

**"SAVE THE PLANET" BY ALL MEANS (SPIRITUALITIES)!**

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Have you seen the "SAVE THE PLANET" t-shirts & sweatshirts?

A worthier inscription than most, & not just this "Earth Day II"

time of saturation journalism....The outer means for saving the planet are political & technical. The inner means are the spiritualities motivating **eco-eco caring** (the interlocking concern for the economic health of humanity & the ecological health of our earth-home)....This Thinksheet looks at three save-the-planet spiritualities:

**(MOTHER) NATURE SPIRITUALITY**

A pagan cake, sometimes with a bit of biblical frosting. Almost 100% of TV programming on nature is of this religion. Nature worship, the worship of nature, not worship *through* nature. Chief Seneca & shaman Black Elk, both worshipers of the Great Spirit through nature, have been converted to this nature worship for purposes of eliminating theism & promoting **romantic-mystical naturalism**, the religion of Earth

Day populism. Hating sharp boundaries, poets panel with scientists here, as scientists hate dualism, a Creator/creation divide.....You

**HAGAR THE HORRIBLE**

by Dik Browne



could call this religion, in its literary form, **poetic naturalism**. Often the influential poet is a naturalist not only philosophically but also professionally, as is the case with Cape Cod's Jn. Hay, who (in "Sacred Places," in his *THE IMMORTAL WILDERNESS*) came up with a bromide familiar to environmentalists: "When nothing is sacred, nothing is safe." (God is not immortal, the wilderness is; God is not holy, Mother Earth is sacred. And salvation, if any, will be our "attaining an equilibrium between the earth and the human spirit.")

Philosophically put, this religion teaches **ontological continuity** between humanity & the rest of nature (an assumption the animals make when they try to identify Hagar's genus, in this cartoon) & between humanity & divinity (as in process theologies, & the current fashion of referring to earth as God's body [thus eliminating transcendence except in the poetic sense in which it can be said that mind transcends body]). Hay, on a panel here 11 Apr 90: "If I have a religion, it's the earth." (Contrast Kazantzakis, who could have said "If I have a religion, it's the spirit's call to transform nature into spirit.") Predictably, the panel attacked "the Judeo-Christian tradition" for otherworldliness (a charge truer of, eg, Hinduism & Buddhism), which many environmentalists figure must be bad news for nature (in spite of the ecstatic feelings in the Bible, eg the Psalms, for nature, as is true also of many Christian mystics, the best known being Francis d'Assisi).

**Radical immanentism** is another philosophical way to describe this nature religion (as opposed to the radical transcendentalism of biblical theism). "Above"- "beyond"- "more than" experiences are captured for "the only world we've got"; & the possibility of valuing things both in themselves & as signals/representations of realities beyond themselves is denied. History's first effort at this was the Greek atomists, who didn't have to battle religious dualism, as Greek religion had no generally accepted creation-story. The 6th-c.-BC/BCE Ionian philosophers assumed we have to do only with impersonal, "natural" processes; & they debated as to what is the universe's unifying principle or essence (water? air? fire? earth?), the irreducible, "un-cuttable" (the literal of "a-tom"). The atomic tradition from Democritus to Epicurus to Lucretius (d.55 BC/BCE) began broad influence in the West with L.'s work's translation into Latin, in 1473 AD/CE, as *DE RERUM NATURA* (On the

Nature of Things)....Learning that Tennyson was the only major poet to deal with L., I decided to read his "Lucretius" (1868). Jerome reports this story on L., & T. puts it into profound & playful poetry. L.'s wife gets from a witch a love potion to kindle L.'s ardor, but it drives him crazy (his "brute brain" swamping his "tender [brain] cells," so he has nightmares ["I saw the flaring atom-streams"] & spectacularly lustful dreams) & he suicides. The poem is an anatomy of the psyche squeezed between science & sensuality & thus similar to Goethe's "Faust" & to our present cultural crisis (eg, television pervading the American psyche with big-bang "flaring atom-streams" & superheated sex).

Or again, this religion is called **bioenergism** (formerly, "vitalism"), the worship of "the life-force" (New-Age-defined as "spirituality"). The stress may be on morality (Bergson), diversity (Darwin), unity (Teilhard, Ashley Montagu), or mysticism (New Age, Carl Sagan). In this form, nature religion is becoming the gospel's main competitor in the West. Earth Day's drumbeat: "communing with Nature."

Are the biblical & the **organismic** understandings of "nature" compatible? Yes, once the in/organic distinction is set aside as nonbiblical: as long as nature is creature (the work of the Creator), the Bible doesn't care whether or not the universe is seen--as in the current Gaia Hypothesis--as a living organism--though it can't tolerate "All is God" [pantheism] or "All is in God" [panentheism] or [in the vein of the ancient Stoic extensions of  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ ] "The universe is God's body." (Curiosum: In 1574AD/CE, Tycho Brahe's ORATIO DE D.MATH. not only saw the universe on the analogy of the human body but compared its parts to our parts, organs! By parallax-measuring of a comet three years later, he disproved all three pillars of the ancient Greek concept of the universe as promulgated by Aristotle!) "The universe is like our body" is a heuristic scientific paradigm: "The earth is God's body" is only bad, in the sense of antibiblical, theology.

Immunological note: In some respects, the human body & the biosphere are not only analogous but also homologous. One of these respects is the homeostatic tendency: "we" (our bodies & the biosphere) protect ourselves autonomically. Consider the negative confirmation: AIDS & "Industrial Man" destroy the self-protective power to fight off disease & death in, respectively, our bodies & the biosphere (meaning the entire environment seen from the angle of life-needs). We may find a way to defeat the destroyer of our bodies' immune system: will we find a way to defeat "development," viz ourselves in our earth-ravaging lifestyle (the worst feature of which is runaway fertility + declining infant-mortality)? Our bodies resist intruders (including alien transplants): can we resist ourselves at the points & degrees in which we are intruders in earth-life? Can we effect a **mutual homeostasis**, equilibrium, between our bodies & the rest of nature? (We're learning that homeostasis in the human being is not just of the body but of the mindbody, which fights to restore normality in physical temperature but also in psychospiritual temperature [the proper chemicals appearing in our skinbags to cool us when manic & warm us up when depressed. How "fearfully & wonderfully" God has made us!].)

Sociological note: All this applies not only to our physical bodies but also to our social bodies that make up the body politic. The taproot of AngloAmerican democracy was the religion NGOs (nongovernment organizations, the free churches): a parallel for ecology might be Earth-gardens' experience, millions learning IPM (integrated plant-management--becoming skillful in knowing, & dealing creatively with, plants & their friends [good bugs] & enemies [bad bugs, "pests"]). A parable: If we kill all the bugs, the good with the bad, our plants--& therefore we--will suffer: nature will take vengeance on us, God will punish us, for being ourselves the Big Pest (which indeed right now we manifoldly are--not just in being good-bug killers, but in threatening all the plants--& therefore we--need: water [fresh & salt], soil, air. Consider, too, the application of the pest-metaphor to criminology. In only three years, China eliminated 70 million drug addicts by impounding them to cold-turkey them. Drug producers-distributors? They disappeared, for the same reason I'll have no significant number of bad bugs in the garden-sections I fallowed last year: genocide, from nothing to eat for a whole growing season. So far, the USA does not consider the drug infestation bad enough to use this method to starve out the producers-distributors. (Against our "way of life"? Then perhaps we need to

examine that way of life. "New occasions teach new duties.")

### **CREATION SPIRITUALITY, falsely so-called**

In between nature-worship & biblical God-worship lies a murky region of misty mysticism mixing scientific jargon with the Bible "creation" vocabulary. I'll use just one example, physicist Brian Swinne's THE UNIVERSE IS A GREEN DRAGON: A COSMIC CREATION STORY (Bear & Co./84). S. studied with "geologist" Thos. Berry (philosopher of the "creation spirituality" movement) & has co-authored with Matt. Fox (mystic preacher, romantic author, of the movement). Here he spiritualizes the Big Bang (which he takes as fact) into "the creative fireball," one holophrase for God--another being (p.173) "the Mysterious Source, the primary teacher." Fraudulently, he calls his view--which accurately could be called cosmopyric spirituality--"creation spirituality" (sans Creator!). But some of his cultural analysis is useful. P.18: "Our modern western civilization began with a kind of cultural schizophrenia. Our scientific enterprise effectively decoupled itself from our humanistic-spiritual traditions at the beginning of the modern period" (& I add, decoupling [1] morality from religion & then, in our public schools, [2] education from morality). "Diseased mindscapes only produce diseased landscapes."....The quantitative overwhelmed the qualitative. So now, with awe & wonder revived, we must reinvent the human in the new cosmos, putting more emphasis on music than on math....28: "We are the first generation to live with an empirical view of the origin of the universe."....35: "Humanity is a [sic] creation of [another of his holophrases for God] the Earth process." Humanity's purpose? No to glorify God & enjoy him forever, but to (36) "enrich the total life of the planet."....Incredibly, disingenuously, he claims (58) that this shift "does not diminish the spiritual traditions."....40: "What is our fullest duty? To become love in human form....The journey out of emptiness is the [sic] creation of love."....169: "the universe [another God-substitute word, holophrase] our primary teacher."....170: "Our principle moral act is to cherish this [cosmic] fire, the source of our transformation, our selves, our society, our species, and our planet....The universe created....Our first and deepest response is infinite gratitude. That which created all of this now desires *our* creativity, commitment, and labor, *our* delight in entering with full awareness the cosmic story." Wrongly, he assumes his "cosmic story" is scientific fact, not myth. Here he fails twice: (1) his "fire stream" from a Big Bang has not passed from hypothesis to knowledge, & (2) even if it were knowledge of event & process, it could never be "story," for story in the comprehensive sense (ie, in the technical sense, "myth") always involves the religio-esthetic imagination....But the book is well-written & because influential, worth this much attention in this Thinksheet for those two reasons + this: translated into theistic language, it would enrich the theology of ecology....Influential? He's to be the kickoff speaker at the 16-19 May 90 "Intercontinental Conference on Caring for Creation," Washington Nat'l. Cathedral, where, my guess is, the highest excitement will be the science-&-religion debate between Carl Sagan & Langdon Gilkey....The Augustine-bashing, pro-"movements" guru of this spirituality is Matt. Fox, well critiqued by Wayne G. Boulton in the 25 Apr 90 CHRISTIAN CENTURY. Defining mysticism as "experiential union with creation and its unnameable mysteries," Fox trots out his "creation-centered" historic Christian mystics, though every one of them are known to have been neither "redemption-centered" (his no-no) nor creation-centered but God-centered. But as in Swinne's case, much that Fox has to say is useful corrective & ideas-stimulant. Some of it's fluff: original sin becomes "original blessing," Enlightenment-bashing is overdone by excessive Romanticism-embracing (with its downplaying of the cognitive), & movements virtually replace institutions (including the churches).

### **CREATION SPIRITUALITY, rightly so-called**

The Psalms call on all creation, severally & collectively, to praise, & rejoice in communion with, the Creator (the Hebrew behind "Psalms" = "Praises"). YHWH-Adonai is seen as distant from creation as MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (Langdon Gilkey's published PhD dissertation), & as distant from the nature deities in being real. The Psalms are the basic hymnbook of the Church. In retirement, LG defines creation as "all comes from one source, the divine source" (Aut/89 CRITERION, p.4).