

“THE ONLY PARADISE WE EVER NEED”: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
PANTHEISM’S SACRED GEOGRAPHY IN THE WRITINGS OF
EDWARD ABBEY, THOMAS BERRY, AND MATTHEW FOX, AND A
A PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF SIGNS OF
EMERGING PANTHEISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

By

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To Veronica Daley Zaleha, my loving wife,
to John Van Cleve, my devoted friend and supporter,
to Gregory Gilbert, my long time friend and conversation partner,
to Henry David Thoreau, whose timeless wisdom helped me understand this Cosmos,
and to Edward Abbey, who interpreted Thoreau's wisdom for our contemporary era.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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I explore the definition and meaning of pantheism, and its related and contrasting concepts of theism, panentheism, atheism. Pantheism is identified as a concept of sacred geography that locates the sacred as penetrating the entire universe, but which does not indulge in speculation about a sacred dimension outside the space and time of this cosmos. Pantheism is divided into two categories: *naturalistic pantheism* and *spiritualized pantheism*. Panentheism acknowledges the sacred as penetrating all of this universe but still asserts a divinity that transcends this cosmos. Both of these concepts are contrasted with dualistic theism and nihilistic atheism. Specific explorations of the presence of pantheism in the work of Edward Abbey, Thomas Berry, Albert Einstein and Matthew Fox, are undertaken. Abbey is found to be an exemplar of naturalistic pantheism. Fox, in particular, is found to be pantheistic, notwithstanding his assertion that he is a panentheist. Finally, a tentative, preliminary survey of the extent to which pantheism is being taken up in American popular culture is presented. Notwithstanding their professed atheism, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris are found to be examples of naturalistic pantheism. While a full evaluation

of the extent to which pantheism is penetrating American culture must await further research, suggestive examples of pantheism in cyberspace, movies, television, popular music and even among purported atheists are presented.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: “I WAS BORN TO BE A PANTHEIST”

“I was born to be a pantheist.” Henry David Thoreau made this declaration in a February 9, 1853, letter to the famed editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley.¹ For some time, Greeley had been promoting Thoreau to various publishers. Thoreau was responding to a January 2, 1853, letter from Greeley wherein Greeley explained that Thoreau’s “very flagrant heresies” and his “defiant Pantheism” were frustrating his efforts to promote Thoreau’s work.² In January, February, and March of 1852, *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*, had published the first three installments of *A Yankee in Canada* (essays recounting Thoreau’s 10-day trip to Canada in the fall of 1850).³ Then Thoreau learned that George William Curtis, the editor of *Putnam’s*, had insisted on omitting certain “heretical” passages from the final installments. Rather than submit to this censorship, Thoreau withdrew the manuscripts, giving rise to Greeley’s exasperation.⁴ As the famed Protestant theologian Paul Tillich has noted, the term *pantheist* is “a ‘heresy’ label of the worst kind.”⁵ As Greeley’s tone demonstrates, this was accurate in 1853 as well. Heresy label or not, upon having the pantheist label applied to him by Greeley, Thoreau declared “if that be the name of me, and I do the deeds of one,” then “I was born to be a pantheist.”⁶

¹ Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau* (New York: New York University Press, 1958), 294.

² Harding and Bode, eds., *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, 293.

³ Philip Van Doren Stern and Henry David Thoreau, *The Annotated Walden: Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, 1st ed. (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1970), 56, 88.

⁴ Harding and Bode, eds., *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, 293.

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 233.

⁶ Harding and Bode, eds., *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, 294.

Given Thoreau's personal and intellectual history, it is not surprising that Thoreau would not let charges of heresy deter him from adopting any particular self-description. After all, in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau had noted that "I know that some will have hard thoughts of me, when they hear their Christ named beside my Buddha, yet I am sure that I am willing they should love their Christ more than my Buddha."⁷ Even in his first attempt to publish a successful book, Thoreau was not afraid to risk offense of the dominant Christian sensibilities. Nevertheless, Thoreau's embrace of the term pantheist signals something new. While he continued to use other terms of self-description (for instance, "mystic," "transcendentalist," and "natural philosopher"),⁸ Thoreau provides perhaps the first American example of a person claiming the term *pantheist* as a self-description. A review of the literature has revealed no earlier documented exemplar in American history.

What was the content of Thoreau's pantheism at the time he accepted the label? On the same day Greeley was penning his pantheist indictment, Thoreau was penning this in his journal that gives at least a partial description of his thinking at that time:

⁷ Henry David Thoreau, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," in *Henry David Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers; Walden, or Life in the Woods; the Maine Woods; Cape Cod*, ed. Robert F. Sayre (New York: The Library of America, 1985), 55.

⁸ In his journal entry for March 5, 1853, in explaining his completion of a "printed circular" from the Association for the Advancement of Science, he states, "The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations." ———, "The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, Volume 5," ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1984), 4. While still using "transcendentalist" to describe himself, Walter Harding, one of the giants of Thoreau scholarship, and Carl Bode note that in Thoreau's life history, 1853 marked the year when "Thoreau's eye for nature has sharpened, but his eye for Transcendentalism has definitely clouded." Harding and Bode, eds., *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, 292.

The [church] bells are particularly sweet this morning. I hear more, methinks, than ever before. How much more religion in their sound, than they ever call men together to! Men obey their call and go to the stove-warmed church, though God exhibits himself to the walker in a frosted bush to-day, as much as in a burning one to Moses of old.⁹

And then this, a day later:

I love Nature partly because she is not man [using ‘man’ here to label humanity and its culture], but are retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this. None of the joys she supplies is subject to his rules and definitions. What he touches he taints. In thought he moralizes. One would think that no free, joyful labor was possible to him. How infinite and pure the least pleasure of which Nature is basis, compared with the congratulation of mankind! The joy which Nature yields is like that afforded by the frank words of one we love.

Man, man is the devil,
The source of all evil.

Methinks that these prozers, with their saws and their laws, do not know how glad a man can be. What wisdom, what warning, can prevail against gladness? There is no law so strong which a little gladness may not transgress. I have a room all to myself; it is nature. It is a place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments. Pile up your books, the records of sadness, your saws and your laws. Nature is glad outside, and her merry worms within will ere long topple them down. There is a prairie beyond your laws. Nature is a prairie for outlaws. There are two worlds, the post-office and nature. I know them both. I continually forget mankind and their institutions, as I do a bank.¹⁰

In this January 3, 1853 passage, Thoreau displays an “ecstatic naturalism” (a term more recently coined by pantheist philosopher Robert Corrington),¹¹ a bit of misanthropy (perhaps hyperbolic) or

⁹ Journal entry for January 2, 1853; Henry David Thoreau, “The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, Volume 4,” ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1984), 443.

¹⁰ Journal entry for January 3, 1853; *Ibid.*, 445-46.

¹¹ Robert S. Corrington, *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992).

at least contempt for human civilization, a sense of *Nature* as a refuge, a place beyond human law, a place for “outlaws” (a theme taken up by the contemporary novelist, Tom Robbins),¹² and perhaps most important for this project, a “contentment” with “this world.” In embracing the term *pantheist*, Thoreau was blazing a path of new metaphysical understanding that would be increasingly taken up in American culture.

That it is being taken up within popular culture was demonstrated by the release in 2007 of a Hollywood produced movie, *Evan Almighty*. This movie will be explored more fully in Chapter 8. It is sufficient here to note that viewers learn in the movie that “God is the creator of the Heavens and the Earth . . . He lives in all things.” This is quite consistent with one of the definitions of *pantheism* provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, namely, “a belief or philosophical theory that God is immanent in or identical with the universe,” a definition that I will explore at length herein. Heresy label or not, Hollywood knows about, and is interested in depicting, pantheism.

As the foregoing examples from Thoreau and Hollywood illustrate, pantheism addresses the question, Where does God reside, or Where is the sacred located? It is therefore, in this sense, a question of geography. It is for this reason that I have characterized this study as an investigation into *Sacred Geography*, in particular, the sacred geography of Pantheism. I will explore various definitions of pantheism, and its related and contrasting concepts of atheism, theism, panentheism, and paganism and will arrive at definitions of each of these terms for the purposes of this study. As to pantheism, I will distinguish between *spiritualized pantheism* and *naturalistic pantheism*. In three individual chapters, the presence of pantheism in the work of Edward Abbey, Thomas Berry, and Matthew Fox, is explored. Finally, I make a tentative, preliminary survey of indications that

¹² “Unwilling to wait for mankind to improve, the outlaw lives as if that day were here. . .” Tom Robbins, *Still Life with Woodpecker* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 65.

pantheism is being taken up in American popular culture. While a full evaluation of the extent to which pantheism is penetrating American culture is beyond the scope of this project, it is a question that is ripe for further research.

CHAPTER 2
WEBER, ELIADE AND GEERTZ AS AIDS IN INTERPRETING
PANTHEISM, PANENTHEISM, CLASSICAL THEISM AND ATHEISM

In approaching this study of pantheism in America, and its necessary subsidiary investigations in to panentheism and classical theism, I will utilize the theories and heuristic perspectives of several theorists of religion, namely, Max Weber, Mircea Eliade, and Clifford Geertz.

The Weberian approach to the sociological study of human culture and religious ideas can be succinctly stated as, “Ideas matter.” Elaborated a bit more, ideas matter and may in fact effect the way individual humans go about living their lives. This will be an illuminating insight in the present project.

Even though he believed ideas matter, Weber was not an idealist and did not regard ideas themselves as the only decisive factor. Weber puts it this way:

Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern [humanity]'s conduct. Yet very frequently the ‘world images’ that have been created by ‘ideas’ have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.¹

Weberian analysis may therefore provide useful insights in settings in which given behaviors seem divorced from or even in opposition to either the best interests of the individuals or the explicit ethics or values of the individuals under study. Weber himself declared that in a real sense, his goal was to study the unintended consequences of ideas. For instance, in his famed work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber stated that he hoped to make a modest “contribution to

¹ Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 280, reproducing ‘Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen’ (The Economic Ethic of the World Religions), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Tübingen, 1922-23), vol. 1, pp. 237-68.

the understanding of the manner in which ideas become effective forces in history.”² His case study on the relationship between capitalism and Protestantism yields models for interpreting the interplay between theism, pantheism, and panentheism, and I will therefore summarize some of Weber’s key insights.

Weber’s starting point for his investigation into “the relationship between the old Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” would be the works of Calvin, Calvinism, and the other Puritan sects.³ However, Weber knew that none of these Calvinists would have in any way imagined they were actively promoting anything called “the spirit of capitalism.”⁴ Indeed, the pursuit of worldly goods as an end in itself would have been considered by these religionists as sinful. The salvation of the soul alone was the center of their life and work. Thus, Weber notes that paradoxically “the cultural consequences of the Reformation were to a great extent . . . un-foreseen and even unwished-for results” for these unintentional capitalist innovators.⁵

Weber also makes clear he was not evaluating the social or religious worth of the Reformation. Instead, he was “merely attempting to clarify the part which religious forces played in forming the developing web of our specifically worldly modern culture, in *the complex interaction of innumerable different historical factors.*” Further, “*at the same time we must free ourselves from the idea that it is possible to deduce the Reformation, as a historically necessary result, from certain economic changes,*” showing Weber was also not a crude, Marxian materialist.

² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, Routledge Classics (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 48.

³ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*

“Countless historical circumstances, which cannot be reduced to any economic law, and are not susceptible of economic explanation of any sort, especially purely political processes, had to concur in order that the newly created Churches should survive at all.”⁶

Further, Weber declares he was not “maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism . . . could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation.” Instead, Weber was exploring “whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world, [and] what concrete aspects of our capitalistic culture can be traced to them.”⁷ Then, making an implied reference to his concept that he elsewhere called “elective affinities,”⁸ he notes that “in view of the tremendous confusion of interdependent influences between the material basis, the forms of social and political organization, and the ideas current in the time of the Reformation, we can only proceed by investigating whether and at what points certain *correlations between forms of religious belief and practical ethics can be worked out.*”⁹ Finally, Weber declares his intention to “as far as possible clarify the manner and the general direction in which, by virtue of those relationships, the religious movements have influenced the development of material culture.”¹⁰

In these key few pages in *Protestant Ethic*, in the course of that particular case study, Weber articulates the complex relationship between religion and society, and that trying to understand in

⁶ Ibid., 49. (emphasis supplied).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," 284.

⁹ ———, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 49. (emphasis supplied).

¹⁰ Ibid., 49-50.

the specific case whether religion or other cultural factors within a given society are playing the determinative role will always provide challenging obstacles to finding conclusive empirical data. Thus, making confident assertions about causal connections between a given belief or set of beliefs held by individuals or societies and the behavior of those individuals or societies is always a problematic assertion.

Another illuminating concept developed by Weber is his concept of disenchantment. In his modern context, Weber defined *disenchantment* as an intellectually rationalized knowledge or belief that, at least in principle, there are no mysterious, unknowable forces at play in the physical world around us that cannot be measured, known or in some way discovered.¹¹ One of the consequences of this thoroughgoing “rationalizing” of humanity’s “conception of the world” into a “cosmos governed by impersonal rules” has been, according to Weber, to shift religion “into the realm of the irrational.” Thus, the aboriginal perception of a reality where “everything was concrete magic” has been transformed instead into “rational cognition and mastery of nature, on the one hand, and ‘mystic’ experiences, on the other.” In his *Economic Ethic of the World Religions*, Weber suggests that the inexpressible contents of these mystic experiences become the only possible “beyond” for human experience in this new, mechanistic world “robbed of gods.”¹² This demythologized reality thus results in a shift towards a this-worldly soteriological locus, widespread in, if not unique to, the West.

Weber has a certain melancholy in seeing humanity deprived of the meaning previously

¹¹ Max Weber, "Science as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 155, reproducing ‘Wissenschaft als Beruf’, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaft* (Tübingen, 1922), pp. 524-55. Originally a speech in 1918 at Munich University.

¹² Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," 281-82, reproducing ‘Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen’ (The Economic Ethic of the World Religions), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Reigionssoziologie* (Tübingen, 1922-23), vol. 1, pp. 237-68.

obtained from a magical, enchanted world. At one level, Weber echoes the angst of Nietzsche¹³ and anticipates the further angst of existentialists like Sartre and Camus. However, in recognizing a cosmos devoid of supernaturalism, Weber's concept of disenchantment also lays the foundation for the re-enchancing religious naturalism of theorists like Edward Abbey,¹⁴ Donald Crosby¹⁵ and Ursula Goodenough.¹⁶ Thus, Weber helped lay the foundation for a very vibrant area of current religious theorizing that joyfully embraces a non-supernaturalistic world. Religious naturalism, including pantheism, is an ongoing attempt to remedy the disenchantment that Weber recognized.

The famed historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, continued to insist on the reality of the sacred. For Eliade, the sacred is “the opposite of the profane and secular life.”¹⁷ Yet paradoxically, for Eliade, any object, from a stone, to all of earthly nature, to the “the cosmos in its entirety” can become a hierophany to those humans susceptible to or capable of experiencing such hierophanies, even while others continue to experience these things as desacralized, secular, profane matter.¹⁸ Aldo Leopold's observation that “[t]here are some who can live without wild things, and some who

¹³ “‘Whither is God’ he cried. ‘I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers.’” Nietzsche, F.W., “The Gay Science,” reproduced in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Rev. and expanded. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1975), 126.

¹⁴ Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988 [1968]).

¹⁵ Donald A. Crosby, *A Religion of Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 1.

¹⁸ ———, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, 1st American ed. (New York, : Harcourt Brace, 1959), 12.

cannot,”¹⁹ comes to mind as an illustration of differing perceptions among humans of the importance of various natural features. Further, those experiencing hierophanies conclude that “the *sacred* is equivalent to *power* and in the last analysis, to *reality*, . . . enduringness and efficacy.”²⁰ Thus, the religious practitioner, upon experiencing the hierophany, wishes to immerse him or herself in this sacred reality and be saturated with its power.

While Eliade declares that mere profane objects can be experienced as revealing the sacred, his is nevertheless primarily a supernaturalist, theistic understanding of the sacred. And Eliade is not merely describing the theistic beliefs of others, but appears to be declaring the metaphysical truth of reality as theistically conceived, leading Ninian Smart to describe him as, “in disguised form, a preacher.”²¹

As an advocate for theism, Eliade is decidedly dualistic. *The Sacred* is completely distinct from ordinary reality, what Eliade called *The Profane*. Russell McCutcheon describes the core of Eliade’s thought as seeing a dichotomy in existence “based on an ontological distinction between the sacred, understood by him as representative of order, the ultimately meaningful, and real, and the profane, which comprises chaos, contingency, and nonreality.”²² Thus, Eliade’s understanding of the nature of the sacred makes him an exemplar of dualistic theism, whereby God or the sacred is understood as either separate from the universe, or as a separate realm within this universe that

¹⁹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York,: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), vii.

²⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 12-13.

²¹ Ninian Smart. “Retrospect and Prospect: The History of Religions.” In *The Notion Of "Religion" In Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI IAHR Congress*, edited by Ugo Bianchi, 901-03, 901. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1994.

²² Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 51.

is distinct from the profane, material realm.²³ (Eliade never really declares “where” the sacred permanently resides. He merely insists that the sacred *is* where the profane *is not*). In this study, the term *theism* will be understood in this sense of dualistic theism, exemplified by Eliade. Eliade thereby serves as a contrast to more recent theorists that speak of non-supernatural, naturalistic understandings of religion, of which naturalistic pantheism is an example, or theorists that understand everything as sacred, such as most forms of panentheism and pantheism. The definitions and distinctions between these terms will be explored in the following chapter.

Returning again for a moment to Weber, he opined that humans, who seem to innately abhor chaos and the void, have a “metaphysical need for a meaningful cosmos.”²⁴ Elaborating, Weber declares that humans “demand . . . that the world order in its totality is, could, and should somehow be a meaningful ‘cosmos.’”²⁵ Weber’s choice of “metaphysical” to modify “need” is somewhat awkward. I take him to mean that humans have a psychological need for a meaningful cosmos and all humans will adopt some metaphysical stance that supplies the required meaning. Stated more compactly, humanity’s central existential situation is a yearning for meaning and comprehensibility. Or, as the anthropologist Roy Rappaport put it, humanity “lives, and can only live, in terms of meanings it must construct in a world devoid of intrinsic meaning but subject to physical law.”²⁶

²³ See William L. Reese, "Pantheism and Panentheism," in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 1994).

²⁴ Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," 281, reproducing ‘Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen’ (The Economic Ethic of the World Religions), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Reigionssoziologie* (Tübingen, 1922-23), vol. 1, pp. 237-68.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology Series, no. 110 (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1. Rappaport restates this observation toward the end of his book, at 451. See also discussion of Rappaport in Chapter 3.

Famed anthropologist Clifford Geertz agreed with Weber on this point, also arguing that making reality “comprehensible” is a central human need, and that humans simply cannot “leave unclarified problems of analysis merely unclarified,” and will constantly use “their beliefs to ‘explain’ phenomena, or, more accurately, to convince themselves that the phenomena were explainable within the accepted scheme of things.”²⁷ How do humans obtain their required meaning? According to both Geertz and Rappaport, through religion.

Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion continues to be frequently used if at times critiqued.²⁸

In “Religion As a Cultural System,” he defines it as follows:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.²⁹

In elaborating the first element of his definition, Geertz develops his “model *of* and model *for*” concept.³⁰

Geertz declares that human culture patterns are “systems or complexes of symbols” that serve as “extrinsic sources of information” (i.e., not internally genetic or biological) for a given human.³¹ He argues that “human behavior is so loosely determined by intrinsic sources of information” (thereby showing that Geertz favored the Nurture side in the Nature/Nurture debate)

²⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York,: Basic Books, 1973), 100-01.

²⁸ See Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* 18, no. 2 (1983): 238, for a frequently cited critique of Geertz’s definition.

²⁹ Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

that humans specifically need to acquire various models *of* reality and models *for* reality to make sense of reality. Thus, these culture patterns that transmit these models of reality serve as a sort of cultural DNA, since in the view of some theorists human beings are relatively unfinished from the neuro-physiological point of view. (Just how unfinished remains a matter of fierce debate. Witness the resurgence of theories postulating stronger roles for biological processes in determining human nature, ala E.O. Wilson³² and Steven Pinker³³).

According to Geertz, these culturally acquired models of reality are inherently dual in nature. A *model of* is a cultural representation, a symbolic copy of the natural world, while a *model for* is an actual template to generate meaningful behaviors to affect that nature.

Elaborating, models that are “models *for*” are templates to shape the human processes that actually produce reality—whether architectural ideals that guide the construction of dams or prescriptions for social behavior that then guide human behavior, and thereby the social construction of men and women. At the same time, these models are “models *of*” reality: the architectural principles used to build dams or to make sense of or judge existing dams and or the gender conceptions used to make sense of the differing public behavior of men and women. Geertz argues that it is this “double aspect” that makes “true symbols.” Indeed, Geertz suggests that it is the ability to create true “models *of*” symbols that is the unique “essence of human thought,” something no other species can do.³⁴ He concludes that the “model *of*” and “model *for*” doubleness of symbols means that they give “objective conceptual form to social and psychological reality both by shaping

³² Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, 25th anniversary ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

³³ Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002).

³⁴ Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," 94.

themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves.”³⁵

To give an example, Christianity as traditionally articulated in its creeds provides a *model of* reality, a metaphysical system that attempts to make sense of the world encountered by the believer by explaining why things are as they are now and how things will change in the future: A supernatural God created the world perfect and deathless. However, a rebellious divine being tricked the primal humans into sinning, thereby introducing death into this world. The supreme being incarnated a part of itself into this world and sacrificed that part of itself, thereby paying off the cosmic debt created by the primal couple’s sin, making possible a restoration. The supreme being will supernaturally intervene in the near future to restore the primordial perfection of the world. However, there are requirements to participate in this paradise. Thus, Christianity provides a *model for* reality, an ethical system that lays out the behavioral terms for participation in the anticipated future paradise. These rules are laid out in a book that has been magically given to humans. So long as any human follows the rules in this book (as personally discovered (Luther) or as interpreted by the religious authorities (Catholicism)), he or she will be able to participate in the restored deathless perfection of reality that is near at hand. The “*model for*” is directly related to the “*model of*.” Both have their origin in the biblical revelation.

As we will see herein, adherents to each of the metaphysical systems investigated here produce different “*models for*” and “*models of*” reality, in turn effecting both their ideas and their material.

³⁵ Ibid., 93.

CHAPTER 3
PANTHEISM, PANENTHEISM, CLASSICAL THEISM AND ATHEISM DEFINED

A beginning point for analyzing pantheism in American culture is arriving at a definition of the term for use in this investigation. And as will become clear in this chapter and the next, pantheism cannot be understood without also understanding the terms *pagan*, *panentheism*, *theism*, and *atheism*. I will define *theism* in this study as the dualistic theism set forth in Chapter 2 of which Eliade is the prime exemplar. I will define the remaining terms in this chapter.

An individual who comes across the term *pantheism* and wants to know its meaning may very well consult a dictionary and, if the person wants to have an especially authoritative definition, may very well consult the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), where I will therefore begin.

On March 19, 2008, the online edition of the OED offered two definitions of pantheism:

1. A belief or philosophical theory that God is immanent in or identical with the universe; the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God. Freq. with implications of nature worship or (in a weakened sense) love of nature. Cf. PANENTHEISM *n.*¹
2. Worship or tolerance of all or many gods. Cf. POLYTHEISM *n.*²

¹ The etymology of this meaning as presented in OED's Dec. 2007 revision is as follows: **1729** S. COLLIBER *Christian Relig.* p. ix, The Supposition of such an Absolutely Unlimited, and, as it were, Antecedent Necessity..leads directly to Pantheism. **1743** J. BROWN *Honour* 18 (*note*) That Species of Atheism commonly called Pantheism. **1834** S. T. COLERIDGE *Lit. Remains* (1836) II. 326 The sacerdotal religion of Egypt had..degenerated from the patriarchal monotheism into a pantheism, cosmotheism, or worship of the world as God. **1848** R. I. WILBERFORCE *Doctr. Incarnation* (1852) v. 121 Pantheism, the principle of which is to merge the personality of the moral Governor in the circle of His works. **1890** J. F. SMITH tr. O. Pfeleiderer *Devel. Theol.* IV. i. 338 His agnostic evolutionism is only a disguised materialistic (hylozoistic) pantheism. **1907** J. R. ILLINGWORTH *Doctr. Trinity* x. 196 We may..think of God as dwelling in the universe, without in any way transcending it. This means pantheism of one kind or another. **1955** *Sc. Jrnl. Theol.* **8** 88 This process is illustrated in religions which tend towards cosmic pantheism..immanental piety [etc.]. **1995** *New Yorker* 4 Dec. 48/1 The prevailing religion [in England] is a kind of domesticated pantheism: a communion with shrubberies and rockeries, with the song thrush at the birdbath. (**Bold** in the original)

² The etymology of this meaning as presented in OED's Dec. 2007 revision: **1822** tr. M. C. Bruun *Universal Geogr.* I. 576 Pantheism, modified by the institutions of particular nations, and blending

OED labeled these definitions as a “Draft Revision - December 2007”, along with etymologies of each usage. The still official OED definition is in its printed 1989 Second Edition, which was also available online on March 19, 2008, and provides the following pair of definitions which are similar but slightly different from the 2007 draft revision:

1. The religious belief or philosophical theory that God and the universe are identical (implying a denial of the personality and transcendence of God); the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God.³

2. The heathen worship of all the gods.⁴

While the OED is usually thought of as the most authoritative dictionary for scholarly purposes, it is only available online to the general public for a fee. Seeing this study is more concerned with popular understandings of pantheism, the available free, online dictionary resources are perhaps more relevant to an understanding how the term may understood in popular culture. On

itself with Sabeism, became systematic, or mythological *Polytheism*. **1837** F. PALGRAVE *Merchant & Friar* (1844) i. 21 The greater portion of the Tartar tribes professed a singular species of Pantheism, respecting all creeds, attached to none. **1861** C. H. PEARSON *Early & Middle Ages Eng.* (1867) I. 18 The spirit of Roman pantheism, which erected a temple to the divinities of all nations. **1988** J. L. ESPOSITO *Islam* iv. 117 A new wave of Neo-Sufism arose that sought to restrain and purify the excesses of pantheism and eclecticism that had infected Sufism. (**Bold** in the original).

³ The etymology of this meaning as presented in OED’s 1989 2nd Edition, which differs somewhat from the 2007 proposed revision, is as follows: “**1732** WATERLAND *Chr. Vind. Charge* 76 Pantheism..and Hobbism are scandalously bad, scarce differing from the broadest Atheism. **1766** J. BROWN *Honour* 176 *note*, That species of atheism commonly called Pantheism. **1823** COLERIDGE *Table-t.* 30 Apr., Pantheism and idolatry naturally end in each other: for all extremes meet. **1848** R. I. WILBERFORCE *Doct. Incarnation* v. (1852) 121 Pantheism, the principle of which is to merge the personality of the moral Governor in the circle of His works.” (**Bold** in the original).

⁴ The etymology of this meaning as presented in OED’s 1989 2nd Edition, which again differs somewhat from the 2007 proposed revision, is as follows: “**1837** SIR F. PALGRAVE *Merch. & Friar* i. (1844) 21 The greater portion of the Tartar tribes professed a singular species of Pantheism, respecting all creeds, attached to none. **1861** PEARSON *Early & Mid. Ages Eng.* (1867) I. 18 The spirit of Roman pantheism, which erected a temple to the divinities of all nations.” (**Bold** in the original).

March 19, 2008, the free online resource, Dictionary.com, provided the following definitions of the term from four sources:

From Random House⁵:

1. the doctrine that God is the transcendent reality of which the material universe and human beings are only manifestations: it involves a denial of God's personality and expresses a tendency to identify God and nature;
2. any religious belief or philosophical doctrine that identifies God with the universe.

From American Heritage Dictionary⁶:

1. A doctrine identifying the Deity with the universe and its phenomena;
2. Belief in and worship of all gods.

WordNet® 3.0⁷:

1. (rare) worship that admits or tolerates all gods;
2. the doctrine or belief that God is the universe and its phenomena (taken or conceived of as a whole) or the doctrine that regards the universe as a manifestation of God.

From The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy⁸:

The belief that God, or a group of gods, is identical with the whole natural world; pantheism comes from Greek roots meaning “belief that everything is a god.”

The other major free online dictionary is the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.⁹ It defines pantheism as follows:

⁵ Pantheism. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Pantheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

⁶ Pantheism. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Pantheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

⁷ Pantheism. Dictionary.com. *WordNet® 3.0*. Princeton University. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Pantheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

⁸ Pantheism. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Pantheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

⁹ Pantheism. Merriam-Webster.com. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2005. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pantheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

1. a doctrine that equates God with the forces and laws of the universe;
2. the worship of all gods of different creeds, cults, or peoples indifferently; also: toleration of worship of all gods (as at certain periods of the Roman empire).

This survey of definitions from five different online sources reveals that Merriam Webster, American Heritage Dictionary and Princeton's WordNet® 3.0 all include some variation on the OED's second definition, though WordNet identifies it as a rare usage. Random House does not include any version of the OED's second definition.

OED's pair of definitions, in both their 1989 and 2007 renderings, plus those variations in the three online dictionary resources present an immediate challenge for studying pantheism, because the definitions are quite different. The second definition is essentially a synonym for polytheism (and a perhaps indiscriminate polytheism ("Worship of all gods")), namely, the belief in multiple, discretely different gods or deities, while OED's first definition presents pantheism as a belief system that equates or at least very closely associates Nature or the total reality that is the universe with God, not discrete subsets of that reality. Polytheism is ultimately type of dualistic theism.

My own unscientific sampling, wherein I simply ask friends and colleagues to share what they believe the term "pantheism" means, confirms that both definitions are in play in the larger culture. Some say something like "Nature is God" (the first definition), and some say some variation on "Worshiping or believing in all gods" (the second definition). Like many facets of culture, there is not agreement on terminology.

To further complicate this investigation are the varied definitions of the word "pagan." As with pantheism, the OED has a new draft revised definition released in March 2008:

A. *noun*.

- 1a. A person not subscribing to any major or recognized religion, esp. the dominant religion of a particular society; spec. a heathen, a non-Christian, esp. considered as savage, uncivilized, etc. Now chiefly *hist.*
- 1b. A follower of a pantheistic or nature-worshipping religion; *esp.* a neopagan.

In extended use:

- 2a. *euphem.* A prostitute. *Obs.*
- 2b. A person of unorthodox, uncultivated or backward beliefs, tastes, etc.; a person who has not been converted to the current dominant views of a society, group, etc.; an uncivilized or unsocialized person, *esp.* a child.

B. *adjective*.

- 1a. Holding, characteristic of, or relating to those who do not subscribe to any major or recognized religion, esp. the dominant religion of a particular society; spec. heathen, non-Christian or pre-Christian (usually with connotations of savagery or primitiveness). Now chiefly *hist.*
- 1b. Pantheistic, nature-worshipping; (now) *esp.* neopagan.

In extended use:

- 2. In extended use: immoral, spiritually lacking; uncivilized, backward, savage.

The main difference from OED's 1989 edition is that *pagan* now is recognized as a noun to describe "A follower of a pantheistic or nature-worshipping religion; *esp.* a neopagan." Thus, in the OED's new March 2008 revision wherein *pagan* is defined as a "follower of a pantheistic religion," *pagan* and *pantheist* nearly or in some usages are actually synonymous.

The OED's second definition of pantheism could be applied to New Age and Neopagan religions. Sarah Pike, in her investigations of both these new religious movements, notes that "New Agers and Neopagans" believe in a highly diverse group of "gods and spirit helpers" that "they contact . . . in ritualized settings. Some of the entities they honor exist on a separate plane of reality, while others are extraterrestrials with special messages intended to improve life on this planet." Further, in terms of practices, New Agers and Neopagans "consult astrologers and tarot cards, the *I Ching* and other divinatory techniques for guidance in life choices and to further self knowledge.

They appropriate the spiritual riches of other cultures, including Tibetan Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Egyptian, American Indian, and even some Christian beliefs and practices. They put statues of the Buddha or Hindu or Egyptian deities their home altars alongside objects such as pentacles, candles, crystals, and goddess figurines.”¹⁰ Thus, Pike’s description of New Agers and Neopagans is quite consistent with the “pantheism” of the OED’s second definition, either in it’s 1989 or 2007 form.

While in some instances it may be that the same individual embraces both definitions, the pantheism of individuals who embrace the OED’s first definition is usually much different than the neopagan/new age religion captured by the second definition of pantheism. To further illustrate the differences, I will lay out some additional common sources for understanding the nature of both *pantheism* and *panentheism*, turning first to the so far undefined term *panentheism*. The importance of the term *panentheism* will become clear presently, as it is offered by many contemporary philosophers and theologians as a superior alternative to pantheism.

None of the free online dictionaries provide a definition of *panentheism* and until very recently neither did the OED. The OED, also in December 2007, now provides what it denominates as a “Draft Revision” that defines *panentheism* as: “The theory or belief that God encompasses and interpenetrates the universe but at the same time is greater than and independent of it. Freq. contrasted with pantheism.” It is not really a revision, because the 1989 OED did not provide a definition of panentheism.

The 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica, available free online because it is now in the public domain, provides this definition: “Panentheism, the name given by K. C. F. Krause (q.v.) to his philosophic theory. Krause held that all existence is one great unity, which he called *Wesen*

¹⁰ Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 14-15.

(Essence). This Essence is God, and includes within itself the finite unities of man, reason and nature. God therefore includes the world in Himself and extends beyond it. The theory is a conciliation of Theism and Pantheism.”¹¹ The only other free online encyclopedia explanations of panentheism are provided by Wikipedia, with its recognized lack of reliability.

While not available online for free, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* has provided an exposition that has been widely available for a number of decades, namely, William L. Reese’s article “Pantheism and Panentheism” which forms a subsection to the section entitled “Systems of Religious and Spiritual Belief.” Reese was a student of the famed philosopher and process theologian Charles Hartshorne. The two co-authored *Philosophers Speak of God* in 1953,¹² a book providing an exposition of panentheism. Thus, Britannica’s article explaining pantheism is actually authored by an advocate of panentheism, which perhaps in part explains why the article has a less than neutral tone in places. The first two paragraphs read as follows:

Pantheism: the doctrine that the universe conceived of as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe. The cognate doctrine of panentheism asserts that God includes the universe as a part though not the whole of his being.

Both “pantheism” and “panentheism” are terms of recent origin, coined to describe certain views of the relationship between God and the world that are different from that of traditional Theism. As reflected in the prefix “pan-” (Greek pas, “all”), both of the terms stress the all-embracing inclusiveness of God, as compared with his separateness as emphasized in many versions of Theism. On the other hand, pantheism and panentheism, since they stress the theme of immanence—i.e., of the indwelling presence of God—are themselves versions of Theism conceived in its broadest meaning. Pantheism stresses the identity between God and the world, panentheism (Greek en, “in”) that the world is included in God

¹¹ <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Panentheism>

¹² Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

but that God is more than the world.¹³

The remainder of the nearly 8,000 word article provides a reasonably detailed and at times technical survey of the different types of pantheism and panentheism across time and cultures. The two concluding paragraphs provide a fairly strong endorsement of panentheism and a negative critique of both pantheism and classical theism.¹⁴

The Encyclopedia Americana, another common American encyclopedia, includes a one page article titled "Pantheism." Its first paragraph reads as follows:

Pantheism: a term describing the philosophical belief that literally "everything is God." The word has no undisputed definition and refers to a family of worldviews that identify all or part of God with all or part of the universe. Although pantheism is monotheistic, its deity is ultimately impersonal, and like much primitive polytheism, it deifies nature. Its origins are found both in religious mysticism and philosophical speculation.¹⁵

The author of this article is John W. Cooper, a Christian philosopher and theologian at Calvin Theological Seminary, who also authored the recent book surveying the history of panentheism from the ancient Greeks to contemporary theologians like John Cobb, Jr., and then in his final chapter

¹³ William L. Reese, "Pantheism and Panentheism," in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 1994).

¹⁴ Ibid. Reese concludes the entry as follow: "Panentheism is then a middle way between the denial of individual freedom and creativity characterizing many of the varieties of pantheism and the remoteness of the divine characterizing Classical Theism. Its support for the ideal of human freedom provides grounds for a positive appreciation of temporal process, while removing some of the ethical paradoxes confronting deterministic views. It supports the sacramental value of reverence for life. At the same time the theme of participation with the divine leads naturally to self-fulfillment as the goal of life.

Many pantheistic and Theistic alternatives claim the same advantages, but their natural tendency toward absoluteness may make justification of these claims in some cases difficult and, in others, some argue, quite impossible. It is for this reason that a significant number of contemporary philosophers of religion have turned to panentheism as a corrective to the partiality of the other competing views."

¹⁵ Cooper, "Pantheism," in *The Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 21* (Danbury, CT: Grolier Incorporated, 1998), 363.

argues for its rejection and continued Christian adherence to traditional theism.¹⁶ His assertion that pantheism is “impersonal” like “primitive polytheism,” based in “mysticism” and “speculation,” reveals Cooper’s negative bias in the first paragraph.

Finally, there is a short entry in World Book. “Pantheism is the belief that the essence of God is in all things. It is often associated with nature religions, including many American Indian, African, and ancient Middle Eastern religions. In these religions, gods are connected with such things as storms, stars, the sky, the sea, fertility, and skill in hunting. In the Japanese Shinto tradition, gods are identified with natural objects, including rocks and trees. In a more general sense, pantheism refers to any religious philosophy that identifies God with nature.”¹⁷ This short entry maintains the clearest scholarly neutrality and recognizes both the God in nature and the polytheism strands of the two OED definitions.

Thus far I have concentrated on sources commonly available to the general public and that may therefore contribute to their understandings of these terms. Resolving whether or the extent to which one of the two OED definitions is dominant would require field and/or quantitative polling research that is beyond the scope of this project. However, as a proxy for such research, I have done a survey of the *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (ERN) and the manner in which pantheism and panentheism is discussed in that work, thereby at least reviewing data on how scholars use the terms. I begin with Michael York’s article on pantheism and then survey the remaining references to the terms throughout the rest of the work. York’s article provides a reasonably concise descriptions of pantheism, panentheism, and theism that I will use hereafter to analyze various

¹⁶ John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

¹⁷ Juergensmeyer, Mark. “Pantheism.” *World Book Online Reference Center*, 2008. <http://www.worldbookonline.com/wb/Article?id=ar413040> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

manifestations of pantheism in American culture, and thus set forth these portions in full:

Pantheism relates to the question concerning transcendence and the place of deity – whether it is within or beyond space and time. It contrasts essentially with theism that holds that the personality and being of god (God) transcend the universe. For pantheism, the universe as a whole is god or, in feminist “theological” terms, goddess. In this sense, pantheism is to be distinguished both from deism, which still holds a personal god to be creator of the world but neither immanent in nature nor revealed through history or by religious experience, and from atheism as the complete rejection of belief in god’s existence. Pantheism is also known as “cosmotheism,” which either ascribes divinity to the cosmos or simply identifies god with the world, and as “acosmism,” which is the fundamental denial of the existence of the universe as distinct from god. Consequently, pantheism is also to be contrasted with “panentheism” or the doctrine that god/goddess includes the world as a part of his/her being but not the whole of it. In other words, and especially from the acosmic view, god is none other than the combined forces and laws that manifest in the existing universe. In general, the pantheistic position holds that all is god rather than that god is all (theopantism). . . .¹⁸

. . . [E]specially in its Christian forms, Abrahamic religion posits . . . a transcendental personal god that stands “outside” nature and/or the material world and is its fully autonomous creator. From the theistic perspective, god and nature are ontologically separate and distinct. The Abrahamic religions do not deny the metaphysical reality of the world, but inasmuch as they adopt what is still essentially a Gnostic position, though this world may be the “gift” of the creator god, it is not an end in itself but more an impediment to obtaining or regaining a state of transcendental and/or heavenly grace . . .¹⁹

The ultimate understanding of pantheism and the relation between the divine and nature rests not only in its distinction from theism but also from the theological framework of panentheism and the process theologies of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000). . . Panentheism attempts to reassert the godhead as the totality of both actual and potential being. But unlike the “god is all” stance of pantheism, panentheism (“all in god”) is closer to the theopantic position of “god is all.” In other words, this view asserts that all things are within the being of god, but god is not subsumed or “exhausted” by all things and is additionally something other than the world or cosmos itself.²⁰

York notes that the distinctions between pantheism, panentheism, and theism come down

¹⁸ Michael York, "Pantheism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005), 1257, (emphasis supplied).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1258.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1260.

to different metaphysical claims about sacred geography, namely, where does “the sacred” (or “God” or “the divine”) exist. In noting the geographical aspect of this question, York explains my reference to “Pantheism’s Sacred Geography” in the title of this project.

Pantheism says the sacred is here, in this universe, and everywhere in this universe, and, given the standard naturalistic assumptions, the only universe we actually know exists. According to latest data combined with the best astrophysical theories, the universe emerged out of a “vacuum fluctuation” 13.7 billion years ago and trillions of years from now will fizzle to a halt as dead motionless matter, there to sit for eternity.²¹ In contrast, both panentheism and theism in York’s definition, speculate that there is an elsewhere (it does not really do to call it “a space” or “a place”) for the sacred to exist and further speculates does exist there.

But what of the polytheistic component of the OED definition no. 2? In his article on polytheism, York acknowledges that there is “a prevailing affinity for polytheistic conceptions of divine reality to be grounded in a pantheistic understanding of cosmic actuality.” York notes that “this need not invariably be the case, and polytheism might in some circumstances be understood as a sub-category of theism itself.”²² However, looking from a social evolutionist perspective, York notes that polytheism can be seen as the beginning of a human reflection that led in two historic directions, namely, to “pantheism and absorption in the One” and in the other direction to “monotheism and its victory over the many.” York notes further that “polytheism in both its naturalistic and humanistic forms tends to resist the rationalism of pantheism,” even if it accepts “the basic understanding of the non-transcendental immanence of deity,” while also retaining “theism’s

²¹ Brad Lemley, "Guth's Grand Guess (Cover Story)," *Discover*, April 2002 2002.; Michael D. Lemonick, "How the Universe Will End (Cover Story)," *Time*, Jun. 25, 2001 2001.

²² Michael York, "Polytheism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005), 1290.

notion of divine personality (in this case, multiple) whether as a reality, a metaphor or both.” In noting this ambiguous relationship between polytheism and pantheism, York seems to suggest, though he does not expressly state, that the two metaphysical concepts should be kept distinct. Thus, from York’s perspective, the OED’s definition no. 2, which treats pantheism as a synonym for polytheism, creates an unnecessary and unfortunate theoretical confusion. I concur with York. Both terms serve a different descriptive purpose for describing fundamentally different metaphysical understandings.

In further testing this approach, I reviewed the 249 occurrences of “pantheism” or “pantheist[ic]” in the *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. There were a few instances where the author’s intended definition (OED1 or OED2) could not be determined from context. Either could apply. There were a few instances where OED2 was clearly the intended usage. But overall, OED1 was the intended definition. Hereafter, I will continue my analysis based on OED1.

In addition to arriving at working definitions of theism, panentheism, and pantheism, it is also necessary to have a settled definition of *atheism*. This may seem odd at first. However, pantheism is often accused of being “merely another form of atheism.”²³ Indeed, Arthur Schopenhauer made this complaint: “Against pantheism I have mainly the objection that it states nothing. To call the world God is not to explain it, but only to enrich the language with a superfluous synonym for the word world. It comes to the same thing whether we say ‘the world is God’ or ‘the world is the world.’”²⁴ Thus, I return to the OED.

In the OED, atheism is defined as: “Disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a God. Also,

²³ Richard H. Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 175.

²⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99.

disregard of duty to God, godlessness (practical atheism).” A visit to dictionary.com confirms that each of the dictionaries there utilized contain a definition essentially consistent with the OED. However, Random House includes a second definition: “disbelief in the existence of a supreme being or beings.”²⁵ And Webster’s defines it this way: “The disbelief or denial of the existence of a God, or supreme intelligent Being,” and provides two examples of usage.²⁶ Thus, Random House and Webster’s provide a definition of atheism that allows atheism to be limited to a denial of the existence of a supreme being or beings. Thus, an understanding of God that did not include belief in a supreme being or beings would not be inconsistent with or excluded by this second definition of atheism. This second definition would not therefore necessarily include a denial of God understood pantheistically. (This distinction will become important when I explore the self-professed atheism of Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris in Chapter 8).

An example of an atheistic sentiment, in this case a nihilistic one, is the anthropologist Roy Rappaport’s statement that humanity “lives, and can only live, in terms of meanings it must construct in a world devoid of intrinsic meaning but subject to physical law.”²⁷ In calling this an

²⁵ Atheism. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Atheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008)

²⁶ Atheism. Dictionary.com. *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*. MICRA, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Atheism> (accessed: March 19, 2008). The examples are: (1) “Atheism is a ferocious system, that leaves nothing above us to excite awe, nor around us to awaken tenderness. - R. Hall”; and (2) “Atheism and pantheism are often wrongly confounded. - Shipley.”

²⁷ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology Series, no. 110 (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1. Rappaport restates this observation toward the end of his book, at 451. Rappaport did not always display a nihilistic materialism that denied intrinsic meaning. Indeed, he can also be cited as an anti-nihilist, or even a pantheist. In an interview near the end of his life, he admits that he was “some sort of an environmental mystic” and, contrary to his assertion that the “world [is] devoid of intrinsic meaning,” instead argues that ideas (or meanings?) that lead to “environmental destruction” are “wrong,” and that ideas that lead to a “flourishing” world should

example of nihilistic atheism, I am relying on OED's first definition of "nihilism" as "the belief that life is devoid of meaning." Rappaport is asserting that to the extent a human finds meaning, it is a self or societally constructed meaning, not one intrinsic to existence itself. In rendering his opinion of the human condition, Rappaport appears to echo Jean Paul Sartre:

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after, already existing—as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.²⁸

Thus, Sartre lays out in more detail what it means to declare that the cosmos has no intrinsic meaning.

I have not yet addressed a key question in any investigation of pantheism, namely, What exactly does it mean to say, "The Universe is God"? Why is Richard Dawkins wrong, if he is, when he says "Pantheism is [just] sexed-up atheism"?²⁹ This project is not primarily a philosophical investigation into the various ways that philosophers parse the various interpretations of pantheism.

be "privileged" over ideas that lead to destruction. In so stating, he said "this separates me, as far as I understand it, from most postmodernists who would simply say that there is no ground for judgment, that it is all relative." Roy A. Rappaport, Brian A. Hoey, and Tom Fricke, "'from Sweet Potatoes to God Almighty': Roy Rappaport on Being a Hedgehog," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007): 590, 93-94. In that interview, Rappaport seemed to describe a personal meaning that was something more than a mere internal construction.

²⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975), 349.

²⁹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 18.

But I will briefly review here three of the more prominent philosophers of pantheism, Michael Levine, Robert Corrington and J. Edward Barrett, particularly their expositions of what it means to declare that the universe is God.

Michael Levine, in *Pantheism: A non-theistic concept of deity*, in the epigraph of his section entitled “Divinity,” provides a portion of the following from the poet Robinson Jeffers: “I believe the Universe is one being, . . . one organic whole. The parts change and pass, or die, people and races and rocks and stars, none of them seems to me important in itself, but only the whole. This whole is in all its parts so beautiful, and is felt by me to be so intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it, and to think of it as divine. . . It seems to me that this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love; and that there is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation, in turning one’s affections outward toward this one God, rather than inwards on one’s self, or on humanity, or on human imaginations and abstractions—the world of spirits.”³⁰

Having introduced Jeffer’s explanation of why he called the Universe “God,” Levine states that pantheism is the view that in some sense “everything that exists constitutes a unity” and in some sense “this all-inclusive unity is divine,” and gives philosophical Taoism as “one of the best articulated and thoroughly pantheistic positions there is.”³¹ A scientific materialist could conceive of reality as in some sense “a unity.” Thus, pantheism’s defining trait is its additional assertion that the unity is “divine.” Levine explains this critical aspect of pantheism as follows:

I use the terms “divinity” and “holiness” interchangeably. “Divine” is defined as pertaining to God (“of, from, or like a god”), but also as “sacred” or “holy.” Either

³⁰ Michael P. Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 47, citing Letter to Sister Mary James Power (Oct. 1, 1934), included in Robinson Jeffers, "The Wild God of the World: An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers," ed. Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 189. and

³¹ Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity*, 25.

definition suits the present purpose, since determining why pantheists regard the Unity as divine, or god, is equivalent to determining why they regard the Unity [of the Universe] to be sacred or holy. The idea of “divinity” in pantheism is similar in some respects to its theistic meaning and use.

Why do pantheists ascribe divinity to the Unity? The reason is similar to why theists describe God as holy. *They experience it as such. In [Rudolf] Otto’s experiential account, what is divine is what evokes the numinous experience.* This can be a theistic god, but it can also be a pantheistic Unity. And, when looked at from socio-scientific perspectives in terms of how the concept of divinity functions intellectually and affectively (e.g. its ethical, soteriological and explanatory roles), its application in theism and pantheism is much the same.³²

In laying out this exposition, Levine relies on Rudolf Otto’s term, *numinous*. Levine notes that Otto “coined the word ‘numinous’ to describe ‘that aspect of deity which transcends or eludes comprehension in rational or ethical terms.’”³³ For Otto, “rationalistic speculation” about God has the effect of concealing God, and it is only by breaking “through the hard crust of rationalism” and bringing “into play the feelings buried deep down in our religious consciousness” that humans become able to encounter God’s “sheer mystery and marvel” that is experienced as “the wholly non-rational and ‘other.’”³⁴ Levine notes that for Otto, the “holy has an objective correlate in the object (i.e. the numinous) that evokes the experience,”³⁵ and is not merely a term to describe a subjective human mental state. Put another way, a human who experiences the numinous is experiencing

³² Ibid., 47-48. (emphasis supplied).

³³ Ibid., 52, citing John W. Harvey’s “Translator’s Preface” in Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed. (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1950), xvi.

³⁴ Ibid., 195-94. It is worth noting here that Otto’s phrase describing God as “the wholly other” often gets used in support of dualistic theism’s understanding of God as separate from profane reality. Here though, it seems clear that Otto means “wholly other” to denote the “sheer mystery and marvel” of existence that can only be an affective, non-rational human experience. Thus, the concept of *wholly other* can be consonant with pantheistic understandings and cannot not be exclusively claimed by panentheists and dualistic theists.

³⁵ Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity*, 48.

something real, and is not merely hallucinating. Levine notes that Otto's assertion that the numinous is an objective reality is at odds with theorists such as Geertz and Berger that argue that experiences of the numinous are "a human projection."³⁶ Levine argues that for many pantheists, the "intuition and ground for attributing divinity to the Unity (i.e. the pantheist's intimations of divinity) rests on numinous experience or something like it. It is affectively and experientially grounded. The Unity is experienced as numinous—i.e. as 'divine.'"³⁷ Levine explains further that what it means to experience the Unity as divine is complex, but it "partly means that it is experienced as having value." Thus, seeing reality as divine is for the pantheist a rejection of the meaninglessness of nihilistic atheism, regardless of whether reality can be said to be "meaningless" in any absolute sense. Whether as an emotional human projection or as an experience of some objectively real aspect of existence, the pantheist finds his or her own existence and the existential reality in which it is embedded "sacred," i.e., meaningful and valuable.

Levine, expressly relying on Geertz's definition of religion and his concept of "models of" and "models for," declares that

Divinity for the pantheist functions symbolically in a manner not unlike the way "God" does for the theist. It is part of a system of symbols, one of which is Unity, that enables those for whom the symbols are operative to do what all sacred symbol systems (i.e. religions) do; that is, to get about the business of "ordering" and "making sense of," of making moral judgments, working, relating to others—in short—living in a world which no matter how grand is fundamentally difficult. Thus, theistic and pantheistic concepts of divinity are functionally equivalent.³⁸

I will briefly touch on the complex thought of Robert Corrington. In his article, "My Passage from Panentheism to Pantheism," he explains his personal journey from a panentheism born out of

³⁶ Ibid., 128, n. 18.

³⁷ Ibid., 58.

³⁸ Ibid., 69.

the thought of Paul Tillich and Charles Hartshorne to his new found pantheism. Corrington now finds panentheism's attempt to preserve a realm (perhaps "supernatural" or extraordinary) for God somewhere outside of nature as impossible and logically incoherent. "Nature is all there is," and necessarily includes whatever higher, transcendent realm panentheism is trying to preserve. For Corrington, "the concept of 'non-nature' makes absolutely no sense."³⁹ In like manner, the term "supernatural" is likewise incoherent, because there can be "no supernatural realm. . . Starkly put—there are no non-natural traits or orders."⁴⁰ Because of what Corrington deems the logical incoherence of panentheism, he describes it as "conceptual laziness" born of the "last gasp of liberal Protestant theology."⁴¹ Corrington's "naturalism" does not imply any sort of "materialism." Indeed, Corrington is open to models of reality that most other theorists, and indeed most non-specialists, would consider supernatural. For instance, he asserts "human beings are eternal, . . . that is, that our soul was neither created nor will it be destroyed. . . . [However,] the soul is fully an order *within* nature and that it will always be so. It is simply an order with specific non-temporal features that renders it different in kind from all those orders subject to entropy and the time process."⁴² Given his openness to, indeed insistence on, the existence of non-material realities, Corrington is an exemplar of what I will refer to herein as *spiritualized pantheism*,⁴³ in contrast to *naturalistic*

³⁹ Robert S. Corrington, "My Passage from Panentheism to Pantheism," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2002): 141.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 134, 137.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 130, 136.

⁴² ———, "Deep Pantheism," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 1, no. 4 (2007): 506 (Corrington's emphasis).

⁴³ I specifically considered and rejected calling this type of non-naturalistic pantheism, pantheistic spirituality, because the term *spirituality* is increasingly coming to include naturalistic understandings of reality. An example is the way purported atheist Sam Harris extols the

pantheism, which either denies or is agnostic about non-material realms currently undetectable by contemporary, mainstream science.⁴⁴

Finally, I review the pantheism of Christian theologian and philosopher, J. Edward Barrett. Like Corrington, Barrett describes an intellectual odyssey from a more traditional understanding of Christianity to a new found Christian pantheism. Barrett eloquently lays out a Christian Pantheism, primarily naturalistic in tenor. Many will consider the very idea of a naturalistic Christian pantheism as oxymoronic, not to mention heretical (for reasons that will become clear in the next chapter). I therefore set forth Barrett's argument in his own words without risking the imposition of my own interpretation through selective quotation.

“God” is not the name of something outside and above reality (as with Barth), nor is it a super consciousness grounded in the whole of reality (as with Hartshorne). Instead, the word “God” is a way of addressing—with awe, appreciation, and a posture of reverence—our everyday encounters with nature and one another. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote: “Earth’s crammed with heaven, and every common bush aflame with God, but only those who see take off their shoes.” Passing over the ancient Stoics, and even Spinoza (who for all his genius and piety thought of the world as a machine), I am prepared to argue that pantheism has two distinct advantages which qualify it for first place in the list of options available to those interested in a religious interpretation of life.

a) When “God” is understood as an “attitude” word, a posture of reverence or respect we assume toward the world, a way of saying “Thou” to the world, then

importance of humans developing their “spirituality.” Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 205-07. As Bron Taylor has said, “there are many examples around the world where people feel and speak of a ‘spiritual connection’ to nature, or of ‘belonging to’ the earth (mother earth, or even mother ocean), or speaking of the earth as ‘sacred,’ without any concomitant confession of supernatural beliefs.” Bron Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion?,” *Futures* 36 (2004): 1000. I believe “spiritualized” captures the supernatural/extraordinary connotation which I intend.

⁴⁴ My categories of *spiritualized pantheism* and *naturalistic pantheism* are closely analogous to Bron Taylor’s categories of *Gaian Spirituality* and *Gaian Naturalism*. See ———, “Dark Green Religion: Gaian Earth Spirituality, Neo-Animism, and the Transformation of Global Environmental Politics,” unpublished paper at the *Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion* (San Diego: 2007). and ———, *Dark Green Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, Expected 2009).

we know our talk about God is about something real, the reality in which we “live and move and have our being.”⁴⁵ In case you haven’t noticed it, talking about something unquestionably real is an advantage few theologians throughout history have enjoyed.

b) Not only is “God” then undeniably real, but religion is then indisputably relevant. It has to do with our ordinary lives, their guts and their glory. And however much we may prefer another world, or weigh the possibilities of another one awaiting us after this one, the divine in this world is the one with which we have to do now. Pantheism makes religion relevant to our earthly life—so far as we know, the only life we have (which is not to rule out other possibilities, but simply to remain agnostic regarding what William James called “over-beliefs”). Pantheism is what Whitehead called “world loyalty.”

Should one be asked “Is this God a “person?” the only honest answer is that we do not know—Charles Hartshorne’s “Cosmic Consciousness” and the traditional interpretation of Martin Buber’s “Eternal Thou” (which I believe is incorrect) to the contrary. There are well documented but inconclusive arguments both ways. I find myself unable to choose between them.

But, I would affirm that on occasion we feel the quality, quantity, and value of our relationships with nature and history, relationships that are more abundant, deeper, richer and meaningful than we normally know. These experiences . . . [which I call] “grace,” have three characteristics: (1) experiences of support or nourishment, (2) experiences of summons or challenge, and (3) experiences of union with a height, and depth, and breadth of connections of consequence that we can begin to describe, but that eventually fade into mystery, beyond the horizon of language and imagination.

But, the opposite is also true. We experience emptiness, shallowness, meaninglessness, nausea, and blatant evil. This means that reality (whether or not addressed as “God”) is morally ambiguous. The idea of God in the Jewish Scriptures, as one capable of both wrath and repentance, as well as steadfast love, seems to me (however mythological) to be closer to the truth about our experience of reality than the idealistic abstraction of John’s first letter, where he writes that “God is light, and in God is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5). John’s selective idealism creates that difficult and unsolvable “problem of evil,” or theodicy. For my own part, it seems wiser for us to liken God to everything else we know about in nature (and about ourselves)—with both precious and appalling impulses, helpful and horrendous behaviors, constructive and destructive dynamics—hoping that the scales tip on the constructive side, but uncertain. The dilemma of the religious moralist is that we are ambiguity in the midst of ambiguity striving to make the world less ambiguous.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See Chapter 4 for the significance of this quotation to Acts 17:28.

⁴⁶ J. Edward Barrett, "A Pilgrim's Progress: From the Westminster Shorter Catechism to Naturalistic Pantheism," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2002): 168-70.

In concluding this investigation of the various definitions of paganism, pantheism, panentheism, polytheism, theism, and atheism, I offer this example of how one self-described layperson pantheist tries to explain all these different definitions to a neighbor who asks for an explanation of what she means by describing herself as a pantheist:

Pantheism is a word easily confused with other words. Pantheon, for example, refers to a collection of many gods. Polytheism is the belief in many gods. When I tell an acquaintance that I am a pantheist, she looks at me askance. Do I believe in tree spirits? No, that is animism, I explain—the belief that individual souls inhabit natural objects and phenomena. Am I a pagan? she wonders. Yes, I say. Paganism is the religion of anyone not specifically a Christian, Muslim, or Jew. But, I add, she is probably thinking of neo-pagans, people from a modern, technological society who are trying to revive the ancient worship of nature. My pantheism does revere nature. But I don't practice any ancient rituals.

Importantly, what pantheism is not is theism—the acceptance of a single, personal god. Pantheism is not atheism either, a disbelief in a sacred or numinous universe. There is some argument here. The well-known atheist and scientist Richard Dawkins calls pantheism "sexed-up atheism." Well, nothing wrong with being sexy. But the pantheist acknowledges a strong religious impulse. The pantheist walks literally, every day, in the Mind and Body of God. Panentheism sounds the most like pantheism but also is not, being the doctrine that God is both immanent in the world and transcendent or outside it, too.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Sharman A. Russell, *Standing in the Light: My Life as a Pantheist* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 3-4.

CHAPTER 4
THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR
PANTHEISM, PANENTHEISM AND CLASSICAL THEISM

Any exploration of pantheism must occur with at least some understanding of its polar opposite, classical theism. So it is with the emergence of classical theism I will begin.

Richard Elliott Friedman, in noting that biblical Israel was the first enduring monotheism known, notes further that the “difference between Israelite monotheism and pagan religion . . . was not a simple matter of arithmetic: one God rather than many. The pagan religion that dominated the ancient world for four millennia was tied to nature. . . Pagan religion personified [Nature’s] forces, ascribed a will to them, and called them: gods. . . Having one God who controlled all these forces was another (more appealing?) way to . . . deal with these” natural forces. Thus, “Israel’s monotheism, for the first time, conceived of a God who was outside of nature, controlling its deified forces.”¹ While I will explore this in more detail, this dualistic separation of God from nature is the key element of classical theism, as I discussed in regard to Mircea Eliade in Chapter 2.

This divorce of God from Nature had other ramifications. It allowed biblical writers to imagine that humans occupied a more exalted position in the natural order. Thus, in the Priestly version of the Israelite creation story contained in the first chapter of Genesis,² humanity is given this command: “God blessed them, and God said to them ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every

¹ Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Hidden Face of God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 87-88.

² See, Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 405-06, for an argument that this story was most likely composed in the mid-sixth century BCE during Israel’s period of Babylonian exile.

living thing that moves upon the earth” (NRSV).³ In regards to Christianity, it is this passage along with the declaration that humanity was made in “God’s image” contained in Genesis 1:26 that led historian Lynn White to argue in a now famous and still controversial essay that especially “in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.”⁴ Jeremy Cohen notes that the two Hebrew verbs that the NRSV translates as “subdue” and “have dominion” and that Cohen translates as “master” and “rule” indeed do have harsh connotations, contrary to some Christian interpreters efforts to soften the terms by equating them to God’s wise and compassionate rule. According to Cohen, the Hebrew equivalent of “subdue” “usually denotes the enslavement of people or the physical conquest of territory.” In like manner, the Hebrew equivalent of “have dominion” is “often reinforced by terms of harshness, refers in general to the rule over slaves, subjects, or enemies, at times to the vanquishing of an opponent in battle, and perhaps even to the trampling of grapes in a winepress.” Cohen notes that these harsh connotations lead some interpreters to “flatly to agree with White.”⁵

Another key passage from the Hebrew Bible needs to be considered, Psalms 8. It reads as follows:

To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

¹ O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set

³ Jewish scholar Jeremy Cohen translates the passage as follows: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on the earth.’” Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 1.

⁴ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.; see also Elspeth Whitney, "White, Lynn -- Thesis Of," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005).

⁵ Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text*, 16.

your glory above the heavens,

² Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

⁹ O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Scholars have noted the similarity and relationship between Psalm 8 and Genesis 1:28, though they disagree on which text predates which. According to Cohen, some see this text as substantially earlier than the Priestly creation text, while others consider it a merely a later gloss on the Genesis idea of dominion.⁶ Either way, it is another text that has during the course of the evolution of ideas in Western Civilization reinforced the sense of human entitlement to dominate, control and utilize the natural world to its own benefit. As Clarence Glacken noted in regard to Psalm 8 and Psalms 115:16 (“The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings”), the “theme that man, sinful though he be, occupies a position on earth comparable to that of God in the universe, as a personal possession, a realm of stewardship, has been one of the key ideas in the religious and philosophical thought of Western civilization regarding [humanity’s] place in nature.”⁷

In terms of Christian belief in the separation between God and the natural created order, the Apostle Paul is the decisive character. Paul, in the opinion of many if not most scholars, is the

⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

⁷ Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 155.

decisive interpreter and, some would say, creator of the Christian Myth.⁸ Of the various letters included in the Christian New Testament, there is near-unanimous agreement among scholars that seven were authentically written by Paul.⁹ His letter to the Romans, the last of these seven, and is considered to be the most comprehensive articulation of his theology. In Chapter 1, Paul has this to say:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; ²¹ for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. (Romans 1:19-25, NRSV)

Glacken notes that the idea expressed in verse 20, that the reality of God is demonstrated by God's creation, "could have been written by a Stoic philosopher." Yet it is the declaration in verse 25 that has proven decisive in the history of Western Civilization. "It is a theme repeated often in Christian theology: worship the Creator, not the creature. The works of God can be discerned in the creation, but God is transcendent, the creation is by him but not of him, and it is only a partial teacher. One can see His ways in it, but worship is for the Creator alone."¹⁰ Viewed through the lens of memetics

⁸ See generally Burton L. Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy* (New York: Continuum, 2001).; Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, 1st Harper & Row pbk. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

⁹ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 105.

¹⁰ Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, 161.

or meme theory,¹¹ this idea, that worship is for the Creator alone and that the divine is not to be seen in the creation, is a meme that has been wildly successful and casts a long shadow. It must be taken into account in any investigation of ideas about God and Nature.

Given Paul's undisputed authorship of this passage and its derivative ideas, it is therefore necessary to examine another biblical passage, also attributed to Paul, that seems to have exactly the opposite message. In the New Testament book of Acts is this account of a public sermon by Paul at Athen's Areopagus,¹² set forth here in full for complete context:

²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

The decisive verse for anyone looking for biblical warrant for seeing the divine in nature is the

¹¹ The term *meme* was coined by Richard Dawkins in Chapter Eleven of his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30th Anniversary ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 189-201. For an updated summary, see Daniel Clement Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 341-57.

¹² Richard Oster notes that this sermon is depicted in a way that "deliberately echoes the trial of Socrates for proclaiming new deities and leading the populace to question its beliefs in the traditional gods." Richard E. Oster, Jr., "Athens," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 65.

quotation contained in verse 28, “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being.’” Glacken notes it as a contrast to Paul’s ideas in Romans.¹³ Charles Hartshorne, the founding philosopher of 20th Century panentheism, cites it and, apparently assuming that Paul said it, asks whether Paul was “a pan-theologian?”¹⁴ The philosopher and theologian Philip Clayton uses the verse in the title to one of his recent books on panentheism.¹⁵ The non-theistic philosopher of religious naturalism Donald Crosby in a recent journal article uses the quote without attribution¹⁶ and with attribution in his book.¹⁷ Panentheistic Christian theologian and New Testament scholar Marcus Borg uses the quote to demonstrate the immanence of God.¹⁸ The passage appears repeatedly in discussions of religion and nature.

But did Paul actually deliver this sermon and utter these words? It has been argued both ways.¹⁹ Given the way this passage has been used by Christian panentheistic theologians, perhaps

¹³ Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, 161, n. 30.

¹⁴ Charles Hartshorne, "Pantheism and Panentheism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 166.

¹⁵ Philip Clayton and A. R. Peacocke, *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004).

¹⁶ Donald A. Crosby, "A Case for Religion of Nature," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 1, no. 4 (2007): 490.

¹⁷ ———, *A Religion of Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁸ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 38.

¹⁹ For an argument that he may have delivered this sermon, see F. F. Bruce, "Acts of the Apostles," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.; for the contrary view, see Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 264-65.; A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*, 1st American ed. (New York: W.W. Norton &, 1997), 157.; Günther Bornkamm, *Paul, Paulus*, 1st U.S. ed. (New

the more important question is who is Paul allegedly quoting in this passage? In annotated bibles, the quote is sometimes attributed to the 6th Century BCE Greek poet Epimenides,²⁰ but it is more likely a passage from the 1st Century BCE Stoic pantheist monistic poet Posidonius (c. 135-51 BCE).²¹ I will return to this, but I will note here a certain irony when this piece of pantheistic pagan verse which happened to make into the biblical canon is adamantly utilized by Christian panentheistic theologians as a refutation of pantheism.

York,: Harper & Row, 1971), 65.

²⁰ See Martin Dibelius and K. C. Hanson, *The Book of Acts: Form, Style, and Theology*, Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 109, suggesting the passage is from a hymn to Zeus by Epimenides of Crete. See also “Epimenides,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, (2008), Encyclopædia Britannica Online, Mar. 30, 2008 <http://www.search.eb.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/eb/article-274263>; and Euan Nisbet, “Heavenly Phenomena: How an Astronomer’s Words Were Transformed into a Citation Classic,” *Nature*, 5 April 2001, 635.

²¹ Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), at page 219 (New Testament), in note to Acts 17:28.

CHAPTER 5
THE NATURALISTIC PANTHEISM OF EDWARD ABBEY

The quoted phrase in the title of this project, “*the only paradise we ever need*,” was penned by Edward Abbey (1927-1989), an essayist and novelist that many consider the Thoreau of contemporary America, in his essay “Down the River” in *Desert Solitaire*, his famed collection of essays about two seasons as a park ranger in Arches National Monument in the 1950s. He was also a philosopher of anarchy and an inspiration to the formation of contemporary radical environmentalism. But my interest here is the metaphysical framework by which he oriented himself and that he advocated for others.¹

Abbey played with his metaphysical grounding over time. But on at least one occasion in 1983, approximately six years before his death, he applied the term pantheist to himself:

Call me a pantheist. If there is such a thing as divinity . . . then it must exist in everything, and not simply be localized in one supernatural figure beyond time and space. Either everything is divine, or nothing is. All partake of the universal divinity—the scorpion and the packrat, the Junebug and the pismire. Even human beings. All or nothing, now or never, here and now.²

Thus, we do not have to wonder if he would apply the term to himself. But what kind of pantheist was he? I will argue Abbey is a very good exemplar of naturalistic pantheism.

How early did Abbey’s earth-centered metaphysics emerge? In a 1959 letter, he referred to the “Great Christian Hangover” and also to himself as “an atheist. Tho’ earthiest might be a better

¹ Abbey’s pantheistic thought has also been explored by Bron Taylor. See Bron Taylor, “The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no. 1: 32-36.; Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, Expected 2009), and ———, “Resacralizing Earth: Pagan Environmentalism and the Restoration of Turtle Island,” in *American Sacred Space*, ed. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 105-10.

² Jack Loeffler, “Edward Abbey,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005), 2.

term. I believe in the earth. Let Heaven go to Hell!”³ He reworked this sentiment later in *Desert Solitaire* as follows:

God? . . . who the hell is *He*? There is nothing here, at the moment, but me and the desert. And that's the truth. Why confuse the issue by dragging in a superfluous entity? Occam's razor. Beyond atheism, nontheism. I am not an atheist but an earthiest. Be true to the earth.⁴

Is Abbey expressing disloyalty to rest of the cosmos? Probably not. So far, the only part of the Cosmos that humans can harm through disloyalty is the Earth. Hence, it is a proper focus for pantheistic loyalty.

In his famous 1975 novel of radical environmentalism, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*,⁵ Abbey gives an intimation of pantheism by having Doc Sarvis, the character that was a fictionalized combination of himself and his friend John DePuy,⁶ say the following: “Pan shall rise again, my dear. The great god Pan. . . My God is alive and kicking. Sorry about yours.”

Abbey penned an especially evocative pantheistic credo reflecting on the need for wilderness:

The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, *the only paradise we ever need*—if only we had the eyes to see. Original sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us—if only we were worthy of it.⁷

³ Edward Abbey and David Petersen, *Postcards from Ed: Dispatches and Salvos from an American Iconoclast*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006), 11. The letter was to a college professor and was mostly a scathing critique of the playwright and writer Samuel Beckett

⁴ Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988 [1968]), 163.

⁵ ———, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), 50.

⁶ James M. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey: A Life* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 157-58.

⁷ Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 147. (emphasis supplied).

Thus, Abbey tells us that this is our only home, thereby declaring disbelief in a heavenly afterlife, though not necessarily ruling out reincarnation. Indeed, Abbey frequently would ruminate on being reincarnated as a vulture. But was he serious?

Appealing as I find the idea of reincarnation, I must confess that it has a flaw: to wit, there is not a shred of evidence suggesting that it might be true. The idea has nothing going for it but desire, the restless aspiration of the human mind. But when was aspiration ever intimidated by fact? Given a choice, I plan to be a long-winged fantailed bird next time around. . . I think I'll settle for sedate career, serene and soaring, of the humble turkey buzzard. . . And contemplate this world we love from a silent and considerable height.⁸

Thus, Abbey displayed his capacity to engage in flights of fancy while simultaneously showing his essentially empirical orientation.

Elsewhere, he expressed disapproval of taking flights of fancy away from factual truth, as shown in this description of a day hike up Escalante Canyon in Southern Utah:

Is this at last the *locus Dei*? There are enough cathedrals and temples and altars here for a Hindu pantheon of divinities. Each time I look up one of the secretive little side canyons I half expect to see not only the cottonwood tree rising over its tiny spring—the leafy god, the desert's liquid eye—but also a rainbow-colored corona of blazing light, pure spirit, pure being, pure disembodied intelligence, about to speak my name.

If a man's imagination were not so weak, so easily tired, if his capacity for wonder not so limited, he would abandon forever such fantasies of the supernatural. He would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence more than sufficient of the absolute and marvelous, more than enough to console him for the loss of the ancient dreams.⁹

Abbey reveled in his existence and the mystery of it:

. . . Einstein thought that the most mysterious aspect of the universe (if it is, indeed, a universe, not a pluri-verse) is what he called its “comprehensibility.” Being primarily a mathematician . . . Einstein saw the world as comprehensible because so many of its properties and so much of its behavior can be described through

⁸ Edward Abbey, *Down the River*, 1st ed. (New York: Dutton, 1982), 55.

⁹ Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 155.

mathematical formulas.

But to me the most mysterious thing about the universe is not its comprehensibility but the fact that it exists. And the same mystery attaches to everything within it. The world is permeated through and through by mystery. By the incomprehensible. By creatures like you and me and Einstein and the lizards.¹⁰

Trained philosopher that he was, he had no patience for philosophical nonsense that would deny the reality of our existence on our “paradise” home:

Solipsism, like other absurdities of the professional philosopher, is a product of too much time wasted in library stacks between the covers of a book, in smoke-filled coffeehouses (bad for the brains) and conversation-clogged seminars. To refute the solipsist or the metaphysical idealist all that you have to do is take him out and throw a rock at his head: if he ducks he's a liar. His logic may be airtight but his argument, far from revealing the delusions of living experience, only exposes the suffocation of logic.¹¹

Reveling in the real, with a real appreciation for knowledge obtained through science, Abbey reveals an ecstatic empiricism:

[T]he Colorado Plateau lies still beyond the reach of reasonable words. Or unreasonable representation. This is a landscape that has to be seen to be believed, and even then, confronted directly by the senses, it strains credulity. . . [T]here remains something in the soul of the place, the spirit of the whole, that cannot be fully assimilated by the human imagination.

My terminology is far from exact; certainly not scientific. Words like "soul" and "spirit" make vague substitutes for a hard effort toward understanding. But I can offer no better. The land here is like a great book or a great symphony; it invites approaches toward comprehension on many levels, from all directions.

The geologic approach is certainly primary and fundamental, underlying the attitude and outlook that best support all others including the insights of poetry and the wisdom of religion. Just as the earth itself forms the indispensable ground for the only kind of life we know, providing the sole sustenance of our minds and bodies, so does empirical truth constitute the foundation of higher truths. (If there is such a thing as higher truth.) It seems to me that Keats was wrong when he asked, rhetorically, "Do not all charms fly . . . at the mere touch of cold philosophy?" The word "philosophy" standing, in his day, for what we now call "physical science." But Keats was wrong, I say, because there is more charm in one "mere" fact, confirmed by test and observation, linked to other facts through coherent theory into a rational

¹⁰ ———, *Down the River*, 51.

¹¹ ———, *Desert Solitaire*, 88.

system, than in a whole brainful of fancy and fantasy. I see more poetry in a chunk of quartzite than in a make-believe wood nymph, more beauty in the revelations of a verifiable intellectual construction than in whole misty empires of obsolete mythology.

The moral I labor toward is that a landscape as splendid as that of the Colorado Plateau can best be understood and given human significance by poets who have their feet planted in concrete—concrete data—and by scientists whose heads and hearts have not lost the capacity for wonder. Any good poet, in our age at least, must begin with the scientific view of the world; and any scientist worth listening to must be something of a poet, must possess the ability to communicate to the rest of us his sense of love and wonder at what his work discovers.¹²

In his essay paean to Thoreau, Abbey explores where a metaphysics grounded in science leads:

Watching the planets, I stumble about last night's campfire, breaking twigs, filling the coffeepot. I dip waterbuckets in the river; the water chills my hands. I stare long at the beautiful, dimming lights in the sky but can find there no meaning other than the lights' intrinsic beauty. As far as I can perceive, the planets signify nothing but themselves. "Such suchness," as my Zen friends say. And that is all. And that is enough. And that is more than we can make head or tail of.

"Reality is fabulous," said Henry; "be it life or death, we crave nothing but reality."¹³ And goes on to describe in precise, accurate, glittering detail the most

¹² Edward Abbey, *The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West*, 1st ed. (New York: Dutton, 1977), 86-87.

¹³ Abbey is here referring to Thoreau's famous reflection on reality in the two penultimate paragraphs of Chapter 2 in *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For":

Shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous. . . .
. . . Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call *reality*, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then . . . set a . . . Realometer, that future ages might know how deep a feshet of shams and appearances had gathered from time to time. If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business.

Philip Van Doren Stern and Henry David Thoreau, *The Annotated Walden: Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, 1st ed. (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1970), 226-29. (Thoreau's emphasis). While

subtle and minute aspects of life in and about his Walden Pond; the "pulse" of water skaters, for instance, advancing from shore across the surface of the lake. Appearance is reality, Thoreau implies; or so it appears to me. I begin to think he outgrew transcendentalism rather early in his career, at about the same time that he was overcoming the influence of his onetime mentor Emerson; Thoreau and the transcendentalists had little in common—in the long run. . .¹⁴

Abbey also explored this “Appearance is reality” theme in both his original 1968 “Author’s Introduction” to *Desert Solitaire*, and the final “Preface” in the 1988 final edition, penned nine months before his death:

Desert Solitaire, I'm happy to add, contains no hidden meanings, no secret messages. It is no more than it appears to be, the plain and simple account of a long sweet season lived in one of the world's most splendid places. If some might object that the book deals too much with mere appearances, with the surface of things, and fails to engage and reveal the patterns of unifying relationships that many believe form the true and underlying reality of existence, I can only reply that I am content with surfaces, with appearances. I know nothing about underlying reality, having never encountered any. I've looked and I've looked, tried fasting, drugs, meditation, religious experience, even self-mortification, but never seem to get any closer to basic reality than the lizard on a rock, a hawk in the sky, a dead pig in the sunshine. Beneath each stone I find more stone . . . ; peeling an onion to the core I end up with nothing but the perfect complement to my hot skillet of fried eggs, diced chiles and hashbrown turnips. Appearance *is* reality, I say, and more than most of us deserve. You whine and whimper after immortality beyond space-time? Come home, for God's sake, and enjoy this gracious Earth of ours while you can. . . Okay, you contemplate the underlying relationships; I'll . . . [t]hrow metaphysic to the dogs. I never heard a mountain lion bawling over the fate of his soul.¹⁵

Abbey is here citing to Thoreau for his proposition that surface reality is all we need, Charles Anderson argues that this passage is, in contrast to Abbey’s usage, the “most abstract treatment of Idealism in *Walden*.” Charles Roberts Anderson, *The Magic Circle of Walden* (New York,: Holt, 1968), 102, cited in Stern and Thoreau, *The Annotated Walden: Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, 226.

¹⁴ “Down the River with Henry Thoreau,” in Abbey, *Down the River*, 19-20.

¹⁵ ———, *Desert Solitaire*, xii. As written by Abbey in the original 1968 version, the passage reads as follows:

It will be objected that the book deals too much with mere appearances, with the surface of things, and fails to engage and reveal the patterns of unifying relationships which form the true underlying reality of existence. Here I must confess that I know nothing whatever about true underlying reality, having never met any. There are many people who say they have, I know, but they've been luckier than I.

In his characteristic humorous style, Abbey acknowledged “pondering what my hero [composer] Charles Ives called [in the title of his orchestral piece] *The Unanswered Question*. What am I doing with my life? Nothing. What is the significance of existence? Who knows. Where do we come from and where are we going? Who cares.”¹⁶ But further responding to the question, What is the nature of this universe, he answered it is “something strange and more beautiful and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams. . .”¹⁷

In conclusion, Abbey provides one of the best examples that an ecstatic pantheistic naturalism is possible, one that embraces science, accepts human mortality, does not quest after unseen spirits or immaterial presences, and yet joyfully celebrates our amazing good luck to be here.

For my own part I am pleased enough with surfaces—in fact they alone seem to me to be of much importance. Such things for example, as the grasp of a child's hand in your own, the flavor of an apple, the embrace of a friend or lover . . . , the sunlight on rock and leaves, the feel of music, the bark of a tree, the abrasion of granite and sand, the plunge of clear water into a pool, the face of the wind—what else is there? What else do we need?
Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*, Paperback ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), xi.

¹⁶ Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, viii.

¹⁷ Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, xiii.

CHAPTER 6
REINVENTING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN:
THE ECOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF THOMAS BERRY

Born in 1914, Thomas Berry is Catholic priest of the Passionist Order.¹ His education at Catholic University was as a historian of Western intellectual history.² He has become a key figure in environmental philosophy. *Newsweek* has recognized Berry as a key figure in Christian ecotheology, known for promoting “the evolution of the universe” as humanity’s “new sacred story.” *Newsweek* summarized Berry’s view: “evolution is both a ‘sacred process’ and ‘the primary revelation of God to man.’ And like all revelations, this one elicits a new set of commandments: to preserve and protect the life forms created by Mother Earth.”³

What I will do here is review and compare his major works, and see how his writing has evolved over time. I will consider individually and then together, *The Dream of the Earth*,⁴ *Befriending the Earth - A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*,⁵ and *The Great Work - Our Way Into the Future*.⁶

¹ Thomas Mary Berry et al., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), Back Cover.

² Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Berry, Thomas," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005), 164.

³ Kenneth L. Woodward, "On the Road Again: Americans Love the Search So Much That the Idea of a Destination Is Lost," *Newsweek*, Nov. 28, 1994.

⁴ Thomas Mary Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

⁵ Berry et al., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*.

⁶ Thomas Mary Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, 1st pbk. ed. (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

The Dream of the Earth

The Dream of the Earth was published by Sierra Club Books in 1988 as the first of its “Sierra Club Nature and Natural Philosophy Library.” An example of the book’s influence is that Gardner and Stern, in their chapter on “Religious and Moral Approaches” in their social psychology text book, exclusively rely on Berry and *The Dream of the Earth* to describe new developments in Christian eco-theology and describe his ideas as “Berry’s new religion.”⁷

For those as yet uninformed about the environmental challenges currently facing humanity, Berry spends some time in *Dream* laying out the basic facts of our planetary crisis; increased extinction rates, increased air and water pollution, increased accumulation of toxic waste, dying oceans, the common litany usually recited when urging the importance of this issue. He notes that “[i]t is a supreme irony of history that the consequences of [humanity’s] millennial expectations have been the devastation of the planet—wasteworld rather than wonderworld. . . [W]e need to alter our commitment from an industrial wonderworld achieved by plundering processes to an integral earth community based on a mutually enhancing human earth relationship.”⁸ Berry acknowledges our collective guilt:

We all bear a certain amount of guilt for our present situation. . . We have been entranced with the progress myth, unlimited progress, progress that would lead beyond the existing human condition to something infinitely better, to wonderworld. Such is the seductive theme in almost all our advertising.⁹

Berry declares his prescription as “reinventing the human.”¹⁰ (See also “Our challenge is to create

⁷ Gerald T. Gardner and Paul C. Stern, *Environmental Problems and Human Behavior* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 51.

⁸ Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 29-30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21, 82.

. . . a new sense of what it is to be human”¹¹). He spends much of the book in diagnosis of this wasteworld problem by critiquing what he sees as the four human institutions responsible for our plight: government, corporations, religious institutions, and the modern university.

Berry speaks with a strong prophetic voice that doesn’t mince words. For example:

In this disintegrating phase of our industrial society, we now see ourselves not as the splendor of creation, but as the most pernicious mode of earthly being. We are the termination, not the fulfillment of the earth process. If there were a parliament of creatures, its first decision might well be to vote the humans out of the community, too deadly a presence to tolerate any further. We are the affliction of the world, its demonic presence. We are the violation of the earth’s most sacred aspects.¹²

**

In relation to the earth, we have been autistic for centuries. Only now have we begun to listen with some attention and with a willingness to respond to the earth's demands that we cease our industrial assault, that we abandon our inner rage against the conditions of our earthly existence, that we renew our human participation in the grand liturgy of the universe.¹³

Berry sets forth his proposed principles that must guide us in developing technologies that will mutually enhance both the human community and the earth process. "Creation must now be experienced as the emergence of the universe as a psychic-spiritual as well as material-physical reality from the beginning. We need to see ourselves as integral with this emergent process. . .”
“All human professions, institutions, and activities must be integral with the earth as the primary self-nourishing, self-governing, and self-fulfilling community. . . [This] is our way into the future.”¹⁴

Berry declared that one of the principal characteristics of the emerging Ecological Age is the

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Ibid., 209.

¹³ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴ Ibid., 81, 88.

move from a human-centered norm of reality and value to a nature-centered norm. Berry says, "We cannot expect life, the earth, and the universe to fit our rational human designs of how life, the earth, and the universe should function. We must fit our thinking and our actions within the larger process. We must move from democracy to biocracy. We need a constitution for the North American continent, not simply a constitution for the humans occupying this continent. We need a United Species, not simply a United Nations."¹⁵

Berry also prescribes a new direction for seeking the divine. "The natural world *is* the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. . . [T]his sense of the sacred character of the natural world *as our primary revelation of the divine* is our first need."¹⁶ At a public lecture in Boise, Idaho in October 1993, Berry made the same point even more succinctly: "The earth is the primary scripture; all written scriptures are secondary at best,"¹⁷ here echoing the Apostle Paul's sentiments in Romans 1:20. And in 2005, he declared the natural world should be "seen as primordial scripture, a scripture predating the Bible."¹⁸

Is there any hope that the needed changes will occur? In his chapter "Patriarchy," Berry gives this ominous assessment:

If mitigations [to industrial processes] have appeared, they have served only to make industrial processes more enduring. Thus the question of meliorism appears, the

¹⁵ Ibid., 161.

¹⁶ Ibid., 81. (emphasis supplied).

¹⁷ This quote is from my lectures notes from that public lecture.

¹⁸ Thomas Berry. "Thomas Berry on Religion and Nature." In *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, edited by Bron Taylor, 166-68. London & New York: Continuum International, 2005, 167.

tendency to constantly modify an existing system without changing the basic pattern of its functioning. What is needed is a profound alteration of the pattern itself, not some modification of the pattern. To achieve this, the basic principle of every significant revolution needs to be asserted: rejection of partial solutions. The tension of the existing situation must even be deliberately intensified so that the root cause of the destructive situation may become evident, for only when the cause becomes painfully clear will decisive change take place. The pain to be endured from the change must be experienced as a lesser pain to that of continuing the present course.¹⁹

But, in the last two pages of *Dream*, Berry ends with this explanation of why hope is justified and does so in so evocative a manner, that I present this extended quote:

. . . Evidence for this hopefulness is found in the sequence of crisis moments through which the universe and, especially, the planet Earth have passed from the beginning until now. At each state of its development, when it seems that an impasse has been reached, most improbable solutions have emerged that enabled the Earth to continue its development. At the very beginning of the universe, the rate of expansion had to be at an infinitesimally precise rate so that the universe would neither explode nor collapse. So it was at the moment of passage out of the radiation stage: only a fragment of matter escaped antimatter annihilation, but out of that fragment has come the galactic systems and the universe entire. So at the shaping of the solar system: if the Earth were a little closer to the sun, it would be too hot; if slightly more distant, it would be too cold. If closer to the moon, the tides would overwhelm the continents; if more distant, the seas would be stagnant and life development could not have taken place. So with the radius of the Earth: if it were a little greater, the Earth would be more gaseous, like Jupiter; if a little less, the Earth would be more solid, like Mars. In neither case could life have evolved in its present form.

After the appearance of cellular life, when the original nutrients were consumed, the impasse was averted by invention of photosynthesis, upon which all future life development has depended. So it has been with the great story of life in its groping toward unlimited variety of expression; the mysteries of life multiply, but the overall success of the planet became increasingly evident, until the Neolithic phase of the human.

This story of the past provides our most secure basis of hope that the earth will so guide us through the peril of the present that we may provide a fitting context for the next phase of the emergent mystery of earthly existence. That the guidance is available we cannot doubt. The difficulty is in the order of magnitude of change that is required of us. We have become so acclimated to an industrial world that we can hardly imagine any other context of survival, even when we recognize that the industrial bubble is dissolving and will soon leave us in the chill of a plundered

¹⁹ Ibid., 158-59.

landscape.

None of our former revelatory experiences, none of our renewal or rebirth rituals, none of our apocalyptic descriptions are quite adequate for this moment. Their mythic power remains in a context far removed from the power that is abroad in our world. But even as we glance over the grimy world before us, the sun shines radiantly over the earth, the aspen leaves shimmer in the evening breeze, the coo of the mourning dove and the swelling chorus of the insects fill the land, while down in the hollows the mist deepens the fragrance of the honeysuckle. Soon the late summer moon will give a light sheen to the landscape. Something of a dream experience. Perhaps on occasion we participate in the original dream of the earth. Perhaps there are times when this primordial design becomes visible, as in a palimpsest, when we remove the later imposition. The dream of the earth. Where else can we go for the guidance needed for the task that is before us.²⁰

Befriending the Earth

Befriending the Earth had its genesis as a television series consisting of 13 half-hour episodes produced by Canada's *Vision TV*. The series, which I have viewed in its entirety, records a colloquium between Berry, as a Passionist priest, and Thomas Clarke, a Jesuit priest, that occurred in 1990 at the Holy Cross Centre of Ecology and Spirituality in Port Burwell, Ontario. In 1997, I had the chance to interview Berry about some of the seemingly unorthodox statements he made at that 1991 colloquium and inquired how he managed to avoid getting in trouble with his Catholic superiors. He said he was indeed quite spontaneous and was just talking extemporaneously and was not really thinking about the fact that video cameras were going.

Much of the spontaneity of the videos is preserved in the book. To at least some extent, the book is a transcript of the videos, though the book has clearly be rearranged, edited, and somewhat toned-down. Missing is Berry's declaration in the video version that the First Commandment in the Hebrew Bible should really be understood as the sky father decreeing that "Thou shalt not have an Earth Mother."

Unless one already knew it, one would never guess that *The Dream of the Earth* was written

²⁰ Ibid., 221-23.

by a Catholic priest. He never says he's a priest and the book contains no biographical information indicating it. You might think he was just a secular environmentalist commentator, albeit, with a bit of New Age feel toward the end. He negatively critiques Christianity, but it is a critique that could have come from any outsider. In *Befriending*, you have much more of a sense that one is hearing a disappointed insider, disappointed that the religion of Christianity and its Roman Catholic form to which he has dedicated his life is failing so miserably in its duties to the Earth. After extolling the wisdom of Black Elk, he declares "the salvation of Christians lies in the unassimilated elements of paganism."²¹ Seemingly realizing that he is saying something radical, he goes on to justify this statement: "We have assimilated the Greek wisdom. We are assimilating the Oriental mystique, as well as the meditation techniques of different parts of the world. We have assimilated much of what China has to offer. Why, then, do we exclude the assimilation of the culture of 'pagan people'?" One does not usually imagine a Catholic priest encouraging Christians to look to pagan wisdom for their salvation, which is one of the noteworthy aspects of this book.

After extolling pagan wisdom, he marginalizes *The Holy Bible*, the sacred text of Christianity: "I suggest we might give up the Bible for awhile, put it on the shelf for perhaps twenty years. Then we might have a more adequate approach to it. We need to experience the divine revelation presented to us in the natural world." "Why are we not getting our religious insight from our experience of the trees, our experience of the mountains, our experience of the rivers, of the sea and the winds? Why are we not responding religiously to these realities?" "Here we are with a planet that is being devastated . . . and we are still reading the book instead of reading the world

²¹ Berry et al., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*, 21.

about us. We will drown reading the book.”²²

In a manner recalling William Ophuls’ *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity*,²³ Berry has harsh words for one of our Western Civilization’s most cherished secular institutions, democracy. “I consider democracy a conspiracy of humans against the natural world. The United States Constitution is a constitution of humans guaranteeing human rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness at the expense of the continent. We need a North American constitution that would include all the components of the North American continent. . . In my view, the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.”²⁴ “If democracy is such a great thing, why is U.S. democracy destroying the planet? Why does democracy not guide us?”²⁵

In a move again unusual for a Catholic priest, Berry also chastises those who say “Trust in God.” “God is not going to take care of our present crisis. The deity is not going to pick up the pieces and remedy the disasters we bring about. God gives us the capacity to deal with these things. One of the most disappointing aspects of Christian spirituality comes from . . . counsels [of] total abandonment and total trust in the divine. . . [L]ook what God is permitting us to do. God is letting us kill off the most beautiful things around and evidently God is not bringing an end to it. God is functioning through ourselves. God is telling us what to do. The natural world is telling us what

²² Ibid., 75-76.

²³ William Ophuls, *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity: Prologue to a Political Theory of the Steady State* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1977).; William Ophuls and A. Stephen Boyan, *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited: The Unraveling of the American Dream* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1992).

²⁴ Berry et al., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*, 42-43.

²⁵ Ibid., 76.

to do. God speaks to us through the natural world. . . How the human functions, will determine the destiny of” the Earth.²⁶

Finally, and perhaps most unusual for a Catholic priest, Berry addresses the explosion of humanity’s population.

. . . The bishops of the Philippines put out a document called *What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* It was written by a missionary in cooperation with tribal peoples. A local bishop presented it to the national meeting of the bishops. They approved it. But what did they do before they approved it? They took out one of the important statements on population. They diminished an important aspect of the document by their unwilling-ness to deal with population, even though overpopulation is one of the most disastrous realities facing the Philippines and the planet.

While we are trying to be good to people, we are often being cruel. The Philippines, at the beginning of this century, had six million people. That figure has doubled every twenty years, from six to twelve, twelve to twenty-four, twenty-four to fifty. The number is 70 million now, and that is in the process of doubling. There will be over 100 million people shortly after the year 2010. Meanwhile, the mangrove swamps are destroyed, and 80 percent of the coral reefs, which are among the richest ecosystems on the planet, are severely damaged. A third of the soil is severely damaged, two-thirds is partly damaged, and the rain forest that once covered over 90 percent of the area will, it seems, soon be totally gone. Only 10 percent survives now.

So we can list disaster after disaster to the natural environment, all occurring, ostensibly, in order to better care for people’s needs. Why do they blast the fisheries? To take care of people. Why do they destroy the mangrove swamps? To take care of people. And where is it all going to end up? In the impoverishment and death of millions of people.

This points to a number of other things. We have to live on the planet, on the planet’s terms and not on our terms. Living in the natural world on its terms is hard for us. We want the planet to exist on our terms. At last we are realizing that we had better find out right away what the planet’s terms are. We must accept life, the human mode of being, within the conditions of the natural world that brings us into being. We were brought into being by the natural world, and we must survive on its conditions.²⁷

Given the Catholic Church’s historic opposition to birth control, this passage is startling. This last

²⁶ Ibid., 52.

²⁷ Ibid., 45-46.

paragraph is reminiscent of remarks by the radical environmentalist Paul Watson's²⁸ essay *On the Precedence of Natural Law*.²⁹

In summary, while the themes contained in *Befriending the Earth* are consistent with those laid out in *The Dream of the Earth*, they have an edge and passion here that give the work a distinctive feel. This is probably owing to the unique genesis of the book.

The Great Work - Our Way into the Future

Berry begins *Great Work* in his introduction as follows:

Human presence on the Planet Earth in the opening years of the twenty-first century is the subject of this book. We need to understand where we are and how we got here. Once we are clear on these issues we can move forward with our historical destiny, to create a mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling on the planet Earth. Just now we seem to be expecting some wonderworld to be attained. . . . In the process, however, we are causing immense ruin in the world around us.³⁰

Beginning thus, Berry maintains the wonderworld/wastworld theme that he first presented us in *DREAM*. The book is clearly intended to stand on its own without reference to prior works, so much of the ground covered in the previously discussed works is presented here as well. Here, however, Berry arranges his material around the theme of "The Great Work." By this, Berry means that the Great Work of the present and foreseeably future human generations is that "of moving the human project from its devastating exploitation to a benign presence" on planet Earth,³¹ or as I might phrase it, from malignancy to benignity. And indeed, as noted in the opening sentences, Berry imagines

²⁸ See generally Steven Best, "Watson, Paul and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (Continuum International, 2005). for an account of Paul Watson.

²⁹ Paul Watson, "On the Precedence of Natural Law," *Environmental Law & Litigation* 3 (1988).

³⁰ Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, ix.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

something a bit more positive for humanity than mere benignity, but imagines a future in which we are “a mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing organic-based Earth community.”³²

Berry explains our human situation as follows:

The Great Work before us . . . is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves. . . We do not choose the moment of our birth, who our parents will be, our particular culture or the historical moment when we will be born. We do not choose the status of spiritual insight or political or economic conditions that will be the context of our lives. We are, as it were, thrown into existence with a challenge and a role that is beyond any personal choice. The nobility of our lives, however, depends upon the manner in which we come to understand and fulfill our assigned role.³³

Noting Al Gore’s maxim that “we must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization,”³⁴ Berry exhorts us to step up to the plate, and lays out the reasons we must do so.

In an effort to be hopeful, in his final chapter entitled “Moments of Grace,” Berry concludes his book as follows:

We are now experiencing a moment of significance far beyond what any of us can imagine. . . The mythic vision has been set into place. The distorted dream of an industrial technological paradise is being replaced by the more viable dream of a mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing organic-based Earth community. . . In the larger cultural context the dream becomes the myth that both guides and drives the action.

But even as we make our transition into this new century we must note that moments of grace are transient moments. The transformation must take place within a brief period. Otherwise it is gone forever. In the immense story of the universe, that so many of these dangerous moments have been navigated successfully is some indication that the universe is for us rather than against us. We need only summon

³² Ibid., 201.

³³ Ibid., 7.

³⁴ Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 269.

these forces to our support in order to succeed. Although the human challenge to these purposes must never be underestimated, it is difficult to believe that the larger purposes of the universe or of the planet Earth will ultimately be thwarted.³⁵

In addition to this conclusion, elsewhere in the book a certain yearning desperation can be seen. “[W]e must believe that those powers that assign our [Great Work] must in that same act bestow upon us the ability to fulfill this role. We must believe that we are cared for and guided by these same powers that bring us into being.”³⁶ Berry, showing his influence by Teilhard de Chardin,³⁷ suggests that it is Humanity that the universe has been building toward. (See “The Anthropic Principle”, cited by Berry in *DREAM*³⁸). Surely it won’t let us snuff ourselves out. Yet, in his concluding paragraph, Berry admits that “moments of grace are transient,” that our window of opportunity is closing. And in passages I noted in the foregoing section on *Befriending the Earth*, Berry there acknowledges that “God is not bringing an end” to our self-destructive impulses, and that we are on our own.

Is Berry’s Thought Pantheistic?

For the purpose of the present project, based on my heuristic device of pantheism’s sacred geography, I conclude that Berry’s thought can be fairly described as pantheistic. Unlike other Christian writers, based on my review of his writings, Berry avoids explicitly labeling himself as a member of any particular metaphysical camp, including those primarily explored here. However, Berry’s thought is devoid of any sense of importance or even discussion of a realm outside this universe. He does not discuss issues of human after-life. Instead, he is throughout *this Earth* and

³⁵ Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, 201.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959).

³⁸ Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 16.

this Universe focused.

As a final example of this, I provide this from a 2005 essay.

. . . The saying of Henry Thoreau (1817–1862) is now heard more often: “In wildness is the preservation of the world.” This return to the natural world is at the same time a manifestation of the survival of religion and a support for the renewal of religion throughout the Earth. . . [W]hen we return to nature in its wilderness form . . . for the healing of our inner world . . . [a]lways there seems to remain in the human soul an awareness of some divine presence in the wilderness regions of the world, a presence that can provide relief from the anxieties of existence in an industrial dominated society.

Perhaps the person in America who best personifies the religious tradition of Western civilization in its most intimate relation to the natural world is John Muir (1838–1914). He spent the greater part of his life after 1860 wandering through the fields and woodlands of Northern California and recording his experiences there. Brilliant compositions, his writings can be considered so many songs to the indwelling sacred presence of the Yosemite Valley along the Merced River.³⁹

Again, not a trace of concern for some sacred realm outside this universe. And he cites as sources of his inspiration, Thoreau, a self-described pantheist, and Muir, another figure that, though contested, many scholars see as pantheistic. Berry uses the word God and at places suggests that this God may be a super-intelligence guiding us forward, thus showing some affinity for spiritualized pantheism. However, he never suggests that his God exists outside the dimension of this universe. His overall tone is naturalistic. Given Berry’s sole concern with the dimension of this universe, which he constantly reminds us is a divine and sacred universe, “the primordial scripture,” I conclude he is an example of pantheism in American Christianity, whether or not the term is a “heresy label of the worst sort.”

³⁹ ———, "Thomas Berry on Religion and Nature," 168.

CHAPTER 7
THE CREATION SPIRITUALITY OF MATTHEW FOX

Matthew Fox, born in 1940, was ordained as a Catholic priest in the Dominican order in 1967.¹ He was silenced by Pope Benedict XVI in 1989-90 (who was then Cardinal Ratzinger, the head of the Roman Catholic Church's Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith) and was expelled from his order in 1993. According to Andrea Kresge, the Vatican "objected specifically to Fox's refusal to deny his belief in pantheism, his denial of original sin, for referring to God as 'mother' and for promoting a feminist theology."² He is currently a Episcopal priest.³ He is noted for his radical rethinking of Christian theology toward a more earth-centered orientation. In one of his early works, Fox dramatically illustrated the extent of this rethinking as follows: "Is Mother Earth herself not the ultimate [victim], the most neglected of the suffering, voiceless ones today? And along with her, the soil, forests, species, birds, and waters are not being heard where legislators gather, where judges preside, and where believers gather to worship. Is the human race involved in a matricide that is also ecocide, geocide, suicide and even deicide? . . . [Are we our] mother's keeper? This is the moral and spiritual question of our time. Evidence is slim that Westerners have taken that responsibility at all seriously. . . Patriarchal agendas and cultural presuppositions, patriarchal educational and religious institutions have left us all with maternal blood on our hands. The blood of Mother Earth crucified."⁴

¹ Andrea A. Kresge, "Fox, Matthew," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005), 669.

² Kresge, "Fox, Matthew," 670.

³ Matthew Fox, *A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality and the Transformation of Christianity* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2006), 132.; Kresge, "Fox, Matthew," 669.

⁴ Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 17, 33.

During Pentacost week 2005, Fox, reenacting Luther's act in 1517, posted 95 new theses penned by Fox to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.⁵ In his Thesis No. 15, he states "Christians must distinguish between Jesus (a historical figure) and Christ (the experience of God-in-all things)."⁶ In Thesis No. 10, Fox says "God loves all of creation, and science can help us more deeply penetrate and appreciate the mysteries and wisdom of God in creation. Science is no enemy of true religion."⁷ And in Thesis No. 6, he says "*Theism* (the idea that God is 'out there' or above and beyond the universe) is false. All things are in God and God is in all things (panentheism)."⁸ Thus, Fox explicitly claims panentheism as his metaphysical stance.

While the Vatican may have accused him of being a pantheist, he denies this, and goes into the most detail in one of his early and still influential books, *Original Blessing*. There, among other sources for his metaphysical claims, he cites "Paul in Acts 17:28 – It is in God that we live and move, and have our being" and the medieval Christian mystic "Mechtild of Magdeburg – The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw—and knew I saw—all things in God and God in all things."⁹ He then goes into some detail as to why he is properly understood to be a panentheist. Because I argue that, his claim to the contrary notwithstanding, Fox is best understood as a contemporary expression of pantheism, I will here begin with Fox's own argument for his position:

⁵ Fox, *A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality and the Transformation of Christianity*, Back Cover.

⁶ Ibid., 67.; Here, Fox states in thumbnail the argument developed in his still widely cited book, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. ———, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*.

⁷ ———, *A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality and the Transformation of Christianity*, 65.

⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁹ Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Sante Fe: Bear and Co. Publishing, 1983), 88.

. . . The idea that God is "out there" is probably the ultimate dualism, divorcing as it does God and humanity and reducing religion to a childish state of pleasing or pleading with a God "out there." All theism sets up a model or paradigm of people here and God out there. All theisms are about subject/object relationships to God. . . [R]eligious theism itself . . . kills God and the soul alike by preaching a God "out there."

What is the solution to the killing of God and the loss of human soul? It is our moving from theism to panentheism. Now panentheism is not pantheism. Pantheism, which is a declared heresy because it robs God of transcendence, states that "everything is God and God is everything." Panentheism, on the other hand, is altogether orthodox . . . for it slips in the little Greek word *en* and thus means, "God is in everything and everything is in God." This experience of the presence of God in our depth . . . in all the blessings and the sufferings of life is a mystical understanding of God. Panentheism is desperately needed by individuals and religious institutions today. It is the way the creation centered tradition of spirituality experiences God. It is not theistic because it does not relate to God as subject or object, but neither is it pantheistic. Panentheism is a way of seeing the world sacramentally. Indeed, as we have seen previously, in the creation centered tradition, the primary sacrament is creation itself—which includes every person and being who lives. Other sacraments derive their fruitful and creative power from this primary sacrament. This is one thing that distinguishes pantheism from panentheism—pantheism has no need of sacraments, but panentheism does. For while everything is truly in God and God is truly in everything, this is not always evident to our experience.¹⁰

Why does pantheism have no need for sacrament? Fox doesn't say. And the momentous import that Fox attaches to the difference between "is" and "in" is likewise not explained.

Another radically new aspect of Fox's theology is the seeming disappearance of the traditional Christian doctrine of the trinity. The traditional Nicene formulation of the trinity, where God the Father is the Creator that resides somewhere outside the universe, where God the Christ ("Jesus") was a special, one-time incarnation of part of God into human form, who's now back with God the Father somewhere outside the universe, and God the Holy Spirit, which is that part of God that exists inside the universe and through whom God now, since Jesus' departure, communicates with humanity. By emphasizing the Christ as the "God in all things" and denying the theistic God

¹⁰ Ibid., 89-90.

that “is ‘out there’ or above and beyond the universe,” all three parts of the traditional formulation seem to disappear. If God, the Cosmic Christ exists in all things and in that sense communicates with all things, what remaining purpose is served by imagining a Holy Spirit? Doesn’t the Cosmic Christ now serve the purpose previously imagined for the Holy Spirit? Fox’s writings don’t really explain if he intends this outcome.

When Fox visited the University of Florida on November 1, 2006, I was able to ask him whether the idea of a “holy spirit” was retained in his understanding of the universe. His response was an emphatic “Yes,” and went on to explain that “just as photons display qualities as both particles and waves,” he imagines “the Cosmic Christ as the particle aspect within all matter in universe, while the Holy Spirit is the ‘wave’ or ‘energy’ aspect in all matter in universe, which intermix with each other constantly.” In response to my question “What if any continuing role is there for God the Father?” He immediately corrected me by saying “God the Father/Mother,” consistent with his known feminist theology, and then said that “God the Father/Mother is the Creator who continues the ongoing process of creation; creation isn’t done; God is still creating, and thus, God the Father/Mother is that ongoing creative part of God.” He concluded the interview with a smile and said, “Of course, this is all just metaphor.” Thus, Fox at least implicitly acknowledged these are his creative efforts to come up new ways of imagining the divine mystery in useful and meaningful ways. Fox does not conceive of them as “The Truth” with a capital “T.”

In evaluating Fox’s denial of pantheism, I note that along with many progressive Christian theologians, he cites to Acts 17:28. I noted in Chapter 4 that the quoted text is most likely from the Stoic pantheist monistic poet Posidonius. Given the import attached to his text, it is perhaps justifiable to explore this poet a bit more.

According to the historian of philosophy, Frederick Copleston, Posidonius was a Stoic

monist who tried to demonstrate through an empirical method “the articulated unity of Nature” and the “‘sympathy’ that prevails between all parts of the cosmic system.”¹¹ Glacken writes that “Posidonius’ thought is derived from ideas in biology, history, astronomy, geography, [and] ethnology” and noted the “ecological” character to his thought as well. Glacken says Posidonius “had more to say on environmental questions relating to human beings than any writer before him, perhaps including Hippocrates and Aristotle.” And he was an early student of ethnology, believing that “primitive peoples [then] existing represent early conditions in the history of” humanity.¹²

Does a line of verse from this pantheist philosopher really help establish Fox’s case for “panentheism”? In a public lecture at the University of Florida on October 31, 2008, Fox stated that “pantheism has always gotten poor theological marks because it imagines God as frozen, incapable of change.” Fox went on to say that in contrast, panentheism instead imagines the universe and therefore God dynamically.

Reese explains that there is a type of pantheism called “Absolutistic monistic pantheism” wherein “God is absolute and identical with the world [and t]he world, although real, is therefore changeless.” Thus, there is a type of pantheism that meets Fox’s description. However, as explained by both York and Reese, there are other pantheisms that understand God/The Universe dynamically, in much the same way Fox describes God/The Universe. Thus, avoiding frozenness is not be a sufficient reason to reject pantheism as label.

Like Berry, with whom Fox has been in dialogue, Fox makes no claims about a reality

¹¹ Frederick Charles Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome - from the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus*, New rev. ed., 9 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 422.

¹² Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 54, 97.

outside this cosmos and makes no claims about an after-life. All his public teaching is directed toward encouraging a more ecstatic engagement in this life, in this universe, all the while utilizing Christian imagery and metaphor. Given the sacred geography that I have heretofore set forth, Fox is better understood as a naturalistic pantheist than a panentheist. He displays no interest in a reality outside this universe. This universe is his sacred geography.

For Acts 17:28 and the Mechtild quote to fully support panentheism, those quotes would have to be modified as follows: Acts 17:28 – “It is in God that we live and move, and have our being [but God is also outside this cosmos]”; Mechtild – “I saw all things in God and God in all things [and knew God was also outside all things].” These would have been unambiguous declarations of panentheism. The word “in” simply cannot support the metaphysical weight that Fox and other panentheistic philosophers and theologians attempt to place on it.

When Fox was developing his understanding of Creation Spirituality, he was still under the watchful eye of Cardinal Ratzinger. He needed to avoid Tillich’s “worst kind of heresy label.” It is at least possible that Fox’s need to try to keep at least one toe inside the orthodox fold, especially if he was going to put the Wiccan witch Starhawk on the faculty of Holy Names College,¹³ may have served as one of Weber’s “switchman” that “determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest,” in this case, Fox’s “ideal interest” in remaining at least quasi-orthodox.

There are and have been Christian theologians who have accepted the term pantheist as a description. According to the theologian Nels F.S. Ferré, both Whitehead and Tillich at times told him “that they would prefer to be called pantheists rather than theists,” and Ferré himself accepted

¹³ See Kresge, "Fox, Matthew," 670.; Jone Salomonsen, "Starhawk," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005).

the label.¹⁴ Further, Tillich argued that pantheism as “the doctrine that God is the substance or essence of all things” is necessary for a “Christian doctrine of God” as “being-itself.”¹⁵ As I noted in Chapter 3, Christian theologian Edward Barrett accepts the pantheist label proudly, noting that with pantheism “[n]ot only is ‘God’ then undeniably real, but religion is then indisputably relevant.”¹⁶ So were Fox to stand as a pantheist, he’d have company.

Of course Fox is free to describe himself however he wants, and if his audiences are more receptive to his call to creation-centered spirituality if he calls himself a panentheist, perhaps it serves his purpose. My purpose here is a sociological one. To what extent is pantheism, in contrast to panentheism, present and perhaps spreading in American culture. For this scholarly purpose, it is useful to understand Fox as a naturalistic pantheist.

¹⁴ Nels F.S. Ferré, "God without Theism," *Theology Today* 22, no. 3 (1965): 373.

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 233-34.

¹⁶ J. Edward Barrett, "A Pilgrim's Progress: From the Westminster Shorter Catechism to Naturalistic Pantheism," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2002), 169.

CHAPTER 8
SIGNS OF EMERGING PANTHEISM WITHIN AMERICAN CULTURE

Quantitative Signs of Pantheism on the Internet

Still to be investigated is the extent to which pantheism is penetrating American culture. One way to obtain a quick quantitative snapshot of cultural penetration is by conducting internet searches of the key terms at issue in this study. Because Paganism, Pantheism, and Panentheism are terms that all have some understanding of the sacred in nature, these are the terms that I contrasted and studied. I undertook such a project on March 29, 2008, with the outcome listed in the following table:

Search Results on 03- 29-08	MySpace	Facebook	Yahoo Groups	Google Groups	Yahoo Search (approx.)	Google Search (approx.)
Pantheism	1,990	34	348	16	1,600,000	520,000
Pantheist	1,820	25	237	19	754,000	338,000
Panentheism	250	3	144	18	274,000	94,400
Panentheist	131	2	7	1	49,600	16,300
Paganism	29,600	234	19,394	388	11,700,000	3,780,000
Pagan	130,000	1,039+	11,580	480	60,100,000	25,400,000

The table demonstrates that the terms “paganism”/“pagan” are far more common by more than an order of magnitude than either “pantheism”/“pantheist” or “panentheism”/“panentheist.” Also, using MySpace and Facebook, I looked at the top results to determine the type of paganism that was being displayed. One site referred to “Scientific Paganism,” and defined it in a way consistent with what this investigation refers to as naturalistic pantheism. However, the overwhelming majority of pagan sites showed some references to “magic,” “Wicca,” “witches,” “goddesses,” “shamanism,” and had images of goddesses and/or the pagan pentagram on the sites. It was clear that pagan members and groups on MySpace and Facebook demonstrated the characteristics described by Pike. In contrast, the sites that contained either pantheism/pantheist were substantially in the category of naturalistic pantheism. Thus, on these sites, the OED1 definition was the one operative. The sites

that contained either panentheism/panentheist used the term as defined in this project, namely, to affirm belief in a deity that was immanent in this universe, but also transcended it. This exercise provides evidence that the manner these terms have been defined herein are consistent with actual usage in the larger culture.

To obtain another quantitative snapshot, I also visited Meetup.com. A visit to the “About Meetup” page on March 30, 2008 provided the following explanation fo Meetup:

About Meetup
“Real Groups Make a Real Difference”

Meetup is the world's largest network of self-organized clubs and community groups.

Meetups help people:

- Find others in their area who share their interests
- Learn, teach, and share things
- Make friends and have fun
- Rise up, stand up, unite, and make a difference
- Be a part of something bigger—both locally and globally

People visiting the Meetup.com site can search any term related to an interest, such as “pagan” or “pantheism” and find out if there are active Meetups in the searcher’s area related to the searched topic. If there are no local Meetups, anyone can try to start a new Meetup in their area on a new topic or interest.

I searched two terms “pagan” or “pantheism” on March 29, 2008, with these results:

Search Results on 03- 29-08	Members	Interested	Meetups existing	Cities	Countries	Events so far
Pantheism	934	760	14	12	3	268
Pagan	28,646	22,965	382	273	5	10,025

The results for “pantheism” were sufficiently small that I could visit each site. This disclosed that only 8 of the 14 reported Meetups were actually pantheist. These eight Meetups (New York City,

Washington, DC, Atlanta, GA, San Francisco Bay Area, London, San Diego, and Los Angeles, Worcester, MA) were all naturalistic pantheism groups, while a visit to the top ten pagan meetups demonstrated that they also conformed to the neopagan type described by Pike. Thus, this additional exercise provides evidence that this project's definition of terms in regard to paganism and pantheism is consistent with stable actual usage in the larger culture.

Pantheism Organizations

There are two organizations, organized in the United States, that actively promote pantheism. They are the World Pantheism Movement and the Universal Pantheist Society. I will discuss each in turn.

The World Pantheism Movement ("WPM"), was founded on 1998 and has developed a Pantheist Credo as a general description of its core beliefs.¹ At its website, the WPM notes Rachael Carson, Albert Einstein, novelist Margaret Atwood, Mikhail Gorbachev, Chief Sitting Bull, Stephen Hawking, Carl Sagan, and Thoreau as exemplars of naturalistic pantheism. The website as discloses four honorary advisors: the biologists David Suzuki and Ursula Goodenough, the chemist James Lovelock (originator of the Gaia Hypothesis), and the skeptic, Michael Shermer. The Credo notes Pantheism's reverence "for the self-organizing universe's overwhelming power, beauty and fundamental mystery" and views "all matter, energy, and life as an interconnected unity." The WPM "has a strongly naturalistic base. Nature, the entire living and non-living universe, is all that exists. There are no supernatural entities and no separate spirit realms." Thus, the WPM expressly rejects forms of spiritualized pantheism. "Consciousness and mind are emergent qualities of energy/matter. The senses and science are our best means of developing our ongoing knowledge

¹ Paul Harrison, "World Pantheism Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005). See also www.pantheism.net.

of the universe, and the most solid basis for aesthetic and religious feelings about reality. Nature is seen as the only real basis on which religious feeling can be built.”

Consistent with this, the WPM views death “naturalistically, as a return to nature through the natural recycling of our elements, which should be facilitated by cremation or natural burial in simple linen shrouds or wicker baskets. There is no afterlife for the individual consciousness, but we live on through our actions, our ideas and memories of us, giving us a powerful incentive to do good.”² Paul Harrison, the WPM’s founder, is currently the facilitator of the Los Angeles Pantheism Meetup Group, discussed above.

The Universal Pantheist Society, founded in 1975, seeks to “stimulate a revision of social attitudes away from anthropocentrism and toward reverence for the Earth and a vision of Nature as the ultimate context for human existence, and to take appropriate action toward the protection and restoration of the Earth.” The UPS expressly declares that it is “not tied to any single view of pantheism, but rather recogniz[es] a diversity of viewpoints within it. UPS accepts and explores various interpretations of pantheism, stressing the importance of each member’s personal pantheistic beliefs.” Stressing “that freedom of belief is inherent in the Pantheist tradition, the UPS’s bylaws prohibit [insisting upon] any particular interpretation of Pantheism or imposition of any particular dogma.”³ This openness on the part of the UPS to more spiritual interpretations distinguishes it from the World Pantheism Movement.

Pantheism and the Deep Ecology Movement

There are significant parallels between the Deep Ecology Movement and naturalistic

² Harrison, "World Pantheism Movement."

³ Harold Wood, Jr., "Universal Pantheist Society," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005). See also www.pantheist.net.

pantheism. Bron Taylor notes

. . . most deep ecologists . . . trace their perspective to personal experiences of connection to and wholeness in wild nature, experiences which are the ground of their intuitive, affective perception of the sacredness and interconnection of all life. Those who have experienced such a transformation of consciousness (experiencing what is sometimes called one's "ecological self" in these movements) view the self not as separate from and superior to all else, but rather as a small part of the entire cosmos. From such experience flows the conclusion that all life and even ecosystems themselves have inherent or intrinsic value—that is, value independently of whether they are useful to humans.⁴

In Chapter 3, I laid out Michael Levine's argument that to call something *sacred* and/or *God* is to declare that it has *value*. Deep ecologists, like naturalistic pantheists, find value in the entirety of existence and use language of the sacred to denote that value. The primary difference between deep ecologists and naturalistic pantheists is that most deep ecologists, notwithstanding their general comfort with the term *sacred*, generally refrain from using the word *God*, perhaps because of the cultural baggage the term carries.

Pantheism in the Movies

Metaphysical ideas, including pantheism, can appear in popular movies. One of the most famous examples is the 1977 movie, *Star Wars*. In that movie, set "Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away," one of the heroes of the movie, Obi-Wan Kenobi, is a Jedi Knight, which in the course of the movie viewers learn is an old and disappearing religion. Obi-Wan tells Luke Skywalker about one of the tenets of this religion, namely belief in "The Force" which is "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." In this, we hear strong echoes of Acts 17:28. Later, Kenobi, just before sacrificing himself in a saber battle with Darth Vader, a former Jedi that uses the force for evil, declares "You can't win Darth, you can strike me

⁴ Bron Taylor, "Deep Ecology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005), 456.

down, I will become more powerful than you can possibly imagine,” apparently confident that he will survive in some spiritual form, which in fact turns out to be the case. Kenobi, guiding Skywalker to successful engagement in battle from his new, spiritualized form, intones, “Remember, the Force will be with you, Always.” Here, George Lucas, the screenwriter of this initial episode of the Star Wars saga, is parroting, almost word for word, Jesus command to his disciples, post-resurrection, in the final sentence of Matthew’s Gospel, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” In *Star Wars*, it is an impersonal, morally ambiguous, pantheistic Force that is eternally present, with potential to lend redemptive assistance. *Star Wars* then is an example of spiritualized pantheism. This cosmos is still the focus of concern. The after-life, as evidenced in the original movie and even more so in the sequels, occurs in this Cosmos.

Another example of pantheism is found in Disney’s 1995 animated feature film, *Pocahontas*. The primary pantheistic content is conveyed in a scene where Pocahontas sings the song, “Colors of the Wind” (whose lyrics were written by Steven Schwartz), to Captain John Smith. The pertinent content is the following:

You think I'm an ignorant savage. . . ,
You think you own whatever land you land on,
The Earth is just a dead thing you can claim,
But I know every rock and tree and creature,
Has a life, has a spirit, has a name. . .
Come run the hidden pine trails of the forest,
Come taste the sunsweet berries of the Earth,
Come roll in all the riches all around you,
And for once, never wonder what they're worth.
The rainstorm and the river are my brothers,
The heron and the otter are my friends,
And we are all connected to each other,
In a circle, in a hoop that never ends. . .

Earlier in movie, Pocahontas goes to consult a talking willow tree named Grandmother Willow. When Pocahontas approaches the tree, the side of the tree becomes animated and takes the form of

an old woman's human face, and begins talking to Pocahontas. Given these supernaturalistic, animistic elements, the ideas expressed in *Pocahontas* are an example of spiritualized pantheism. "Colors Of The Wind" was also a major hit in 1995 for the singer Vanessa Williams. Thus, the pantheistic message was disseminated both through the movie itself and via radio play and soundtrack sales.

I mentioned in Chapter 1 the 2007 movie, *Evan Almighty*. Evan, a newly elected, Hummer-driving, congressman, is directed by God, in the form of Morgan Freeman, to build an ark to save the animals because a second flood is coming. God gives Evan an "Ark Building for Dummies" book. The key pantheistic scene shows Evan propped up in bed, about to read the book, and he opens the cover and the audience can read: "About the Author: God is the creator of the Heavens and the Earth. He lives in all things and has 6,717,323,711 children." Then Evan reads the words aloud. This movie generated some controversy, not because it was teaching pantheism, but because a question was raised if Hollywood was inappropriately targeting church audiences with such fare.⁵ The movie portrays a supernaturalistic, personal God who can materialize and disappear at will. However, as Corrington's exposition of pantheism demonstrates, pantheism can be supernaturalistic. Notwithstanding the supernatural elements, the God portrayed in *Evan Almighty* nevertheless "lives" in this universe and in all parts of this universe. No suggestion is made that God transcends this universe, or that there is any portion of this universe that God does not penetrate. Thus, *Evan Almighty* meets this project's definition of pantheism, albeit, spiritualized pantheism, because this universe is the only reality affirmed, and that reality is implicitly sacred due to the fact that God lives in all parts of it.

⁵ Jeff Brumley, "Are religious films crossing the lines?" *The Florida Times-Union*, July 12, 2007, Page A1, Column 1 http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/071207/lif_183888983.shtml

Another movie with a pantheistic theme was the 1999 movie, *Stigmata*.⁶ The movie was a demon possession horror movie in a similar vein to *The Exorcist*. The pantheist twist is that Frankie Paige, the possessed young woman, while experiencing episodes of possession by an unidentified supernatural entity, says the following in the Aramaic language: “Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within you, not in buildings of wood and stone. Split a piece of wood and I am there. Lift a stone and you will find me.” The first part of the first sentence is from Luke 17:21.⁷ The second and third sentences are from Saying 77 of the Gospel of Thomas found at Nag Hammadi in 1945.⁸

The Jesus Seminar, a group of new testament scholars who met from 1985 to 1998, in analyzing whether this verse might have come from Jesus, concluded: “The kind of pantheism—God in everything, God everywhere—reflected in 77:2-3 is unknown from other sources, either gnostic or Christian. Jesus would scarcely have considered himself omnipresent.” Hence, they concluded it was not an authentic saying from the historical Jesus.⁹ However, Hollywood took interest.

The rest of the movie unfolds a plot by the Vatican seeking to suppress a new gospel containing these, and presumably other, formerly unknown sayings of Jesus. Through the course

⁶ *Stigmata*, Dir. Rupert Wainwright, MGM (DVD), 1999.

⁷ The King James Version of Luke 17:21 reads “the kingdom of God is within you.” The New Revised Standard Version reads “the kingdom of God is among you.” However, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* notes that other ancient manuscripts of Luke use “within” instead of “among.” See Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), at page 130 (New Testament), in footnote *d* to Luke 17:21.

⁸ The whole saying reads: “¹Jesus said, ‘I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all has come forth, and to me all has reached. ²Split a piece of wood; I am there. ³Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.’” Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 149. See also, Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1979), for information on the Nag Hammadi find.

⁹ Robert Walter Funk and Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 515.

of the movie, viewers learn that the supernatural entity possessing Frankie is the ghost of a deceased priest who had been involved, along with two other priests, with translating a newly found gospel, and that this ghost is trying to transmit the contents of this unknown gospel. The core of this information to be transmitted to the viewers through the following dialogue between another of the three translators, Father Petrocelli, and Father Andrew Kiernan, the priest that is investigating for the Vatican Frankie's possession and her stigmata:

Kiernan (K): [after being shown a picture of a document] What is this?

Petrocelli (P): It is maybe the most significant Christian relic ever found.

K: Why?

P: It's an Aramaic scroll from the first century discovered near the caves of the Dead Sea scrolls outside Jerusalem. Almeida and I concluded that it is a gospel of Jesus Christ in his own words, Aramaic. But there are some factions in the Vatican who believe that this document could destroy the authority of the modern church.

K: How?

P: It was Jesus' words to his disciples on the night of his last supper. His instructions to them on how to continue his church after his death.

K: Why would that be so threatening?

P: When we gave our initial conclusions to the gospel commission [Vatican Cardinal] Houseman ordered us to stop our work immediately. Almeida refused. He stole the document and disappeared. Houseman excommunicated us in our absence.

K: You have no idea where he is?

P: He doesn't want to be caught until he finishes the translation. [P shows a picture to K with three men, including himself]. That's Delmonico, me, and Almeida. We were all translating the gospel together.

K: I've seen this man, three weeks ago, in Brazil. He's dead. I saw him in his coffin in his church in Bella Quinto. Sorry.

P: Then it is all over. It's gone forever.

K: Why was your work stopped? What is so threatening about this gospel?

P: Look around you, father. What do you see?

K: I see a church.

P: It's a building. The true church of Jesus Christ is so much more! Not in buildings made of wood and stone. I love Jesus! I don't need an institution between him and me. You see! Just God and man. No priests, no churches. The first words in Jesus' gospel "The Kingdom of God is inside you and all around you. Not in buildings of wood and stone. Split a piece of wood and I am there. Lift the stone,

P and AK in unison: and you will find me.

P: Yes brother. . .

K: . . . She's [Frankie] just his [Alameida's ghost] messenger.
P: Houseman will never let this gospel get out.¹⁰

As the story further unfolds, in a dramatic exorcism scene where Cardinal Houseman attempts to murder Frankie and thereby suppress the new gospel but is thwarted by Kiernan, Kiernan promises Alameida's ghost he will work to get the new gospel out to the world, and the ghost then releases Frankie from possession. In the final scene of the movie, Kiernan has gone to a rural, remote Catholic church in Belo Quinto, Southeast Brazil, and finds the hidden scrolls, while the saying noted in for foregoing is dramatically intoned. The screen fades to black, and then the following three sentences in a sequence of three darkened screens are presented to the audience to read: (1) "In 1945, A scroll was discovered in Nag Hamadi, which is described as 'The Secret Sayings of the Living Jesus'"; (2) "This scroll, the Gospel of St. Thomas, has been claimed by scholars around the world to be the closest record we have of the words of the historical Jesus"¹¹; (3) "The Vatican refuses to recognize this Gospel and has described it as heresy." Thus, the film explicitly includes information about recent finds and developments in New Testament scholarship. However, why was the most pantheistic text in Thomas chosen?

The story as originally developed by screenwriter Tom Lazarus did not have this element to it, and did not in any way relate to the Gospel of Thomas or its pantheistic message. It was the director, Rupert Wainwright, who took the film in this direction.¹² In the director's commentary track on the DVD, Wainwright says about the three statements at the end: "These cards at the end are all true, and it was a huge fight to get these cards on, because some people believed it was a

¹⁰ *Stigmata*, at 1h:22m:56s, and following.

¹¹ For scholarship supporting this statement, see Elaine H. Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2003).

¹² Telephone interview with Tom Lazarus, March 22, 2008

distraction for the audience. I believe that what it did was it points the audience towards other facts about the movie that happen to be true. The movie is not about the Gospel of St. Thomas, but it refers to that gospel and other gospels like it. So I would encourage you to if you are at all interested in this material to look further.”¹³

Why did Wainwright pick Thomas’ pantheistic saying? Did Wainwright think this would be the verse most interesting to audiences or was it the verse most interesting to him? This is unknown.¹⁴ However, Wainwright’s disclaimer that the movie is not about the Gospel of Thomas notwithstanding, the central dramatic tension of the movie derives from the idea that a pantheistic understanding of Jesus and God, which is indeed contrary to traditional understandings of Christianity as set forth in the Nicene Creed and other traditional Christian creeds, is a threat to established religious institutions. The director expressly encourages his viewers to “look further.” So, for the purposes of this project, I conclude that *Stigmata* is one sign that pantheistic ideas are emerging into and being taken up in at least some sectors of American popular culture. In this case, a movie director expressly encouraged his viewers to learn more about recent developments in New Testament scholarship and its new pantheistic finds.

The next movie with strong sense of ecstatic naturalism/pantheism is 1999’s “American Beauty.” Two long speeches occur. One is by the character Ricky Fitts, as he plays a video tape of plastic bag swirling in the wind, and he explains what he was feeling as he filmed it to his girlfriend:

It was one of those days when it's a minute away from snowing and there's this electricity in the air, you can almost hear it. And this bag was, like, dancing with me.

¹³ *Stigmata*, at 1h:35m:43s, and following.

¹⁴ At the time this thesis was being, I learned via email that Wainwright was then in Moscow, Russia, and not readily available for an interview.

Like a little kid begging me to play with it. For fifteen minutes. And that's the day I knew there was this entire life behind things, and . . . this incredibly benevolent force, that wanted me to know there was no reason to be afraid, ever. Video's a poor excuse, I know. But it helps me remember . . . and I need to remember . . . Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world I feel like I can't take it, like my heart's going to cave in.

The other main speech is when Lester Burnham gives his final speech to the audience in the final moments of the movie after he's just been murdered by his homophobic next door neighbor:

I had always heard your entire life flashes in front of your eyes the second before you die. First of all, that one second isn't a second at all, it stretches on forever, like an ocean of time. . . For me, it was lying on my back at Boy Scout camp, watching falling stars. . . And yellow leaves, from the maple trees, that lined my street. . . Or my grandmother's hands, and the way her skin seemed like paper. . . And the first time I saw my cousin Tony's brand new Firebird. . . And Janie. . . And Janie. . . And. . . Carolyn. I guess I could be pretty pissed off about what happened to me. . . but it's hard to stay mad, when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much, my heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst. . . And then I remember to relax, and stop trying to hold on to it, and then it flows through me like rain and I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life. . . You have no idea what I'm talking about, I'm sure. But don't worry. . . you will someday.

This film won the Best Picture Oscar, so these scenes were very evocatively acted. It may be that it is hard to experience the effect of these passages on the written page, but as acted they portrayed an ecstatic message that everyone should celebrate their existence, and celebrate that they have been lucky enough to win the cosmic lotto by being here at all. Bill Bryson, in his introduction to his book, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, evocatively articulates this theme.¹⁵ Julia Sweeney, in

¹⁵ Bryson welcomes his readers with this following celebration of existence: "Welcome. And congratulations. I am delighted that you could make it. Getting here wasn't easy, I know; In fact, I suspect it was a little tougher than you realize. To begin with, for you to be here now trillions of drifting atoms had somehow to assemble in an intricate and intriguingly obliging manner to create you. It's an arrangement so specialized and particular that it has never been tried before and will only exist this once. For the next many years (we hope) these tiny particles will uncomplainingly engage in all the billions of deft, cooperative efforts necessary to keep you intact and let you experience the supremely agreeable but generally underappreciated state known as existence. . . To be here now, alive in the twenty-first century and smart enough to know it, you also had to be the beneficiary of an extraordinary string of biological good fortune. . . Not one of your pertinent

her one-woman comedic lesson in metaphysics, declares she is a “naturalist” who, after the epiphany of her conversion to a naturalistic perspective, is “astonished” that she is “here at all. The smallest things in life just seem amazing to me now... I used to think there are no coincidences. Now I think there are coincidences!!! Wow, coincidence!!! If this is all there is, everything means more, not less!” She expresses pity for the “*anaturalistists*,” a term she coined to label for those who reject a naturalistic perspective.¹⁶ These examples are similar or identical to the ecstatic naturalistic pantheism of Abbey.

Pantheism in Television

Pantheism showed up in television in the 1970's perhaps most prominently in the television series *Kung Fu*, whose television pilot aired on February 22, 1972 and whose 62 episodes ran from October 1972 to April 19, 1975.¹⁷ The “Writers’ Guide” manual produced by Warner Brothers Television indicated that writers were to draw the show’s philosophical content from “Confucianism, Taoism and Zen,” though predominately from Confucianism “because it is the most optimistic” in outlook.¹⁸ *Kung Fu* was set in the 1870s and follows the story of a Shaolin priest, Kwai Change Caine, born in China to an American father and a Chinese mother, who after being

ancestors was squashed, devoured, drowned, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from its life's quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result—eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly—in you. This is a book about how it happened—in particular how we went from there being nothing at all to there being something, and then how a little of that something turned into us. . .” Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, 1st ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 1-4.

¹⁶ Julia Sweeney, *Letting Go of God (Audio CD)* (Indefatigable Inc., 2006).

¹⁷ Herbie J. Pilato, *The Kung Fu Book of Caine: The Complete Guide to Tv's First Mystical Eastern Western*, 1st ed. (Boston: Tuttle Co., 1993), 57, 150.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

orphaned is brought up in Shaolin temple. After killing a royal nephew of the Chinese emperor, Caine flees to the American West and searches for his half-brother, with bounty hunters always pursuing him. Each episode depicted some dramatic story, interlaced with flash backs to scenes of his training at the Shaolin Temple, and his two main teachers, Master Kan and Master Po.

In one such flash back in Episode 1, Master Kan tells young Cain, “To know nature is to put oneself in harmony with the Universe. Heaven and Earth are one.”¹⁹ Master Kan further teaches Caine in Episode 4 that “All life is sacred”²⁰ and in Episode 20 that to “be a man is to be one with the Universe.”²¹ In the series pilot, Kan teaches that “All creatures, the low and the high, are one with Nature. If we have the wisdom to learn, all may teach us their virtues.”²² In Episode 4, Master Po teaches Caine that to “be one with the Universe is to know bird, sun, cloud,”²³ and in Episode 50 that the “Sage says: ‘The beginning of the Universe is the Mother of all things.’”²⁴ Finally, this example, again from Master Kan in Episode 46: “Do wars, famine, disease and death exist? Do lust, greed, and hate exist? They are [humanity]’s creations . . . brought into being by the dark side of nature.” Thus, in pantheistic fashion, the metaphysics of *Kung Fu* taught that nature and the Universe were the only and self-creating reality, that human’s can learn the nature of reality by studying the natural world, that mortality is the way of nature (not even the possibility of

¹⁹ ———, *The Kung Fu Book of Wisdom: Sage Advice from the Original Tv Series*, 1st ed. (Boston: C.E. Tuttle, 1995), 20.

²⁰ Ibid.; Pilato, *The Kung Fu Book of Caine: The Complete Guide to Tv's First Mystical Eastern Western*, 71.

²¹ Ibid., 101.

²² ———, *The Kung Fu Book of Wisdom: Sage Advice from the Original Tv Series*, 26.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 106.

reincarnation is suggested), that nature is morally ambiguous (as with “The Force” in *Star Wars*), and that thus a wise person seeks to live in alignment with the forces of nature and the universe as much as possible. Levine noted the close coherence between Taoism and pantheism, and this affinity is visible in *Kung Fu*.

After the original series, *Kung Fu - The Movie*, a made-for TV movie aired February 1, 1986,²⁵ and a new television series, *Kung Fu - The Legend Continues*, continued the storyline into the present day. That series ran with 83 episodes from January 1993 to January 1997. The main character was still Kwai Change Caine, who is the grandson of the Caine of the original series, again he is a Shaolin monk, now residing in a large American city. He continued to dispense the pantheistic wisdom of the original series. Numerous clips of both series are presently available on YouTube, and continue to have cultural influence.

Pantheism in Popular Music

At about the same time of the debut of the original Kung Fu series, the United States was experiencing another missionary of pantheism in the person of popular folk rock singer, John Denver (born Henry John Deutschendorf, Jr.). According to *Newsweek*, in 1976, Denver was “an ecoaware pantheist” who was “the most popular pop singer in America.”²⁶ Four years earlier, in September 1972, Denver released his album *Rocky Mountain High*, whose title track was an autobiographical paean to the glories of nature that in March 1973 made it to number nine on

²⁵ ———, *The Kung Fu Book of Caine: The Complete Guide to Tv's First Mystical Eastern Western*, 154.

²⁶ Maureen Orth, Peter S. Greenberg, and Janet Huck, "John Denver: The Sunshine Boy," *Newsweek*, Dec. 20, 1976.

Billboard's Hot 100 list.²⁷ On March 12, 2007, the song became Colorado's second state song.²⁸ In this autobiographical song, which was inspired by watching the Persied meteor shower on a dark night in the Rocky Mountains,²⁹ Denver describes himself as someone who in "his 27th year" was, invoking Christian imagery, "born again" through his transforming encounters with nature and thereby came "home to a place he'd never been before." After this epiphany, Denver tells his listener's, speaking about himself in the third-person,

Now he walks in quiet solitude the forest and the streams
seeking grace in ev'ry step he takes.
His sight has turned inside himself to try and understand
the serenity of a clear blue mountain lake.

As a result of this inward meditation, Denver can, through nature, "talk to God and listen to the casual reply." However, the song tells further that this new intimacy with God through nature comes with a price:

Now his life is full of wonder but his heart still knows some fear,
of a simple thing he cannot comprehend.
Why they try to tear the mountains down to bring in a couple more,
more people more scars upon the land?

Though he now knows "he'd be a poorer man if he never saw an eagle fly," this new intimacy with sacred nature had attached to it a new concern for the fate of the environment.³⁰ Denver could no longer be indifferent to the fate of creation.

²⁷ Fred Bronson, *The Billboard Book of Number 1 Hits*, Updated and Expanded 5th ed. (New York: Billboard Books, 2003), 360.

²⁸ <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives/history/symbemb.htm#RMH>
(retrieved 03-29-2008)

²⁹ Hence, the song's reference to seeing it "rainin' fire in the sky." John Denver and Arthur Tobier, *Take Me Home: An Autobiography*, 1st ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 1994), 108-09.

³⁰ Ibid.

“Rocky Mountain High” was the first song on the album. With his song, “Spring,” he concluded that album with a rapturous hymn of connection to nature:

Open up your eyes and see the brand new day,
a clear blue sky and brightly shining sun,
open up your ears and hear the breezes say
ev’rything that’s cold and gray is gone.
Open up your hands and feel the rain come on down,
taste the wind and smell the flowers’ sweet perfume.
Open up your mind and let the light shine in,
the earth has been reborn and life goes on.

And do you care what’s happening around you?
Do your senses know the changes when they come?
Can you see yourself reflected in the seasons?
Can you understand the need to carry on?

Riding on the tapestry of all there is to see,
so many ways, and oh, so many things.
Rejoicing the differences, there’s no one just like me,
Yet as different as we are, we’re still the same.

And oh, I love the life within me,
I feel a part of ev’rything I see.
And oh, I love the life around me,
a part of ev’rything is here in me. . .

Over the remaining 25 years of his career, cut short by his death in plane crash in 1997, Denver continued to explore nature-centered understandings of the sacred. In his album, *Spirit*, released in August 1976, he included a song with strong pantheistic elements entitled “The Wings That Fly Us Home,” wherein Denver tells his listening public that he knows “that love is seeing all the infinite in one,” and that “You’re never alone” because

the spirit fills the darkness of the heavens,
It fills the endless yearning of the soul,
It lives within a star too far to dream of,
It lives within each part and is the whole.³¹

³¹ Ibid., 253.

In November 1977, Denver released his album, *I Want To Live*, that included his song, “Singing Skies and Dancing Waters,” which describes the lament of someone, perhaps himself, struggling with loss of faith in a traditional god. The despairing seeker in the song laments to God “I just couldn't see you; I thought that I'd lost you; I never felt so much alone; Are you still with me?” God responds to the seeker’s plea, explaining that “I'm with you in, Singing skies and dancing waters, Laughing children, growing old, And in the heart, and in the spirit, And in the truth when it is told.”³²

In the title track of his September 1983 album, *It's About Time*, in a line reminiscent of Edward Abbey, Denver tells his audience that “It’s about time we start to see it, the Earth is our only home; It’s about time we start to face it, we can’t make it here” without the rest of Earth’s family of creatures. Then, in his song “Children of the Universe,” from his 1990 *Earth Songs* album, Denver describes reality in this way:

The cosmic ocean knows no bounds,
For all that live are brothers,
The whippoorwill, the grizzly bear,
The elephant, the whale,
All children of the universe,
All weavers of the tale.³³

In his song “Raven’s Child,” from his 1990 album, *The Flower That Shattered the Stone*, after describing various human kings (drug kings, oil baron kings, arms dealer kings (complete with a reference to Ronald Reagan’s Star Wars missile shield)) who all sit on an “arrogant throne, away, and above, and apart,” Denver invokes biblical language of God as King, but this pantheistic

true King sits on a heavenly throne,
Never away, nor above, nor apart,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 255.

With wisdom and mercy and constant compassion,
He lives in the love, that lives in our hearts.³⁴

As a final example of Denver's pantheistic lyrics, I'll conclude with this from the title track of his *The Flower That Shattered The Stone* album:

The earth is our mother just turning around,
with her trees in the forest and roots underground,
Our father above us whose sigh is the wind,
paint us a rainbow without any end.

Here, Denver uses the Amerindian imagery of Mother Earth and Father Sky to understand the divine as immanent within the Cosmos.

John Denver continues to impact American culture. A search of "john denver" on MySpace.com on March 30, 2008, yields 33,700 results. Sampling the search results reveals John Denver Tribute sites, numerous clips of John Denver songs, as well as MySpace members that list Denver as a favorite artist. A YouTube.com search of the same phrase yielded 2,810 related clips. At least one fan-written book has been written exploring Denver's spirituality.³⁵ His pantheistic influence continues in present culture.

I will give one more example of popular musician whose lyrics show clear elements of pantheism, the late Dan Fogelberg (1951-2007). Fogelberg's music career, like Denver's, became successful in the early 1970s. However, his most nature-centered metaphysical albums were in the 1990s. In the title track to his 1990 *The Wild Places*, Fogelberg included these thoughts:

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Christine Smith, *A Mountain in the Wind: An Exploration of the Spirituality of John Denver* (Findhorn, Scotland; Tallahassee, FL: Findhorn Press, 2001). Smith's title is drawn from Denver's song, "The Wings That Fly Us Home," treated herein.

. . . There's a heaven on earth that so few ever find,
Though the map's in your soul and the road's in your mind.
. . . When you sleep on the ground with the stars in your face,
You can feel the full length of the beauty and grace.
In the wild places man is an unwelcome guest,
But it's here that I'm found and it's here I feel blessed.

Here, echoing Thoreau and John Muir's love of wildness and experience of wild places as the place of achieving "blessing," Fogelberg tells in listeners that "heaven is on earth." In his followup album that he considered the second volume of a two volume work, Fogelberg released "Magic Every Moment" on his 1993 *River of Souls* album. Here,

There's a magic every moment
There's a miracles each day. . .
On a high and windy island I was gazing out to sea
When a long forgotten feeling came and took control of me
It was then the clouds burst open and the sun came pouring through
When it hit those dancing waters in an instant all eternity I knew. . .
You can see forever in a single drop of dew
You can see that same forever if you look down deep inside of you
There's a spark of the creator in every living thing. . .

These examples have a mystical quality to them and reveal more of spiritualized pantheism than a naturalistic pantheism. But the element of sacred focus remains this Cosmos.

In discussing these albums and these songs, Fogelberg said "I know metaphysical songs aren't going to sell on the radio," but "I felt there was no way we could save this planet unless we learned to love it [here, echoing Thomas Berry]. So these songs were about my love for nature."³⁶

Pantheism in Dawkins, Dennett and Harris

Pantheism also shows up in another surprising place. *Newsweek* has referred to biologist Richard Dawkins, philosopher Daniel Dennett, and neuroscientist Sam Harris as "The New

³⁶ <http://www.danfogelberg.com/biography.html> (Retrieved 3-30-2008).

Naysayers.”³⁷ Indeed, the three can be considered the new evangelical atheists, vigorously spreading atheism’s good news. The trio are usually mentioned together. However, a close reading of their works yields some surprises.

Richard Dawkins, in his 2006 book, *The God Delusion*, makes clear that for him it is the belief that “there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us”³⁸ that he believes is delusional. He further states that his title, *The God Delusion*, “does not refer to the God of Einstein and other enlightened scientists. . . I am talking only about *supernatural* gods. . .”³⁹ “I am calling only supernatural gods delusional.”⁴⁰ Given that Dawkins expressly states that he is not challenging Einstein’s God, a deeper investigation into Einstein’s notion of God is necessary.

Kocku von Stuckrad notes that Einstein always regarded himself as a “religious” scientist, even while rejecting the idea of a personal god who might interfere with human affairs or with nature. According to Stuckrad, Einstein “definitely had a kind of pantheistic religious attitude.” In his 1934 book, *The World As I See It*, Einstein expressed pantheistic ideas, talking about the mystery of the eternity of life, and his endeavor “to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature.” Stuckrad characterizes Einstein’s self-described “rapturous amazement” at the harmony of natural law as a sort of mysticism.⁴¹

³⁷ Jerry Adler, "The New Naysayers: In the Midst of Religious Revival, Three Scholars Argue That Atheism Is Smarter," *Newsweek*, Sept. 11, 2006.

³⁸ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹ Kocku von Stuckrad, "Einstein, Albert," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum International, 2005).

Einstein's recent biographer, Walter Isaacson, confirms Stuckrad's conclusions. Einstein expressly rejected the label "atheist" on a number of occasions. Indeed, on one occasion, Einstein declared "I do not share the crusading spirit of the professional atheist whose fervor is mostly due to a painful act of liberation from the fetters of religious indoctrination received in youth." Instead, he elsewhere said "I am fascinated by Spinoza's pantheism, but I admire even more his contribution to modern thought because he is the first philosopher to deal with the soul and body as one, and not two separate things." When asked if he believed in immortality, Einstein said "No. And one life is enough for me." In response to a Rabbi's 1929 telegram, asking specifically, "Do you believe in God?," Einstein replied, "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of all that exists, but not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind."⁴²

Dawkins, however, objects to labeling as *religion* "the pantheistic reverence which many of us share with its most distinguished exponent, Albert Einstein."⁴³ Does Dawkins include himself among those who share Einstein's "pantheistic reverence" for the cosmos? He does not expressly say so, and he does not expressly preclude that conclusion. While making it clear that it is only "supernatural gods" that he is challenging, Dawkins does express a desire that physicists refrain, to avoid confusion of terms, from using the term *God* because the "metaphorical or pantheistic God of the physicists is light years away from the interventionist, miracle-wreaking, thought-reading, sin-punishing, prayer-answering God of the Bible."⁴⁴ It seems fair though to conclude that Dawkins' is at least tolerant of naturalistic pantheism and may himself share in pantheistic reverence as

⁴² Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 386-90.

⁴³ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

defined in this study. The following is suggestive of Dawkins a ecstatic wonderment:

. . . The evolution of complex life, indeed its very existence in a universe obeying physical laws, is wonderfully surprising. . . Think about it. On one planet, and possibly only one planet in the entire universe, molecules that would normally make nothing more complicated than a chunk of rock, gather themselves together into chunks of rock-sized matter of such staggering complexity that they are capable of running, jumping, swimming, flying, seeing, hearing, capturing and eating other such animated chunks of complexity; capable in some cases of thinking and feeling, and falling in love with yet other chunks of complex matter. We now understand essentially how the trick is done, but only since 1859. Before 1859 it would have seemed very very odd indeed. Now, thanks to Darwin, it is merely very odd. Darwin seized the window . . . [and let] in a flood of understanding whose dazzling novelty, and power to uplift the human spirit, perhaps had no precedent. . .

. . . I [have] tried to convey how lucky we are to be alive, given that the vast majority of people who could potentially be thrown up by the combinatorial lottery of DNA will in fact never be born. . . We are staggeringly lucky to find ourselves in the spotlight. However brief our time in the sun, if we waste a second of it, or complain that it is dull or barren or (like a child) boring, couldn't this be seen as a callous insult to those unborn trillions who will never even be offered life in the first place? As many atheists have said better than me, the knowledge that we have only one life should make it all the more precious. The atheist view is correspondingly life-affirming and life-enhancing, while at the same time never being tainted with self-delusion, wishful thinking, or the whingeing self-pity of those who feel that life owes them something. Emily Dickinson said,

That it will never come again
Is what makes life so sweet.⁴⁵

Another alleged atheist, Daniel Dennett, declares that “The world is sacred.” Because Dennett is one of contemporary culture’s most well-known advocates of atheism, the full quote where he makes this surprising claim is warranted:

Benedict Spinoza, in the seventeenth century, *identified* God and Nature, arguing that scientific research was the true path of theology. . . [I]n proposing his scientific simplification, was he personifying Nature or depersonalizing God?. . . Should Spinoza be counted as an atheist or a pantheist? He saw the glory of nature and then saw a way of eliminating the middleman! As I said at the end of my earlier book:

The Tree of Life is neither perfect nor infinite in space or time, but it is actual, and . . . it is surely a being that is greater than anything any of us will ever conceive of in detail worthy of its detail. Is something sacred? Yes, say I with Nietzsche. I could not pray to it, but I can stand in affirmation of its

⁴⁵ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 366-67.

magnificence. The world is sacred.
Does that make me an atheist? Certainly, in the obvious sense. If what you hold sacred is not any kind of Person you could pray to, or consider to be an appropriate recipient of gratitude (or anger, when a loved one is senselessly killed), You're an atheist in my book.⁴⁶

Thus Dennett, who (like Dawkins) foreswears any elements of supernaturalism, describes himself with all the attributes characteristic of naturalistic pantheism. He uses language of the sacred to describe his affirmation of the universe's "magnificence." However, along with Schopenhauer years ago, he chooses to describe this viewpoint as atheism instead of pantheism. He claims Spinoza for atheism rather than join in the usual understanding of Spinoza's metaphysics as pantheism.

Sam Harris, best known for his books, *The End of Faith*⁴⁷ and *Letter to a Christian Nation*,⁴⁸ self-describes as an atheist. Yet, in his *Newsweek*-sponsored debate with evangelical Christian pastor, Rick Warren, Harris said the following:

You can have your spirituality. You can go into a cave and practice meditation and transform yourself, and then we can talk about why that happened and how it could be replicated. . . . Let's realize that there's a power in contemplating the mystery of the universe, and in reminding yourself how much you love the people closest to you, and how much more you could love the people you haven't met yet. There is nothing you have to believe on insufficient evidence in order to talk about that possibility. . . . You can feel yourself to be one with the universe.⁴⁹

In *End of Faith*, Harris describes himself as agnostic on the question of an after-life (thereby leaving open the possibility), and extols "spirituality" and "mysticism."⁵⁰ Like Dawkins and Dennett, when

⁴⁶ Daniel Clement Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 244-45.

⁴⁷ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004).

⁴⁸ ———, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2006).

⁴⁹ Jon Meacham, "The God Debate," *Newsweek* 149 (2007).

⁵⁰ Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, 205, 08.

Harris declares himself to be an atheist, he is merely declaring his disbelief in supernaturalistic gods as commonly understood. Yet, he celebrates “the mystery of the universe” and a feeling of oneness with it in a way that closely parallels or is, at least arguably, identical with many of the expressions of naturalistic pantheism explored in this study.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

Pantheism's embrace of this universe and this planet is increasingly offering a form of religious meaning to satisfy the metaphysical void that Weber spoke of, and which allows people who are disinclined to speculate about dimensions beyond time, beyond death, and beyond this universe a metaphysical stance around which to orient their lives. However, the term itself, remains relatively little known in American culture, and subject to various definitions. Thus, because people with a pantheistic stance often do not use the term for self-description, either because they do not even know of it (Sharman Russell states she did not learn of the term until she was forty-two¹), because they wish to avoid its heretical associations within the Abrahamic traditions, or because they wish to avoid any association with any metaphysical stance that has any association with any conception of God, pantheistic or otherwise. However, this study has demonstrated that the geography of the sacred laid out by a pantheistic metaphysics is present in American culture, in some cases explicitly (as with Einstein and Abbey), and in many other cases implicitly.

This study has given examples of signs of the presence of pantheistic thought, both spiritualized and naturalistic, in American culture and laid out a framework for detecting pantheistic beliefs in American culture. Thomas Berry has said "Without a fascination with the grandeur of the North American continent, the energy needed for its preservation will never be developed."² And the great humanitarian physician to Africa, Albert Schweitzer, in articulating his principle of "Reverence for Life," argued that humans are "ethical only when life, as such, is sacred . . . , that of

¹ Sharman A. Russell, *Standing in the Light: My Life as a Pantheist* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 5.

² Thomas Mary Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 33.

plants and animals [as well] as that of”³ their fellow humans. If Schweitzer was right, the fact that our natural world is increasingly being regarded as the locus of the sacred may be good news for a planet facing an accelerating environmental crisis.⁴ However, the full extent of the penetration of pantheistic thought into American culture and whether such ideas actually modify environmental behaviors remains for further research.

³ Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, trans. Charles Thomas Campion (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1933), 156-59.

⁴ Jeffrey Kluger, "Be Worried, Be Very Worried: Global Warming Heats Up," *Time*, 167, no. 14 (2006).

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bernard Daley Zaleha graduated first in his class with highest honors from California State University, San Bernardino, with a Bachelor of Arts dual major in environmental studies and geography in 1983. He received his Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*, from Lewis and Clark College Northwestern School of Law, with a certificate in Environmental and Natural Resource Law in 1987. He spent most of the last two decades practicing environmental law and has defended environmental civil disobedience protesters, both civilly and criminally. He is published legal scholar in the areas of federal public land management and the federal law of wetlands protection. Mr. Zaleha has been an environmental activist for the last quarter century. He is presently serving his second term on the national board of directors of the Sierra Club and from March 2004 to May 2006 served as its 62nd national Vice President. He is the founding president of the Fund for Christian Ecology, and has received recognition as a lay eco-theologian, primarily for authoring two essays, *Recovering Christian Pantheism as a Lost Gospel of Creation* and *Befriending the Earth*. His professional interests include the ongoing emergence of Christian Pantheism as a new this-worldly, ecological interpretation of the Christian tradition; the efficacy (or lack thereof) of religious values in inspiring environmental activism; and the potential role of intelligent design/creationism as a factor retarding or suppressing environmental concern.