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seems more consistent with the certain observations from contemporary science. Johnson's emphasis on "genuine interdependence and mutuality" is consistent with contemporary understandings such as the "partnership ethics" of Caroline Merchant (1995: 217) and ecofeminist philosophical insights such as those expressed by Val Plumwood among others. Differing paradigms of this sort may also provide an effective platform from which to engage in Christian environmental activism and may prompt further investigation in regard to the notion of "right relationships" within the whole created realm as well.

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- See also: Evangelical Environmental Network; Krueger, Fred; National Religious Partnership for the Environment; North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology [and the] North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology; Sierra Treks; Wise Use Movement.

The Religious Environmentalist Paradigm

In environmental studies it has commonly been assumed that there exists a fundamental connection between a society's management of natural resources and its perception of nature. With the publication of "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (1967) Lynn White was among the first to focus more narrowly on the relationship between the state of the environment and religion, postulating a direct linkage between the two. He blamed mainstream Christianity – in particular Judeo-Christian cosmology of man's mastery of nature – for the environmental ills facing the world today.

Since the publication of White's paper it has become fashionable to read ecological insight into religious dogmas and practices. Within much of the environmental movement there has been a tendency to appeal to traditional, religious ideas and values rather than to ecological science and technology in the face of environmental problems. Religious ideas and values have come to play prominent roles in environmental discourse. The Danish anthropologist Poul Pedersen has termed this approach the "religious environmentalist paradigm" (1995).

One early example of this approach was the meeting held in Assisi (Italy) in 1986 to mark the 25th anniversary of the World Wildlife Fund (later renamed the World Wide Fund for Nature), ending with the Assisi Declaration (WWF 1986). More recent examples are the series of conferences on religion and ecology held at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, the associated "Forum on Religion and Ecology" as well as many entries to this encyclopedia.

Two sources have particularly inspired scholars and laymen alike in the construction of the religious environmentalist paradigm, namely East and South Asian

cosmologies (particularly those of Daoism, Buddhism and Hinduism) and indigenous traditions (first of all American Indians). These have given fuel to the images of “noble oriental” and “noble savage,” respectively. What religious dogma has been to the construction of the former, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) – alternatively indigenous, folk, local or practical knowledge – has been to the latter. But, unlike a narrow, scientific understanding of “ecology,” TEK is intimately connected with religious beliefs and values. For good reasons the human ecologist Fikret Berkes called his book on TEK and indigenous resource management *Sacred Ecology* (1999).

Asian and indigenous concepts of nature are not less complex than their Western counterparts, and it is therefore dangerous to generalize. Nonetheless, whether looking at indigenous traditions or Asian religious creeds, scholars of such worldviews have almost invariably stressed that they are what Christianity allegedly is not, namely, ecocentric and monistic, promoting a sense of harmony between human beings and nature. Christianity in contrast is portrayed as anthropocentric and dualistic, promoting a relation of domination rather than harmony. By focusing on how these traditions are different from Western ones, non-Western religions meet the demand for new ecological paradigms that unite man and the environment as parts of one another.

Everything is Interconnected

One of the most common and enduring stereotypes in environmental literature on non-Western religions is that they are organic-holistic where everything is interconnected through cosmic webs. Human beings are not seen as something outside and above nature but as interconnected and integrated within nature. This preoccupation with interconnectedness is, for example, clearly expressed in the subtitles given to the Harvard volumes on non-Western religions:

Hinduism and Ecology: The intersection of earth, sky, and water

Buddhism and Ecology: The interconnection of dharma and deeds

Confucianism and Ecology: The interrelation of heaven, Earth, and humans

Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a cosmic landscape

Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life

Indigenous traditions and ecology: The interbeing of cosmology and community

But . . .

Christianity and Ecology: The well-being of Earth and Humans

Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust

Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word

This idea of interconnectedness is expressed somewhat differently in various non-Western traditions, but they are all claimed to be ecocentric rather than anthropocentric and nondualistic or monistic rather than dualistic. People are seen as intimately united with nature.

Scholars of Indian religions often quote from the Bhagavadgita that the person of knowledge “sees no difference between a learned Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog or an outcaste,” and in East-Asian Buddhism the distinction between the animate and inanimate has gradually been erased to the extent that mountains, stones, mist and the sound of blowing winds have become sentient beings, and thus in possession of Buddha-nature (*dharma*). In Japanese Shinto one talks about *kami*, i.e. a divine power or spirit that resides in anything which gives a person a feeling of awe or spiritual experience, a notion shared with many indigenous traditions around the world. As everything may have Buddha-nature or has the potential of harboring divine powers, all creatures, animate and inanimate, are – at least in some contexts – on the same level. There is thus not a sharp line, as in much of Judeo-Christian thinking, between humans and the rest of nature. Here we encounter worldviews where “nature” corresponds to the cosmic whole, i.e. the totality of existing phenomena. In such views nature and the “universal principle” might be inseparable and intrinsically linked.

Jainism tells us that everything possesses *jiva* or life-force, and in Chinese cosmology the notion of *qi* (*chi*’i) or vital force not only permeates everything from rocks to heaven, but may even be seen as the very substance of the universe. *Qi* is thus seen as the cosmological link between all beings and all events, giving rise to the Chinese notion of “cosmic resonance” (*kan-ying*), whereby otherwise independent events are mutually influencing one another.

The interconnectedness has also a temporary aspect, through the laws of cause and effect (*karma*). Common to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism is the notion of reincarnation. In Jain thought all are souls entrapped in different states of karmic bondage, a notion that may lead to an ascetic life and a reverence for everything. But whereas Jainism holds that plants and animals must first be reborn as human beings before entering a state of eternal, blessed solitude, *kevala*, Eastern Buddhism holds that even plants can escape the suffering of rebirths and enter directly into *nirvāṇa*. Beliefs in reincarnation can also be found among indigenous hunters, as among the Cree Indians of North America who believe that killed animals will be reincarnated if rituals are properly performed.

Few, if any, of the above claims are controversial. But what many religious environmentalist writers have done is to clothe these observations, and many more, in the language of ecology and environmental ethics. According to

some of the participants at the Harvard conferences, the notion of *karma*, for example, is taken to entail an environmental moral responsibility, often seen as binding individuals to the environment. To locate human beings with animals, plants and stones is in this discourse supposed to foster a deep reverence for nature, encouraging us to think “like a mountain,” a notion borrowed from the American ecologist Aldo Leopold. And seeing the universe as a dynamic, ongoing process of continual transformation is, according to one of the editors of the Harvard series, precisely the “organic, vitalistic worldview which has special relevance for developing a contemporary ecological perspective” (Tucker 2003: 218).

Critical Voices

However, many observers have questioned the truth of the myths of the ecologically noble Other, whether they are savages or Orientals. The Indian sociologist Ramachandra Guha (1989) objects to attempts to turn Oriental religions into ecocentric religions. He views this Western appropriation of oriental religions as yet another expression of the need of Westerners to universalize their messages and to uphold a false dichotomy between the rational and science-oriented Occidentals and the spiritual and emotional Orientals. Others have argued that the concepts “ecocentric” and “anthropocentric” themselves are creations of the Cartesian worldview with little relevance to non-Western traditions, which may be one or the other depending on the context.

Many skeptics have pointed out that traditional practices are not necessarily benign to the environment. Historical ecology has indicated that indigenous peoples both in Polynesia, Europe and North America may have hunted a number of endemic species to extinction. Native North Americans have been reported to kill indiscriminately, although their environmental values are based on humanistic notions and morality toward nature where animals have intrinsic value. And early agrarian civilizations in, for example, China and Japan experienced serious deforestation and erosion long before industrialization, despite allegedly “environmental-friendly” religions such as Daoism, Buddhism and Shinto. The Chinese and Japanese managed to correct the situation, whereas the prehistoric Maya and Indus civilizations seem to have been unable to halt depletion of their forests. Hence it is certainly far too simplistic to blame all ills in non-Western societies in terms of Westernization and modernization.

We need to tread cautiously when inducing ecological practices from philosophical traditions. Discrepancies between theory and practice are common, as L. Holly and M. Stuchlik argued in 1983 and the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan asserted in his critique of the Lynn White’s thesis in 1968. Tuan warned us not to assume *a priori* that people’s attitudes and norms toward nature are mirrored in their actual behavior. This is important not only because we, as

those before us, often are ignorant of the effects of our practices, but also, as Eugene Hargrove has reminded us, because “moral principles and precepts are normative, not descriptive. They do not, in other words, describe how people actually behave; rather they prescribe how people – again often generally and obliquely – ought to behave” (1989: xx). Moreover, attitudes and norms do not merely serve as guides for our behavior, they serve to rationalize and legitimize behavioral choices already made.

Skeptics have accused religious environmentalist writers for selective readings of religious texts and practices and for ignoring beliefs and practices potentially harmful to the environment. But, writing about the situation in South Asia, Lance Nelson (1998: 5–6) asserted, “the negative outcomes of religious teachings that can be used to rationalize environmental neglect are probably greater than the positive influence of those that encourage conservation and protection.” Russel Kirkland made a similar point regarding Daoism. This situation is probably equally true for the whole of East and Southeast Asia, and most likely with all religious teachings. Worldviews and cosmologies are in this perspective not seen as coherent constructions but full of contradictions, making them vulnerable to interpretation and reinterpretations. It might be argued that it is precisely this ambiguity that makes religions versatile and adjustable to changing circumstances.

That worldviews are ambiguous and harbor contradictory views and values on nature, and that there are discrepancies between people’s attitudes toward nature and their actual behavior, ought not to surprise anybody. It is probably less trivial that the organic-holistic perspective, where everything is seen to be interconnected and changing, in itself might be part of the problem rather than the solution many advocates of the religious environmentalist paradigm want us to believe. Several arguments have been offered to this effect.

First, it has been argued that an organic-holistic view implies that there is no clear distinction between nature created by gods and artifacts created by people. In other words, artifacts and nature are not opposed, and nature becomes everything around us whether it is a river or teapot, a mountain or heap of garbage. Litter or a vending machine is just as much a part of nature as a crane or a pine tree. They may all harbor Buddha-nature, be potentially the abode for a spirit, be permeated by *qi* or possess *jiva*. Writing about Japan, the French geographer Augustin Berque stated that there “it can be natural to destroy nature” (1997:143). In more general terms, without some distinction between nature and humanity, we can hardly be held responsible for the adverse effects our activities may have on the environment. This does not inhibit human intervention in nature but rather opens the way for a utilitarian approach to it. Thus, an organic worldview that explicitly recognized the unity of the natural and social worlds may fail to give rise to sound environmental

practices and may even contribute to the environmental problems.

Second, seeing nature as dynamic implies that it is not regarded as something unchanging or absolute but as a process of something becoming, or entering into, a certain state. Nature is situational or contextual, and this view allows for multiple concepts of nature to coexist: the wild and threatening nature which sometimes plays havoc with people and landscape, or nature in its most cultivated form: a garden, a dwarfed tree (*bonsai*). It is argued that it is in this latter idealized form that nature is most appreciated, at least in East Asia. It is appreciated because it is cultured, which means that it is brought into people's social universe. It has been argued that human assistance is often necessary in order for things to appear in their real "natural" state, and even that the important thing is not the manifestation of nature itself but the idea about nature.

Third, the notion of *karma*, which underlines the dynamic character of many Asian religions, is intimately connected with a search for liberation from an endless cycle of death and rebirth. In viewing nature as a process, where everything decays and dies only to give birth to new lives in an endless cycle, one may arrive at the conclusion that natural objects acquire little value in and of themselves. In Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism there is a strong tendency to withdraw from the world of suffering (*samsāra*) to escape into some kind of blissful void (*kevala, nirvāṇa*), and many scholars have therefore stressed the world-denying features of Asian religions that encourage people to turn their backs on the world. In such a perspective nature becomes irrelevant, which is hardly the best starting point to address the issue of environmental destruction.

Finally, it has been argued that when nature is seen as immanently divine, as it is in animism, this leads to a "love of nature" relationship. But the close relationship between people and spirit also enables people to entice spirits to move from their abodes in order to utilize the locations in question for other purposes. Before the construction of a house can commence, for instance, ground-breaking ceremonies can be performed. Moreover, it is recognized that it is the nature of things that one organism feeds upon another, creating relations of indebtedness in the process. Human beings are considered to become indebted to nature when exploiting it, but can "repay" harm that has been inflicted upon nature, animate or inanimate, through offerings. Memorial rites have been reported for Japanese as well as indigenous hunters throughout the world. A divine nature is, therefore, by no means a guarantee against environmental degradation, as has often been claimed.

If its critics are right, why then, one may ask, has the religious environmentalist paradigm acquired such a prominent position within the environmental discourse?

There may be several answers to this question. Images of the Other do not only help us define ourselves but also serve as a powerful, internal cultural critique. Kay Milton has even claimed that such images are fundamental to the radical environmentalist critique of industrialism (1996: 109).

The paradigm can, moreover, help people to carve out new roles for old religions. This is true not only for Western eco-theologians who are busy searching the Bible and other Christian texts for ecological insight, but even more so for non-Westerners. Pedersen suggests,

By offering to the world what they hold to be their traditional, religious values, local peoples acquire cultural significance. When they speak about nature, they speak about themselves. They demonstrate to themselves and to the world that their traditions, far from being obsolete and out of touch with modern reality, express a truth of urgent relevance for the future of the Earth. This achievement, with its foundation in appeals to imagined, traditional religious values, represents a forceful cultural creativity which would not have worked by the invocation of "pure" ecology or environmentalism (1995: 272).

This opportunity to acquire cultural significance should no doubt be applauded and encouraged. Two warnings are nonetheless in place. First, the religious environmentalist paradigm's notion of the ecologically noble Other has occasionally contributed to chauvinism and even nationalism among indigenous peoples themselves. Second, and more important, by using images of the Other in cultural critiques of modernity, it becomes imperative to stress what the Other is not, namely modern. Only by being "authentic" – that is "uncontaminated" by modern ways – are they noble and worth our consideration. Corrupted by modern ways they become fallen angels. In the hands of some environmentalists, as Beth Conklin and Laura Graham concluded in their study of ecological politics and Amazonian Indians, the notion of the ecologically noble Other locked them in an "ethnographic present" of more idyllic pre-modern days.

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- See also: American Indians as "First Ecologists"; Anthropologists; Bhagavadgita; Buddhism; Buddhism – East Asian; Daoism; Descartes, René; Domestication; Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Eden's Ecology; Environmental Ethics; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Francis of Assisi; Hinduism; India; Jainism; Japanese Religions; Noble Savage; Radical Environmentalism; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Romanticism and Indigenous People; Savages; Social Science on Religion and Nature; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; White, Lynn – Thesis of; World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Religious Naturalism

A working definition of religious naturalism was developed online in 2003 by members of a religious-naturalism internet discussion group on religious naturalism. The statement, a modification of the Champion statement of self-understanding generated by the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, is as follows:

We find our sources of meaning within the natural world, where humans are understood to be emergent from and hence a part of nature. Our religious quest is informed and guided by the deepening and evolving understandings fostered by scientific inquiry. It is also informed and guided by the mindful understandings inherent in our human traditions, including art, literature, philosophy, and the religions of the world.

The natural world and its emergent manifestations in human creativity and community are the focus of our immersion, wonder, and reverence. We may describe our religious sensibilities using various words that have various connotations – like the sacred, or the source, or god – but it is our common naturalistic orientation that generates our shared sense of place, gratitude, and joy. We acknowledge as well a shared set of values and concerns pertaining to peace, justice, dignity, cultural and ecological