

RELIGIOUS NATURALISM AND THE RELIGION-SCIENCE DIALOGUE: A MINIMALIST VIEW

by Jerome A. Stone

Abstract. Although its roots go back at least to Spinoza, religious naturalism is once again becoming a self-conscious option in religious thinking. This article seeks to (1) provide a generic notion of religious naturalism, (2) sketch my own “minimalist” variety of religious naturalism, and (3) view the science-religion dialogue from both of these perspectives. This last will include reflection on the nature of scientific practices, the contributions of religious traditions to moral reflection, and Ursula Goodenough’s “religiopoiesis.”

Keywords: Willem Drees; Ursula Goodenough; Sandra Harding; Charley Hardwick; humanism; Bernard Meland; minimalist vision of transcendence; Lynn Hankinson Nelson; religiopoiesis; religious naturalism; religious traditions; J. Wentzel van Huyssteen; Henry Nelson Wieman.

Religious naturalism is again becoming a self-conscious option in religious thinking. It is a type of naturalism that seeks to explore and encourage religious ways of responding to the world or at least ways that are analogous to what we traditionally call religious. The difference between religious naturalism as I am defining it and the humanism of classical humanists such as John Dietrich during the time of the humanist controversy (1920s) or the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933 is a richer sense of our response to the world. Words such as *mystery* and *openness* are more likely to be used by religious naturalists. In the debates between humanists and theists (classical or revisionary), religious naturalism as a viable option has often been overlooked—but no longer.

Who are the religious naturalists? Historical roots go back at least to Baruch Spinoza. Former religious naturalists included Samuel Alexander,

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George Santayana, John Dewey, Mordecai Kaplan, and Ralph Burhoe, such Chicago theologians as Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Meland, and the later Bernard Loomer, and perhaps George Burman Foster, Edward Scribner Ames, and Shailer Mathews. Recent religious naturalists include Donald Crosby, William Dean, Willem Drees, Ursula Goodenough, Charley Hardwick, Henry Levinson, Karl Peters, Loyal Rue, myself, and perhaps Delores LaChapelle and Gordon Kaufman. Volume 35 of *Zygon* (2000) contains a number of articles by religious naturalists.

In this article I provide a generic notion of religious naturalism, sketch my own specific brand of religious naturalism, and consider the science-religion dialogue when religious naturalism, rather than theism (traditional or revised), is presupposed.

A GENERIC VIEW OF RELIGIOUS NATURALISM

Religious naturalism is a type of naturalism. We start, therefore, with naturalism, a set of beliefs and attitudes that focuses on this world. On the negative side it involves the assertion that there seems to be no ontologically distinct and superior realm (such as God, soul or heaven) to ground, explain, or give meaning to this world.¹ On the positive side it affirms that attention should be focused on the events and processes of this world to provide what degree of explanation and meaning are possible to this life. While this world is not self-sufficient in the sense of providing by itself all of the meaning that we would like, it is sufficient in the sense of providing enough meaning that we can cope.

Naturalism is religious when it includes a set of beliefs and attitudes that postulate religious aspects of this world that can be appreciated within a naturalistic framework. Certain happenings or processes in our experience elicit responses that can appropriately be called religious.²

There are two related views that overlap religious naturalism. The first is empiricism. Religious naturalism often has an empirical orientation, although the nature of this empiricism varies widely. Meland and others have a broad conception of empiricism, what I have called a "generous empiricism" (Stone 1992, chap. 4). Thinkers such as William James and Douglas Clyde Macintosh are empiricists in religious epistemology but develop notions of God that do not fit the generic definition of religious naturalism as developed here. Finally, it should be clear that religious naturalism need not be committed to a empiricist foundationalism.

The second view that overlaps religious naturalism is materialism, or physicalism. Hardwick claims that a consistent and honest empiricism will be a physicalism. This is not, of course, the old-fashioned mechanism, but it is still an insistence on the physical basis of all reality. There is a strong leaning toward physicalism in my own thinking. However, this is a philosophically strong position to maintain. Both for reasons of conversa-

tion with indigenous and neopagan religious thinkers who have experienced what they term spirits that are not part of this material world and also in order not to preclude my own growth in this area by dogmatically foreclosing the possibility of such experiences, I do not unequivocally affirm physicalism. However, I do suspect that eventually whatever spirits there are will be found to have a material basis. The world is full of patterns that can be replicated across time and space, but I have always found them to have a physical reality when they exist.

A third orientation that differs from religious naturalism is religious humanism. This is a controversial claim that should not be overdrawn. There were writers in the early twentieth century, often labeled humanists, albeit religious humanists, who could better be seen as religious naturalists. These include Foster, in his book *The Place of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence* (1909), and Ames, in his book *Religion* (1929).

However, observers from differing points on the theological spectrum have pointed out that religious naturalism and humanism are similar when seen from the perspective of traditional monotheism. Further, many religious naturalists identify themselves as religious humanists. Without insisting on this label, I do suggest that there are differences between the basic stance of many varieties of religious naturalism and that of many humanists, religious or otherwise. The issue is that of "openness to resources beyond and challenges beyond the humanly manageable." Religious naturalism, as I use the term, "has a greater sense that we are not masters of our fate, that we need to recognize the worth of, to nurture and be nurtured by this-worldly grace and judgment" (Stone 1993, 35). Thus, I take as my differentiation of religious naturalism from religious humanism an affirmation of the reality of some aspects of our experience that can be called sacred or divine and that are significantly different from the human although contained within the natural world.³

THE MINIMALIST VISION OF TRANSCENDENCE

So far I have attempted to sketch religious naturalism in general. In this section I present my own specific version of religious naturalism. I affirm that there are aspects of this world that are sufficiently analogous to what has been traditionally called sacred that attitudes of recognition, of gratitude, of being awestruck or some similar attitudes toward these aspects can be called religious in a broad sense. There is not so much a common essence to these experiences as a cluster of familylike experiences. I tend to be explicit about the pluralistic possibilities of these experiences. Rather than speak of *the Sacred*, it is better to use *sacred* as an adjective or adverb to describe these experiences and attitudes.

Recently I have given greater emphasis to the fact that a response to something sensed as sacred does not preclude empirical inquiry or a critical

attitude. These are different from awe or gratitude, but if either is overlooked or prohibited we have superstition or idolatry. Wherever we have a sense of the sacred we are in danger of idolatry and fanaticism. Religious naturalism needs to articulate from within its own resources a challenge to these tendencies. Wieman and Kaplan recognized this.

Normally I prefer to use *sacred* or occasionally *divine* as an adjective. However, I find that other people (and I myself in the past) have used the term *God*. So I have developed what I call a minimal definition of God for purposes of conversation: "God is the sum total of the ecosystem, community and person empowering interactions in the universe." This definition is minimal, because I have to acknowledge that God may very well be more than this, but I am agnostic about this. My definition owes much to Mathews, although the difference between us is significant (Stone 1992, 52).

A more technical yet still minimal definition that I use is that *sacred* refers to norms or creative powers that are relatively transcendent. A common element in the paradigm cases of religion seems to be what I term an orientation to transcendence. A polarity of norms or values and of creative powers or forces is another element. In philosophical terms, this parallels the distinction between values and facts, in religious language between God's challenge and God's blessing. Both sides of this polarity have a transcendent dimension. This condensed statement is a summary of historical and phenomenological investigation of various religions. Within the limits of a naturalistic outlook, the transcendent dimension of norms and powers is understood as a collection of continually compelling norms and situation-transcending creative powers—in other words, relative transcendence. They are relatively transcendent to norms and situations within the world yet are within the world as relevant possibilities and realities beyond a situation as perceived.

To illustrate this, I posit that searching for the norms of truth or justice means reaching for possibilities relatively transcendent to present attainments and yet relevant to our efforts. Truth and justice remain continually compelling norms no matter how far we come. Likewise, openness to the healing or restorative powers of medicine or pedagogy means a readiness to receive creative and recreative powers relatively transcendent to our present situation and yet resident within the world beyond our limited present. In short, this is a philosophy urging openness to norms and resources that are beyond our narrowly perceived present situations and yet are not resident in a different realm. This is relative or this-worldly transcendence, a minimalist version of transcendence.

What this particular version of religious naturalism implies, then, besides a slightly different vocabulary, is a recognition of the pluralistic possibilities of sacredness or transcendence, a recognition that relative transcendence can involve both the pursuit of values and the encounter with realities, with emphasis on a stance of openness.

A brief case for this view can be made here. One point is that the fertility of our mythological and ontological imaginations, coupled with our desire for wish fulfillment, requires restraint on our metaphysical impulses. Further, there is no consensus on the nature of any alleged God or other world or of the appropriate method to use in justifying assertions about them. While not conclusive refutations, these considerations lay a heavy burden of proof on traditional or revised theism.

On the other hand, religious naturalism, particularly the minimalist version, helps conceptualize and thus encourage and nurture openness to continually challenging goals and situation-transcending resources of renewal. Although it is not completely satisfying to some people as a basis of social and personal criticism and renewal, it offers much of the challenge and satisfaction of traditional religion without being as vulnerable to the acids of modernity. It offers a way beyond cynicism and fanaticism.

Religious traditions are not to be defended, revised, or reconstructed. They are not to be abandoned, either. Religious traditions are to be carefully, critically yet appreciatively explored for the light they offer on the resources and challenges of life. Traditions cannot be effectively explored all at once, but two or three can be sufficiently studied within a lifetime to yield a harvest of their fruits.

I treat the remainder of this article from my own minimalist position, with side references to other religious naturalists.

Fading Issues. From a naturalistic perspective certain issues often central to the religion-science discussion fade in significance. While some religious naturalists (such as Wieman, Burhoe, and Hardwick) develop a naturalistic notion of God, religious naturalists generally do not seem interested in questions of divine agency, creation, providence, miracle, or eschatology, even in the revised and scientifically informed formulations of contemporary revisionary theists. Thus, religious naturalists are not likely to spend much time on the religious implications of the Big-Bang theory or indeterminacy in quantum physics.⁴

The Nature and Limits of Scientific Practices. It would seem as if science has cognitive privilege for most naturalists, except for some of the neopragmatists like Richard Rorty and Wesley Robbins. Then again, exploration of religious traditions reminds us of some things for which science may be helpful but not sufficient. Insight, appreciation, evaluation, and wisdom are transcognitive abilities that science cannot supply. However, these are not to be relegated to the realm of the subjective and arbitrary, of mere individual preference. In calling these responses “transcognitive” I emphasize that scientific training and empirical inquiry are helpful in informing these responses but that they are not the whole story. The religious and artistic disciplines help in the nurturing of insight, of critical appreciation and wisdom.

Issues also continue about the nature of science itself. Religious naturalists do not regard religion uncritically. With varying degrees of sophistication and scholarly depth, religious naturalists treat religion often appreciatively but always critically. Some religious naturalists are less reflective about science, although they may be familiar with its results and practices.

Science—like *religion* and *nature*—is a term covering a multitude of changing processes and procedures. We should be wary of general terms that essentialize complex practices and phenomena, convenient though they often are to use. One of the values of the second chapter of Drees's *Religion, Science and Naturalism* (1996) is that it helps counteract oversimplified versions of key events in the history of science and religion, especially the impact of Galileo and the acceptance of Darwin.

Naturalists, religious or otherwise, rely strongly on science. Therefore, they should, and often do, reflect critically on the nature of scientific practices. I argue for three points here.

1. We need a revised notion of rationality to replace some of the outmoded notions of modernity without succumbing to the more extreme irrationalism of some postmodernists. Theologian J. Wentzel van Huyssteen is very helpful here.⁵ Rationality is not an algorithmic, explicitly rule-governed procedure (Brown 1988). There are a variety of scientific procedures, so it is difficult to speak of *the* scientific method. With van Huyssteen we can retain, albeit in a revised fashion, notions of truth, objectivity, progress, and even perhaps a critical or transactional realism (Stone 1992, 130–34).

2. We need to retain a place for the empirical probing, if not proving, of theories. We seldom achieve conclusive verification (or refutation) of theories, so an element of judgment generally enters into our assessment of empirical evidence. Few scientific statements or theories can be supported by irrefutable arguments or conclusive verification. Often we have to make judgments about the strength of conflicting evidence. Language and theoretical commitments also enter into empirical inquiry. Nevertheless, none of this removes the significance of empirical inquiry or results in our having to accept relativism (Stone 1992, 130–34). I have found the philosophers of science Sandra Harding and Lynn Hankinson Nelson to be very helpful on these issues.⁶

3. We also need to explore the possibility and necessity of at least some conversation across the boundaries of epistemic and linguistic communities. Some religious naturalists see a contribution that religious communities can make. If religions and theologies remain confined in their own epistemic ghettos, they will have no impact or critical leverage on society at large. Such dialogue combines conviction with a willingness to be challenged, a valuing of rational and friendly dissensus as well as consensus (van Huyssteen 1998; Schrag 1992; Brown 1994).

In all of this discussion about the nature of science and rationality, I am more of a “paleopragmatist” than other religious naturalists such as Robbins, who clearly follows Rorty’s neopragmatism, and probably more of a paleopragmatist than even Dean. On the other hand, I do not share Hardwick’s unabashed realism.

MORAL RESOURCES FROM THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The issue of the nature of human morals remains important. Religious naturalists do not necessarily have anything distinctive to say here. They are likely to encourage scientific investigation of the history and function of morality, and their ethical and metaethical reflections will be carried out within the parameters of a naturalistic outlook. However, that leaves much room for maneuvering. William Irons is correct when he points out that the results of inquiry into the evolutionary basis of morals tells us nothing about which moral judgments we should make (Irons 1991). The investigation into the sexual behavior of primates may help in understanding human behavior, but it does not tell us what our sexual behavior should be. Sociobiology should not underestimate the importance of cultural factors. To do so would be to make it hard to explain the nature of science itself. A naturalistic worldview cannot be equated with biological or biochemical imperialism.

Some religious naturalists wonder whether the religious traditions can offer any material for ethical reflection. In my view, religious traditions may suggest (a) a regulative ideal, (b) a specificity to moral demands, (c) motive or empowerment, and (d) an analogue to forgiveness and a sense of value beyond morality.

A Regulative Ideal. The challenge of the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah to idolatry is a continuous challenge, a continuing ideal that never ceases to judge people. Jesus contributes the notion of loving all persons. The Mahāyāna Buddhist carries this challenge even further, urging us to have active and meditative compassion for and sympathetic rejoicing with all sentient beings, beings that have the Buddha nature. The debate even encompasses whether we should extend our compassion and rejoicing to plants and all inanimate things, for they too have the Buddha nature and the Buddhas/Bodhisattvas come to enlighten them (LaFleur 1989).

The task of religious naturalism is to learn how to naturalize this continuing challenge, a task to which some of us are devoting effort, often through a naturalized version of Immanuel Kant’s regulative, as opposed to constitutive, ideals. Kaplan and Wieman (with his distinction between creative and created good), are helpful here. So also is the notion of self-correcting possibilities of science and democracy (Stone 1992, 16–17, 37–40, 72–73).

Specificity to the Moral Demand. The concern of the eighth-century prophets for justice/righteousness (*tsedeqah/tsedeq*) has a specificity that is different from (though related to) the love command of Jesus. Although this distinction sounds like a Christian supersessionist stereotype, there is some truth to the distinction. It is used here not to indicate the superiority of love to justice but the difference between the two.

The Hindu emphasizes *ahimsa*, nonviolence, and care for all levels of existence, a stress deepened by Gandhi. The Hindu and the Buddhist speak clearly of a care for all levels of sentient existence. The Buddhist notion of the compassionate Buddha, as exemplified in the vow of the Bodhisattva to save all sentient beings, is another distinctive note with a disinterested love that is different from the Christian agape.

In the Confucian ethic there is a graded sense of responsibility worked out along the Five Great Relationships. This is similar to the traditional West African notion of responsibility to significant others, except more formalized. "The West African image of the self is that it is much like a web. The self is not enclosed within the body, but a part of it which we could call the 'life-force' resides in the persons with whom you have to deal. Thus each of us is responsible to enhance the life-force of the other which resides within us." The West African and the Confucian model have "the advantages and disadvantages of acknowledging positions of superiority and inferiority." They also have "the strengths and weaknesses of stressing the priority of proximate relationships. Here the ethics of Mo Tzu form a valuable point of debate with the traditional Confucian ethic" (Stone 1992, 101–2).

The task of religious naturalists is to be open to at least some of these specific moral ideals and to consider incorporating them into a naturalistic ethic. This will not be easy, and it will probably be strongly influenced by temperament and individual upbringing. Nevertheless, there is an insight that results from a serious and open exploration of the specifics of the ethical teachings of religious traditions. We need to do more than urge ourselves to be moral. Which variety of morals shall we adopt? They are not all the same. And we need not adopt any one of them. In fact, much fruitful reflection can come from exploring the encounter between different views. I have already mentioned the encounter between graded West African and Confucian ethics and Mo Tzu's universalist ethics.

A fruitful exchange would be between the Gandhian view of *ahimsa*, Thich Nhat Hanh or the Dalai Lama's compassion for the enemy, and the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. With all of these, of course, ancient teachings are filtered through tradition as well as traditional attempts to avoid tradition. Thus, a fruitful encounter would be between the approaches to the teachings of Jesus on nonviolence by John Howard Yoder (1985) or Glen Stassen (1992) or Clarence Skinner (1999) and that by Mathews (1971) or Ronald Stone (1988).

Motive or Empowerment. Religious traditions often offer a motive power for the moral life. Sometimes this comes from an overall vision and a sense of the individual's place within this scheme. Sometimes it comes from meditative discipline, as in various Buddhist practices. Some of it comes from the celebration and sensitizing of mutuality with sister living beings through ritual. With Meland, I have stressed the nurture of appreciation (Meland 1953, chaps. 5 and 6; Stone 1992, chap. 4).

An Analogue to Forgiveness. The moral life inevitably ends in at least partial failure, for regulative ideals are unattainable. Hence, we need the power of Yom Kippur, the power to begin again, again. We need a naturalized equivalent of the Christian notion of grace and forgiveness, not for cheap grace or because of our inherent depravity but to address our sense of guilt, failure, and despair. We need more than exhortations to be moral. Psychoanalytic literature is a resource here, and Levinson, Hardwick, and Wieman have something to offer on this topic (Levinson 1992).

In all of this, the religious traditions are not binding but suggestive. Naturalists who take religious traditions seriously find them not normative but as offering resources for living, for appreciative yet critical reflection (Stone 1992, 97–104).

Out of the plethora of religious traditions and their subdivisions, religious naturalists, depending partly on upbringing and schooling, are likely to explore only a selected few. Indeed, religious traditions are so complex that no one can claim a thorough knowledge of world religions. Two, possibly three, traditions could be adequately yet still only partially studied in one lifetime. The ethical teachings of Jesus constitute a favorite for some naturalists who have a Christian background, although others revolt against any mention of him. The teachings of Jesus are more complex and ambiguous than some of those who accept or reject them realize. Others are finding help in socially engaged Buddhism. Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama have helped popularize this extremely significant dimension of Buddhism, which both naturalists and more traditionally religious people could learn from.

While some people are finding resources in the Dao De Jing or the Chuang Tzu, I am finding rich material for reflection in Chinese and Korean Confucian writings. Whether these constitute a religious tradition is debatable, but they certainly offer a valuable resource. They do need supplementing with a stronger concern for the nonhuman world and a sensitivity to their potential for supporting authoritarian and patriarchal domination, but they are not alone in that. The Confucian yin also needs alternation with the yang of Daoist playfulness.

CARE FOR THE TRANS-HUMAN WORLD

Another issue with which religious naturalists should concern themselves is our relationship to and the nature of our responsibility for the trans-human world—that is, the environment. Religious naturalists do not speak with a unified voice here, but they ought (like all of us) to take part in both thought and action in the environmental crisis. Religious naturalists tend to have a strong sense of our relatedness to the rest of the world, but their scientific orientation, paradoxically, can emphasize human superiority through science and technology, resulting in distancing, manipulation, and control.

Some religious naturalists, including myself, find the nonhuman world (or “trans-human” world—after all, we are part of it and vice versa) to have some sort of religious significance, perhaps through a sense of the sacredness of some places or vistas or perhaps through a scientifically informed view of the complexity of life processes (which Goodenough articulates so well). Issues that religious naturalists, among others, need to think about include the value of individual organisms and species other than for human purposes and the direction that our responsibility for them and their habitat needs to take.

For myself, the sharpness of these issues is not only that I have a strong sense of rootedness (transplanted, to be sure) in the Chicago bioregion, with its tall-grass prairie remnants, wooded wetlands, and dunescapes, but also that if the changing web of life has a sacred aspect to it, our destruction of nature, in which I share, is the religious naturalist’s equivalent to deicide. However, these semiapocalyptic and misanthropic musings are tempered soon by the realization that we destroy the web slowly and that there is time to save and revive (if not restore) a network of wilder habitats interspersed between and within our megapolises. And just as the moralist and social activist need to alternate with reinvigorating play, rest, and spiritual rejuvenation, so too all of us can find refreshment in the wilder areas of our land- and seascapes. My own emphasis is that we need to focus on the education and nurture of appreciation lest we and our children lose all physical and emotional touch with the world beyond our houses and shopping malls. For many people the grass (to be frequently trimmed) is their closest contact with “nature.”

THEORIA OR POIESIS?

Goodenough, a cell biologist, has performed a very valuable service in writing *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (1998). In explaining her intention in writing this book, she points out in her article “Religiopoiesis” (2000) that the religion-science dialogue is usually perceived as a venture in theological reconstruction, a cycle of challenge from science and response from the adherents of the faith. Such reconstruction would require a depth of knowl-

edge of a particular faith that scientists generally lack. Rather than attempting such a reconstruction, she conceives of her task as exploring the religious potential of the scientific understanding of Nature, a task made easier by the emergence in recent decades of a coherent scientific cosmology and account of evolution.

Such a task is a *poiesis*, a making or crafting of religious material. No one person, of course, constructs a religion; but unless individuals “offer contributions, there will be no ‘stuff’ available to cohere into new religious orientations in future times” (Goodenough 2000, 562). According to Goodenough, we have learned from the historians of religion that religious cosmologies generally are the product of the interaction of cultural traditions, as is the scientific cosmology itself. “By the same token, the crafting of religious responses to the scientific worldview can—indeed must—be a collective and dynamic project” (p. 563). In fact, the collective nature of the project can alleviate our uneasiness about engaging in it. “No one person is setting himself or herself up as the guru; we’re all responding from our own perspectives, offering rather than professing” (p. 563).

Goodenough notes a spectrum in *religiopoiesis*, one pole of which is theology with its philosophical discourse and the other spirituality, which explores our feelings when we apprehend a cosmology. A viable religious orientation comes from the integration of theology and spirituality. (A third dimension of religious life, our behavior, stems from belief.) Scientific cosmology “is not inherently a proposition that calls for belief. . . . Where the scientific accounts evoke our belief statements, then, is in the realm of our acceptance of their findings and our capacity to walk humbly and with gratitude in their presence. . . . *Religiopoiesis*, in the end, is centrally engaged in finding ways to tell a story in ways that convey meanings and motivations” (Goodenough 2000, 565).

Unlike in theological reconstruction, in *religiopoiesis* we are informed by previous interpretations but not constrained by them. “Perhaps the most important act in the process of *religiopoiesis*, then, is to open ourselves to metaphors: those in our traditional religions, those in the poetry and art of past and present times, and those that emerge from our articulation of scientific understandings. The goal is not strict intellectual coherence. . . . The goal is to come up with such a rich tapestry of meaning that we have no choice but to believe in it” (Goodenough 2000, 566).

What most religious naturalists do is *religiotheoria*, either analytic, like John Herman Randall or Santayana, or constructive, like most of the rest. To be sure, this *theoria* is in a reciprocal relationship with *religiopoiesis* in the lives of these naturalists, at least those engaged in constructive work. What Goodenough has done is to remind us and to contribute to the task of *poiesis*. Santayana, Kaplan, Peters, Meland, Rue, and Kenneth L. Patton (a Unitarian who was at least a borderline religious naturalist) have also begun that task. This dynamic, collective task needs to be pursued.

NOTES

A version of the first section of this paper was given at the Highlands Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought, June 2000, and some sections were adapted from the panel on New Frontiers in Religion and Science at the American Theological Society (Midwest), 2000.

1. Process thinkers such as John Cobb, David Griffin, Charles Hartshorne, Nancy Howell, Jay McDaniel, Les Muray, and Marjorie Suchocki often consider themselves naturalists and surely religious naturalists. However, I see significant differences between these thinkers and the group that I am delineating. Their pantheism allows them to speak of God as immanent within the world and hence of themselves as naturalists. However, theirs is a different type of religious naturalism. For them there is one developing entity that is different in being surpassable by no other entity except itself in a future state. It has maximal relatedness and compassion and often is conceived as conferring objective immortality in its memory. These three interrelated characteristics of being—surpassable by none except itself, supremely related and compassionate, and conferring conservation of value—make it different from the writers grouped together in this article as religious naturalists.

2. For an alternative and rather similar characterization of generic religious naturalism, see Drees 1997, 1–24; 1998; 2000). Hardwick, whose *Events of Grace* (1996) is a recent work of naturalistic theology, utilizes a similar definition. Drawing on the philosopher Rem Edwards, he finds four basic features in naturalism. “These are: (1) that only the world of nature is real; (2) that nature is necessary in the sense of requiring no sufficient reason . . . ; (3) that nature as a whole may be understood without appeal to any kind of intelligence or purposive agent; and (4) that . . . every natural event is itself a product of other natural events.” Hardwick adds that most naturalists have included two further items: “(5) that natural science is the only sound method for establishing knowledge, and (6) that value is based solely in the interests and projects of human beings” (1996, 5–6). Hardwick finds these last two problematic. For my part I am strongly committed to the value of science but find that assertions such as (5) are often used to denigrate partially verified information or to downplay the value of appreciation or insights couched in pictorial images. Further, my growing appreciation of the nonhuman world and awareness of the increasing difficulty of nurturing this appreciation and how this relates to our environmental crises have helped me question assertions like (6). Just because human values are anthropogenic, at least in part, does not mean that they should be exclusively anthropocentric. Hardwick holds that both classical and revisionary theisms generally agree “(1) that God is personal, (2) that some form of cosmic teleology is metaphysically true, and (3) that there is a cosmically comprehensive conservation of value.” On Hardwick’s view a naturalist theology, or roughly what I have called religious naturalism, involves the denial of these three theses and a reconception of religion that involves an alternative view (1996, 5–8).

3. For my approach to a generic definition of religious naturalism, see my “The Viability of Religious Naturalism” (with a response by Langdon Gilkey) (Stone 1993) and “Transcendence” (Stone 2000b).

4. I claim that Meland is a religious naturalist. He explores the implications of indeterminacy not as a place in which divine agency can operate but to protect against overprecision and literalness in assertions about the divine. See “Bernard Meland on the New Formative Imagery of Our Time” (Stone 1995).

5. See *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (van Huyssteen 1999) and my article, “J. Wentzel van Huyssteen: Refiguring Rationality in the Post-modern Age” and his reply (Stone 2000a).

6. The discussion between Harding and Nelson is a fruitful place to explore these questions. Although Harding stresses the social nature of scientific practice, she wishes to retain a sense of objectivity and rejects the notion that there are no rational or scientific grounds for making judgments. Nelson draws on W. V. O. Quine to articulate the implications of viewing the community of inquiry as the epistemological subject yet wishes to avoid relativism and to be able to account for the fact that we can draw distinctions between good theories and beliefs and bad ones (Harding 1986; 1991, 138–63; Nelson 1990, 20–22, 25).

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