine benediction on its political project. America as a place in nature was bigger and better than anything European because its political experiment was bigger and better. More than that,

American nature evoked the Kantian "sublime" as mediated through the writings of English philosopher Edmund Burke. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke had distinguished the sublime from the beautiful because of the capacity of the former to cause astonishment, awe, and even a species of horror. Americans felt the presence of hierophany in the landscapes they observed, as Thomas Jefferson when he gazed at Natural Bridge; and they acknowledged a sacred splendor in what they beheld – in ways that redounded to their new political system. America was physically grand and awesome, and so was its political project.

These estimates turned ugly by the Jacksonian era, as territorial aggrandizement became justified in terms of the grandeur of the political project. Cherokee Indians and others walked their trail of tears to make room for white farmers. By the middle of the nineteenth century, nature religion became the justification for manifest destiny, and imperialism rode strong on nature's back. Earlier, however, even as Andrew Jackson was exporting Cherokee Indians to the Oklahoma Territory, the New England Transcendentalists were busy creating a thoroughly self-conscious and ethically high-minded endorsement of the religion of nature. (Emerson and his friends, for example, protested the forcible eviction of the Cherokees from Georgia and became stalwart anti-slavery advocates.) The Transcendental gospel itself was stated canonically in Emerson's little book *Nature*, with its declaration of profound correspondences between nature and humanity. The Emersonian declaration was accomplished in the context of the combinative English Hermetic tradition that by then was emphasizing Neoplatonism, and in concert with a then-contemporary admiration of the work of the Swedish mystic and scientist Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). The new declaration was contained, too, in a decidedly literary consciousness, but a consciousness that pushed literature strongly into the realm of the religious. For Emerson and his followers, words were signs of natural facts, which were symbols of spiritual facts. And all nature was the symbol of the spiritual.

Emerson himself preached more than he practiced. But his younger friend Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) did both. He built his well-remembered cabin on Emerson's land at Walden Pond outside of Concord, Massachusetts, and wrote his classic *Walden*; or *Life in the Woods* (1854) about his sojourn there. He also tramped the Maine woods, climbed local mountains like Mount Katahdin, and befriended Indian guides. Out of his experiences he pushed Emerson's religio-philosophical convictions regarding self-reliance in still more radical (and expressive) directions that led him into active anti-slavery work shielding runaway slaves and into at least one night in jail. To be natural, for Thoreau, meant to keep one's conscience free, to preserve the integrity of the self in face of the compromises that society – especially in organized political form – sought to impose. Thoreau's fondness for South Asian Indian religious philosophy, when he discovered it in the late 1830s, grew out of his sympathy with Indian mystical notions of unity of Self and world. If, as the Indian texts affirmed, Atman (Self) really was Brahman (the all-power in the universe), if This was That, then Thoreau's nature religion led to fellow beings and their rescue from inequity.

The Transcendentalist moment in American religious history enjoyed its heyday through the 1840s and 1850s. As an elite statement of a complex and many-faceted form of nature religion (at least in germ), it produced a lasting template for what might count as nature religion in the United States. Unlike the earlier folklorized occult and metaphysical religion of colonial America, Transcendental nature religion took religious ideas about human correspondences with an almighty Nature into new and more public directions. It acted, as it were, as a conduit from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century past into a nineteenth-century and later American future. In terms of nature religion itself, that future moved in at least three, and possibly four, major directions.

First, one major form of nature religion in the nation led out from the Transcendentalism of Emerson and, especially, Thoreau in the direction of environmentalism. The often-celebrated John Muir (1838–1914) carried writings by the two of them in his saddlebags, and he clearly revered them as spiritual mentors. Muir himself, who as a young boy had emigrated from Scotland with his family, left the family and the conventional life behind and trekked far and wide, eventually reaching California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. There he felt that he had come home to nature and to himself, a "higher self" that directed him with inner wisdom and even mystical forms of intuition. In Muir's own writings, it is clear that he worshipped a nature that was alive and sentient, resplendent with sacramental manifestations that fed his spirit to the point of inebriation. But Muir combined the earlier Transcendental veneration of the panorama of the land (Emerson) and the details of its construction and inhabitants (Thoreau) with a sense of social activism and public accountability. In this, he was not unlike Henry David Thoreau, but more than Thoreau, Muir's cause became nature itself. That he founded the Sierra Club, the nation's first environmental lobby, and that he worked at the forefront of the national-park movement that gave the United States Yosemite in 1890 are uncompromising statements to his moral conviction and its social enactment.

Muir had found a public rhetoric to connect private delight in wilderness and religious reverence for it with a domain of political practice. After him, and even alongside him, there were others, Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), Professor of Game Management at the University of Wisconsin, important among them. Leopold's enormously

influential *Sand County Almanac* (1949) gave voice to a religious and ethical valuation of nature not tied to conventional Western biblical themes. In fact, turning self-consciously away from what he called an "Abrahamic concept of land," Leopold called for a land ethic based on an affirmation of the land as a community in which humans were members. As community, the land was alive – not a mechanized and commodified other – and humans who understood its life could express love and regard for it, with its encompassing channels of energy that flowed in circuits bringing life and death to individuals.

Leopold's work made a major impact on a then-emerging twentieth-century discourse in environmental ethics, and it also provided resources for the near-mystical spirituality of many who embraced a radical form of environmentalism by the later part of the century. His haunting vision of the dying green fire in the eyes of a mother wolf that as a young man he had hunted down became a catalytic sign and emblem of the death of nature at human hands. Between Leopold's green fire, as it kept burning among those committed to radical action in movements like Earth First! and Greenpeace, and the more law-bound environmentalism of established lobbies like the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society, twentieth-century environmentalism continued into the twenty-first. It became increasingly clear that the wellspring for the passion that drove public speech and action on behalf of the environment was in large part religious and ethical. Environmentalism, in short, had become one version of nature religion in the lingering shadow of American Transcendentalism.

The Transcendentalists functioned, however, as a switching station for a second form of American nature religion as well. The metaphysical nature religion of the past, encoded in a series of cultural practices that ranged from dowsing, to the casting of magical spells, to the pursuit of astrology, to a plethora of folk behaviors involving correspondences with nature still continued even as it was transformed. Based at least in part on the new religious language that Emerson and the other Transcendentalists helped to make familiar to Americans, this metaphysical form of nature religion was now shaped by more urbanizing and middle-class times, reaching out to embrace an Enlightenment rhetoric of reason and science. All the same, it still encompassed a rural and poorer past. And it encompassed, as well, a moral logic similar to the one that had compelled Thoreau and other Transcendentalists, including Emerson, in anti-slavery directions. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the results were visible in spiritualism, both in its practical and speculative varieties.

Spiritualism flourished in popular and what has become known as "phenomenal" (practical or spirit-manifesting) form after 1848, the year that two upstate New York girls, Kate and Maggie Fox, claimed that they were in contact with a murdered peddler whose remains were buried in the cellar of the ramshackle house their family rented. Along with spiritualist phenomena and practice came elaborate theories of how its seeming miracles were produced: spirits, it turned out, were part of nature. They represented a more refined version of matter, and in certain situations (séances), with the aid of gifted professionals (mediums, who were usually but not always female), their material refinement was visible to grosser human eyes and senses.

The more speculative version of spiritualism, from its inception in 1847 – one year before the fabled communications of the Fox sisters – had from the first provided a self-conscious and sophisticated theology to explain spiritualist phenomena and manifestations. Under the banner of the "harmonial philosophy," Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910) and others supplied their own theoretical frame for the ghostly life of phenomenal spiritualists. They did so by means of Enlightenment thought that met and married a metaphysical theory of correspondence in the absence of Christianity. Davis, especially, became an important culture broker, bringing together a Swedenborgian doctrine of correspondence with the "magnetic" or mesmeric theory and practice of Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), based on the belief that there was a universal fluid with mysterious tides operating in all of space.

In effect, harmonialism linked these European concepts to an American popular culture shaped in part by notions of the power of Reason and Right inherited from public discourse in the context of the American Revolution and from a folklorized metaphysicalism that had been handed down. It linked the European concepts, too, to a popular culture shaped in part by the Transcendentalist discourse of correspondence – through the popular speaking tours of Emerson and others, the ubiquitous newspaper reports about them, and the stream of publications by them that kept coming. Harmonialism stressed reform and, in the name of nature, radically equalized the playing field between women and men, even as it also posited something like eternal progress. Always though, nature, not the supernature of Christianity, was God and goal.

Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow underline the significance of spiritualism for what followed, noting that as conventional religion became subject to a growing fear that it was "untenable," spiritualism itself became a "historical hourglass" through the channel of which "the sands of witchcraft, popular ghost lore, mesmerism, Swedenborgianism, and scientism" poured, "then to disperse into Theosophy and parapsychology" (Kerr and Crow 1983: 4). And, it could be added for a century later in the 1970s, into the New Age movement. Theosophy arose as a spiritualist reform movement in 1875, the year after Russian immigrant Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) and American Colonel Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907) met at a

Vermont farm where they both had gone to investigate reported spiritualist phenomena. The Theosophical Society, which the two founded along with William Q. Judge (1851–1896) and others, announced its object in its bylaws as the collection and diffusion of knowledge concerning the laws of the universe. That in itself sounded scientific enough, except that the preamble to the document advanced the hope of going beyond science into ancient esoteric philosophy. Indeed, the religious character of the theosophical enterprise was clarified even further three years later when leaders of the society articulated two new goals in the context of their now-involvement with Asian religions. Theosophy aspired to promote universal "brotherhood" and to promote as well the study of comparative religions. Theosophists understood all three of their goals in light of an esoteric vision of the secrets of nature, the further reaches of which they were seeking to understand and to make productive in their lives.

It requires only a brief foray into the history of connection between the late nineteenth-century Theosophical Society and the century-later New Age movement to notice the line between earlier Theosophical teachers and later interpreters of the New Age. Moreover, clear lineages aside, the continuity of subject and theme between the two movements points to both as strongly linked and related expressions of the metaphysical form of nature religion. In a context that is linked to this, the small but growing neo-pagan movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries needs to be noted here. In Wicca and related movements, nature – become personified in the Goddess and her consort – led her devotees into a religious world of both ritual ecstasy and ethical practice that looked to nature as law and guide. Significantly, for all of these movements, the secrets that humans would uncover in nature were secrets with practical application. None of the movements has aimed at knowledge for knowledge's sake. Rather, all of them have looked to metaphysical knowledge of nature as a vehicle of power, as the source of cultural practice to repair and enhance lives. And nowhere did that practice become more urgent and insistent by the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century than in the domain of healing.

This last observation brings us to the third major form of nature religion that was advanced by and in the Transcendentalist milieu. In keeping with Emersonian claims for the powers of nature and, also, for the realized Self, nature religion came to stand for the physicality of the human body itself. Here, in one religious logic, matter remained subject to universal natural laws, the violations of which automatically brought disease and ill health and the observances of which, by contrast, guaranteed health and blessing. The often-repeated dictum "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" was, in fact, a tenet of this version of nature religion. Or, at the same time and often for the same people, matter became at once the plastic substance that could be shaped and changed by the power of Mind (with the American Vedanta of oneness proclaiming the ability of the Self to cure disease and attract wealth and blessing).

One version of the logic, therefore, leads to immersion in a series of healing practices that valorize natural law and its results. Thomsonian herbal healing, inherited Native American herbalisms, and related Euro-ethnic herbalisms, all of which preceded the Transcendentalists already expressed this form of conviction, and various forms of herbalism have continued from early America into our own times. Perhaps even more graphic in their physicality and their appeal to the laws of an almighty nature have been the late nineteenth-century modalities of osteopathy and chiropractic. Indeed, early osteopathy arose out of an Enlightenment discourse strongly inflected with mechanistic accents, so that the clockwork regularity of nature as expressed in the bones and their manipulation became testimonies to the God of Reason and Law. And chiropractic, for its part, explained its healing work in language about freeing a mysterious energy called Innate, blocked and trapped in the body through spinal misalignments and subluxations. All the same, both Andrew Taylor Still (1828–1917), the founder of osteopathy, and D.D. Palmer (1845–1913), the founder of chiropractic, knew spiritualism intimately, and they also spoke in an American colloquial style that reflected the ideology of the Enlightenment. Both, significantly, had been magnetic doctors, whose goal was the unblocking of the trapped energies of nature. But both, finally, embraced the optimistic and perfectionist style that Transcendentalism expressed and encouraged, and both, even in their emphasis on physicality, looked to the ultimate powers of Mind. Their century seemingly everywhere made similar connections. Healing modalities from the vegetarianism of Sylvester Graham to the hydrotherapy of a small army of water-cure advocates like Russell T. Trall and Mary Gove Nichols pointed to nature, but also led to speculations about "mind" and, as the late twentieth and twenty-first century would say, about consciousness.

Consciousness itself came to be increasingly understood as part of nature, as a mysterious energy that could be tapped, in effect, as a refined version of matter. Paradoxically, for many, nature was now functioning as a bridge to the immateriality of spirit. A classic paradigm for the situation, and for the new cultural practice of nature religion, exists in homeopathy. As formulated by German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843), homeopathy, then as now, represented a form of what today would be called "energy medicine," and that in a Western context. As Hahnemann experimented with his new healing modality, he constructed a theoretical frame to explain it based in part on the ancient notion of correspondence, which – as we have already seen – was alive and well in nineteenth-century metaphysical circles. Hahnemann's

law of similars, as articulated in his *Organon* (1810), taught that a substance that produced somatic results in a healthy person that were similar to the disease symptoms in a sick individual was the very substance that could heal the disease. Like, in other words, cured like. However, "like" worked according to a second law, Hahnemann's law of infinitesimals. The German doctor and his followers used increasingly greater dilutions or, as they said, "potentizations" of the substance that they were employing in order to heal. Indeed, the potentizations were so zealously executed – for example, up to one-thirtieth of one-millionth of a remedy – that in present-day terms not even a molecule of the original substance remained in the homeopathic medicine. What was it then that remained? An energy trace? An electromagnetic field? Some kind of spiritual signature that interacted with a disease? And how did the remedy actually work? Was it a mysterious spiritual vaccination that operated in a murky halfway land between matter and spirit, between body and cosmic Mind?

Whatever the answers to the theoretical questions, homeopathy developed a series of "provings" for its medicines and, also, an anecdotal trail to demonstrate claims that patients were getting better under homeopathic regimes. It began to gain a following in the United States from the 1830s and as the century progressed became almost the preferred healing modality in the nation, used by perhaps half of the population at a time when the heroic medicine of bleeding, blistering, and calomel, or chloride of mercury (a deadly poison) was the orthodox alternative. Especially important here, homeopathy helped to forge a path for Americans into increasingly "mental" forms of cure. In a tradition beginning with the one-time magnetic doctor Phineas P. Quimby (1802–1866), a self-conscious cadre of healers announced the power of Mind to cure the body – in an American melting pot in which homeopathy, spiritualism, Swedenborgianism, and mesmerism had been blended and stirred well.

Quimby, the clockmaker become mesmerist become mental healer, drew to himself the patients-turned-students who brought to Americans the new religious orientations of Christian Science and New Thought. Quimby, in his lifetime, had at least once invoked the term "Christian science" in the context of discussing his healing practice. But it was the chronically ill Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), so thoroughly dependent on his healing influence before his death, who discovered her independence from Quimby through a new emphasis on the Christian gospel, recited for her and others in the late nineteenth century in a different key. Under a platonized Christian rubric that denied the reality of matter, she taught that contact with divine truth and transformation by it could alter the ailing "appearance" of a sick individual; that is, could effect "healthy" changes in the perceived matter of the body. But even as Eddy denied the reality of matter, she exalted nature as the place where Spirit resided. She thought of "man" as the body of God, and continued to identify natural with spiritual laws.

Among Quimby's other patient-students, Warren Felt Evans and Julius and Annetta Dresser moved in a different direction from Eddy, and their form of interaction with the religion of nature came eventually to be known as New Thought. In a movement that greatly admired Emerson and that celebrated the metaphysical doctrine of correspondence, the power of mind to alter nature meant, not an idealism that denied matter, but – in the long shadow of Transcendentalist thinking and of the spiritualist-Swedenborgian-mesmerist model – a vision of mind as continuous with matter. The mental "image" or idea shared real space and time with the afflicted body and could change it for the better. Affirming health was key to *being* health. Conceptions such as this and the plethora of cultural practices that arose from them continued well past the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century heyday of Christian Science and New Thought. Under the banner of positive thinking and, later, of other versions of visualization and affirmation in the service of healing, the generalized American self-help movement spread widely, seemingly everywhere, into the twenty-first century. A flourishing New Thought movement became only the tip of the cultural iceberg. Popular bookstore sales told the greater story, and so did television talk shows, newspaper feature articles, and popular magazine subjects and sales. Always, mind and thought were (more powerful) parts of nature, and always they could change the embodied state of humans who only saw and practiced the connection. The body, the news was, could be well. And even if its grosser material failed to respond on a cellular level, gifts of spiritual and psychic integration and personal peace could, in their own ways, alter appearances. The nature of nature was, in the ultimate sense, bliss and joy.

The complex Transcendental model of nature religion had led, then, in three different directions, with lines and connections among them. Environmentalism, metaphysical religion, and the physical religion of healing the body had all taken cues from this elite nineteenth-century religious and cultural movement. But, arguably, a fourth direction remained for nature religion, and this direction returns us to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment world of old Europe and the new United States. This world that preceded the Transcendentalists was addressed by them in a new rhetoric and was subsequently transformed by later lineages of American philosophers. Ironically enough perhaps, then, this fourth major direction for the nature religion that followed the Transcendental moment in American religious history returns us to a world of natural religion and theology. In his *Emerson Handbook* (1953; reprint, New York, 1967), literary scholar Frederick Ives Carpenter long ago noticed the connection between

Emerson and the pragmatism of William James (1842–1910), and in *American Religious Thought: A History* (Chicago, 1973), so did religious studies scholar William A. Clebsch. Calling James "the American who would . . . refine Emerson's new religious consciousness to the extent of making God essentially man's deity and of making man at home with his humanity" (124), Clebsch read the pragmatic philosopher in ways that underlined that nature, as distinct from supernature, was James' controlling concern. The historical connections were real: Emerson had known James' father, the Swedenborgian theologian Henry James (1811–1882), and had even visited the James household. But the connections of thought and idea, for Clebsch (as for Carpenter), were central. As Emerson before him stressed the overriding importance of direct experience, in religion as in all of life, so, too, did James. With his corridor theory of truth, in which truth opened a route to a series of "rooms" filled with experiences and beliefs that enabled people to live successfully in an often chaotic and even catastrophic world, James hailed religion and its "overbeliefs" when they worked to support human projects and goals. In effect, therefore, the Jamesian stance toward religion saw it as a natural project. It was no accident that James had begun as a medical doctor, had moved from physiological to mental considerations, and had then steered his psychological concerns toward a version of natural religion.

Without James' medical-psychological background, later pragmatic philosophers agreed about natural religion or – in the language invoked here – nature religion. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), a mathematician and scientist, who before James had used the term pragmatism and propounded an earlier version of the pragmatic philosophy, had been a supernaturalist. The same was clearly not the case, however, for the Spanish-born poet and philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952) who became James's Harvard colleague. Even as he emphasized the rational and imaginative prowess of the mind, Santayana situated it squarely in the physicality of the body and spoke of "animal faith." In his *Realms of Being* (1942; reprint, New York, 1972), he argued that the home of spirit lay in matter, for spirit "must be the spirit of some body, the consciousness of some natural life" (843). Meanwhile, John Dewey (1859–1952), who – as Sydney E. Ahlstrom reported in *Theology in America* (Indianapolis, 1967) – had once hailed Emerson as "the one citizen of the New World fit to have his name uttered in the same breath with that of Plato" (59) brought to his philosophy of instrumentalism a new and uncompromising statement of natural religion. With his conviction that truth was an evolutionary phenomenon and a tool for human labor, in his classic work *A Common Faith* (1934; reprint, New Haven, 1975). Dewey argued strenuously against supernaturalism and constructed in its stead a natural religion that, as Emerson and the earlier pragmatists had done, worked to bring idealism down to Earth. Under the banner of the American democratic ideal, he thought that natural piety could "rest upon a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose" (25).

Evolutionary thinking became a still more explicit path into natural religion in the series of late nineteenth-century thinkers who took on the Darwinian manifesto. After the appearance of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and its subsequent permeation of intellectual discourse, the theory of evolution through natural selection provided a frame for conceptions that privileged organicism and turned distinctly away from metaphysics. Liberal philosophers and theologians alike worked out intellectual strategies to come to terms with the new prestige of evolutionary science, and in so doing they resituated themselves in what distinctly looked like the world of nature religion. The philosopher, historian, and scientific popularizer John Fiske (1842–1901), as a leading example, was deeply impressed by English evolutionist Herbert Spencer who had promoted a popularization of the Darwinian thesis that totalized it to interpret human (social) history as well as the history of nature. Fiske's *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874) argued subsequently for an immanent God who was manifest in the life of the phenomenal world. Nature, for Fiske, was the revelation of God that could be considered true, and for him the perfection of humankind was the goal of natural evolution. Others, however, articulated cosmologies that slid them into agnosticism, free thought, and the ideological humanism that came to be known, as in the Free Religious Association after 1867, as the "Religion of Humanity."

With a self-conscious anti-Christian and antimetaphysical stance, members of the FRA, along with adherents to similar groups such as the Society for Ethical Culture and the National Liberal League, sounded in many ways like Enlightenment deists. America's most famous freethinker Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899), the Congregational minister's son who earned himself the epithet "the great agnostic," turned the earlier Emersonian proposition that nature was all that was "not me" upside down. Nature meant human nature, and the religion of nature, including the landscape delights that surrounded humans and their built environments, ended in humankind. Yet even as he pronounced, in ringing terms, his rhetorical trinities of "Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality," of "Observation, Reason, and Experience," and of "Man, Woman, and Child," like nature religionists from Puritan times to the present, he could find the biblical book that lay outside the mind and in the environment, and he declared in favor of nature in sometimes lyrical terms.

The inclusion of Enlightenment-style natural religion and natural theology under the rubric of nature religion, of course, presents its share of difficulties. For one problem, religion on an Enlightenment model tends to

lack strong practical expression. Natural theology has mostly been the province of philosophers and theologians who have sought to clarify belief and thought. As cultural practice, it has been diffuse. We can point, for example, to only a few humanist and freethinking organizations that promote it in organizational terms, and – unlike other phenomena surveyed here (for example, environmentalism, magical practice, various healing modalities) – its symbolic expression in ordinary cultural life is hard to demonstrate. Thus, as *religion* it limps. For another problem, natural theology as an enterprise arises out of a negative characterization of the supernatural more than out of a positive preoccupation with nature itself. In other words, it comes trailing a long history of Christian ideology and antipathy to it. Yet the nod to the Enlightenment, with its natural religion and theology, has its compensating value for any survey of American nature religion. Its glaring weakness regarding institutional forms – its absence of nature "churches" – is only a stronger version of a glaring weakness that may be found repeatedly in this narrative. Cultural practice may be pointed to aplenty, but how and when does it stop being useful to describe it as religious? Where, in fact, does the definitional line end? Where does religion stop and something else begin?

The nod to the Enlightenment, however, has another value. It offers a useful caveat regarding the easy and exclusive identification of nature religion with benign landscapes and/or environmental activism. Like the other great theological terms that have haunted the Western mind – "God" and "man" – nature has no clearly visible boundaries. The history of nature religion, from the time of the seventeenth-century multicultural contact culture that later became the United States to our own time, is a contested history. Both the contest and the undervisibility of the boundaries argue for the wisdom of being content with the broad-gauged Transcendental model as an interpretive trope for making hypothetical sense of nature religion. Neither purely environmental, nor simply neopagan, Goddess-oriented, and/or metaphysical, nor primarily deistic and rationalistic in an Enlightenment anti-supernaturalistic framework, this model suggests that to invoke the rubric of nature religion encompasses all of the above and very much more.

Perhaps the concept itself makes the most sense in a political context, and this in the end may be the strongest argument for continuing to employ the term despite the fragility of the phenomenon. Put simply, nature religion is a *bon mot* that has arisen in the very multicultural late twentieth and early twenty-first century as a sounding center for civil discourse. It offers a "common" that can be shared – both as a concept and as a condition that all must deal with, whatever their multicultural pasts and presents. Contra a "civil religion" that looks to a Jewish-Christian biblical revelation and a European Enlightenment ideology – both of them the historic domain of a privileged Anglo-Protestant leadership community – and contra a "public religion" that secularizes the terms of that discourse to offer a mediating ethical restatement of Christian and Enlightenment values, nature religion begins not with history but with what stands over against it. The "againstness" is there for all, as a something that must be seriously confronted, something requiring – demanding – response. Nature religion, as an idea and phenomenon, reiterates democratic values, to be sure, by acknowledging the essential similarity and equality of human experience embedded in the reality that constitutes nature. But it also acknowledges forces and factors that delimit the human project – aspects of life over which humans, literally, have no control and before which they must bow. Bowing, of course, is one central and important act of worship. Bowing can also promote acts of public and communal reconciliation.

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*See also*: Bioregionalism; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Book of Nature; Celestine Prophecy; Deep Ecology; Deism; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Environmental Ethics; Greenpeace; Leopold, Aldo; Muir, John; Native American Spirituality; Nature Religion; New Age; Paganism (various); Radical Environmentalism; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Romanticism (various); Sierra Club; Snyder, Gary; Thoreau, Henry David; Transcendentalism; Wicca; Wilderness Society.

## Ndembu Religion (South-central Africa)

With *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* and subsequent ethnographies of the ritual life of the Ndembu of Zambia, British anthropologist Victor Turner embarked on what is still to this day one of the most innovative series of symbolic analyses in anthropology. Turner especially focused on rituals of initiation, divination, hunting and therapeutic rituals, and other religious processes in the context of the savannah cultures of South Central Africa. As indicated by the title of Turner's monograph which is itself taken from *Correspondances*, a poem on nature by Baudelaire, the natural environment plays a very important part in the lives and ritual cycles of the Ndembu.

The Ndembu of Northwest Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) are part of a larger Lunda-related cultural complex that spreads out over the southern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre), Angola and Zambia. This Lunda world has its core in *Kool*, the historical Lunda (Ruund) heartland in the province of Katanga, Congo. The Lunda, Ndembu, and other related groups, live in a varied environment of multiple micro-ecological niches: plateau soils of clay, sand plains and rolling hills of wooded savannah, grass plains, shrub lands, woodlands, and gallery forests that grow along the numerous streams and rivers. Nature, in its rich variety, is an omnipresent fact of Lunda life. It constitutes the environmental horizon of Lunda experience, it patterns the social activities, the practical knowledge and the gendered labor divisions that rhythm daily life; it structures the individual life cycle from birth to death; and it offers the raw material that is "good to think with" in the production of symbolic and practical knowledge that is generated in ritual activities. As such, the natural environment provides a topological, projective space, both structured by and structuring the way in which the Lunda perceive their own body, their social relations, and their relations with the surrounding environment and cosmos.

Animals, but to an even greater extent also trees, offer a rich lived-in model to symbolize and signify essential Lunda notions of individual (gendered) health and social well-being, of the union and mediation of male and female in regenerative sexuality, of social reproduction through the creation and sustaining of kinship categories and lineage continuity, and of the political realities of the Lunda world. An example of the rich symbolism provided by trees among the Ndembu is offered in Turner's classic analysis of the "milk tree" (*mudyi* in Ndembu, *muwudi* in Lunda vernacular; Apocynaceae, Dyplorrynchus condilocarpon). The milk tree, conspicuous for its white latex, plays a crucial role in girls' puberty ritual (*Nkang'a*). Ndembu women attribute several meanings to this tree: it stands for human breast milk and thus highlights the metaphorical patterning of the female body, symbolizing the nurturing bond between mother and child. Secondly, Ndembu women describe the milk tree as "the tree of a mother and her child," thus shifting the biological reference of breast-feeding to a wider social tie of profound significance in domestic relations and in the structure of the larger Ndembu community, namely the principle of matriliny (itself denoted by the word *ivumu*, womb) with its underlying notions of unity and inclusiveness. Beyond that, the milk tree also symbolizes the total system of interrelations between groups and persons that make up Ndembu society. At its highest level of abstraction, therefore, the milk tree stands for the unity and continuity of Ndembu society as a whole.

Trees, however, do not only signify female physical and social reproductive qualities. Among the Lunda, the central metaphor of the tree may also express masculinity and male life-giving powers through references to a tree's more vertical qualities of erectness, hardness, stiffness and rootedness (and its manifold associations with the rising sun, the rooster, the hunter's trap, the bow and other "masculine" features). In growing toward the status of senior elder, one becomes more tree-like, rooted in one place. The process of becoming an elder goes together with the acquiring of wisdom, exemplified by the qualities of erectness and immobility that are so typical of a tree. The tree-like immobility of the elder, most fully embodied by the royal title-holder, makes present the ideologically important unchanging continuity of the societal order, over and against the transformations of society as it is lived in everyday life. This is also one of the meanings implied by the invocations that Lunda ritual therapists make to the *kapwiip* tree (Leguminosae, *Swartzia madagascariensis*). In addressing this shrub-like tree, considered to be "the elder of all trees" because of its "bridging" qualities between male and female, left and right, red and white, Lunda therapists address the unchanging fixed normality to which the tree – and the elder – testifies through its immobility. This is also the reason why the Lunda king, as ultimate elder, as living ancestor and as both father *and* mother to his people, is identified with