

A History of Nature/Religion Opposition in Japan and the West

W. Puck Brecher

要約

宗教と自然観の関係は、両者が異なる分野に属するために、あまり広く認識されていないが、自然界と精神界の関係を解き明かすための努力の跡をたどると、いずれの文明においても、積年の有神論的な問題と結びつく。宗教は、自然に関する民族固有の解釈を写しだしているものである。人々が自分達の周囲の世界をどのように考えるかは、自分達自身を自然との係わりにおいてどのように捉えるかという問題であり、こうした見方は、主に宗教によって形成されるものである。つまり、人間に関する検討と、人間と自然の関係についての洞察が、自然と宗教の関係を研究する上で基礎的な前提となっている。本稿の目的は、こうした認識に立って、西洋と日本における両者の関係を発展的に辿りながらそれに多少の説明を加えることである。

皮肉なことだが、多くの宗教的目的は、自然を超越し現世から「教えの」世界へ導くことにある。このため、宗教は環境主義的に捉えにくかったり倫理上の問題として位置づけられる傾向にあるが、自然との関係をどう捉えるかは、宗教が地球上の人間に何をもちめていているかによって左右されている。たとえば、キリスト教は、人間を自然と区別する二重性をもっており、そのために自然界を不敬しているという批判が過去30年間なされてきた。他方、仏教や神道に代表される東洋の宗教は、人間を自然の一部とする宗教観をもっているとされる。そして、日本人は「自然を愛し」自然の驚異に畏敬の念をいだく民族だと言われているが、今世紀の間に、その自然観は、宗教的基盤を大幅に失い、科学的知識やメディア情報に影響されてきた。その結果、東西を問わず、人間と自然を分離した二重的な自然観が台頭して、神学的あるいは宗教的な自然観が薄れ、より普遍的で具体的な自然観が一般的になりつつある。

Introduction

Connections between religion and the conceptualization of nature are not popularly recognized today, as the two inhabit different realms within the public consciousness. However, in most civilizations efforts to understand the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds constitute long-standing theistic questions. Communities construct religion to reinforce and legitimize their views of the world, and as the culmination of their philosophies, it serves to reflect these constructions back upon culture. To this extent, religion is a reflection of a people's unique interpretation of the natural world. What people think about the world around them depends on what they think about themselves in relation to it, and these beliefs are largely shaped by religion (White, p.10). Fundamental to inquiry into nature/religion opposition, therefore, is a consideration of human beings and their relationship to nature.

Ironically, the objective of many religions is to transcend nature, to move us out of our

current state into an "enlightened" one. The question as to whether this makes religion a foe to environmentalism, or at least ethically problematic, can be roughly answered by what it demands of humans during their existence on this earth. In the last thirty years, many have criticized the Christian duality of humanity and nature for harboring a strong irreverence of the natural world. It is charged with shaping industrial, economic and scientific development in the West which sacrifices the environment for human gain. Eastern religions like Buddhism and Shinto are described as embracing a holistic view of nature, with humans as a single inseparable part. Consequently, the Japanese are often touted as "a nature-loving people," spiritually tuned to the wonder and splendor of their environment. Yet the country's abrupt and sweeping adoption of Western constructions naturally had repercussions on how it understood its relationship to the earth. Farmers who hoed the soil, seeing themselves as one with nature, bought tractors, redefining themselves as exploiters of it.

In both Japan and the West, people's religious connection to the natural world dissipated as their dependence on it was dissolved by scientific knowledge and technology. The focus of this paper is to trace this evolution in the West and Japan, and to offer some explanations for it.

The West

In contrast to Japan, the considerable ethnic and theistic diversity in "the West" makes a dubious task out of identifying the cultural pillars necessary to construct a basis for understanding it. Scrambled by centuries of emigration and philosophical and religious flux, not to mention the spiritual confusion created by modern technological development, the various strains of Western civilization have been too inextricably mixed for anthropologists engaged in comparisons of East and West to face. The result is that, for practicality and because some definition is clearly necessary, "the West" has become understood as an industrialized civilization founded in the European, Judeo-Christian tradition, having a Cartesian world-view and organized by democratic government.

The Roots of Duality

Greek culture and philosophy were influential long after the demise of their civilization, and it is to here that writings have traced the origins of the Western human/nature relationship. Greek thought explained the order of the universe as a duality between the human mind and the physical. This view of human rationality and the natural world as separate was perpetuated and magnified by Christianity, wherein it has continued to govern the ethics and world-view of the Christian world for the past two millennia.

The tradition grew largely from the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, despite the fact that these two had opposing opinions concerning the mind and the external world. As Vice President Al Gore identifies in his popular book *Earth in the Balance*, Plato saw the soul or human intellect as disembodied, detached from the physical world which it inhabits. Living in complete separation, therefore, the thinker maintains a semi-God-like vantage

point over nature. In contrast, Aristotle believed that the mind is a product of the sensual experiences of the body and thereby linked to its surroundings (Gore, pp.248-50). He also points out the rhyme and reason of nature, the interconnectedness, attributing it all as designated for the use of humankind:

... we must suppose that plants exist on account of animals ... and the other animals for the sake of man, the tame ones because of their usefulness and as food, and if not all the wild ones, then most, on account of food and other assistance [they provide, in the form of] clothing and other tools which come from them. If, then, nature does nothing without an end and nothing in vain, it is necessary that nature made all these on account of men (Aristotle, pp.19-20).

While in fundamental disagreement as to the place of the human soul with respect to the earth, there existed the common understanding that it was detached in essence and function. That is, nature's purpose was in its utility to people, who enjoyed spiritual freedom from the slavery of its law and order.

Such theories about the order of the universe were spread by Alexander the Great, who studied under Aristotle, throughout the lands he conquered, and were later adopted by the Romans and then the Christians. Plato's views of humankind as separate from nature were preserved by such devotees as St. Augustine and as a precept of Gnosticism during the early centuries of Christianity. Aristotelian thought, proposing a closer relationship between the mind and the body, or humanity and nature, had survived more in the Arab-speaking world where it was rediscovered by crusaders and brought back to Europe, ultimately having an influence on the Renaissance movement and "the impulse to reconnect to the earth" (Gore, pp.248-50).

Yet it is less through Greek philosophy than Christian dogma that we can explain the continuity of a duality between humanity and nature in Western thought. In the fiercely controversial 1967 article "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," Lynn White, Jr. argues that the Judeo-Christian tradition is the foundation of current global environmental problems. While this argument is hard to defend fully, the Biblical story of creation is irrefutably clear in defining the relationship between Adam and the physical world. Not only did God elevate humans from the rest of creation by creating them in His image, He gave them the directive to "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 living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis, p.15). Seemingly an echo of Aristotle, the earth and everything on it were created for humanity to benefit from and rule over. The duality between humankind and nature which this confirmed did not simply elevate us above everything else, like the very God we resembled, but gave us free rein to exploit the natural world as was His will (White, p.10). Later in Genesis, the Bible takes a further step in securing human mastery. Noah, his family and his ark of animals survive the deluge in which God has washed away all life from the earth. At this point, God says to Noah, who we heretofore assume to have been a vegetarian: "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth ... Every

moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything" (Genesis, p.18). Finally, through the crucifixion, humankind is absolved of Original Sin through Grace and completes its transcendence from the natural world.

Appearing at a time when people were looking to place blame for the perceived evils of established society, White's critique ignited animosity against the Christian establishment. In defense, Gore, a faithful Baptist, contends that it was less the Christian Word of God than the notion of Him as the lone creator and divine force which caused the shift away from human-nature nonduality characteristic of that time in history in the West. Many anthropologists and archeomythologists, he argues, adhere to the notion that most of the world's ancient civilizations worshipped an earth goddess, who represented the creator and sustainer of life and the processes of nature. Yet there was also the belief, much like Japanese Shinto, that each natural object or phenomenon contained some divine or spiritual force and the potential to exert it over human beings, which were less spiritual and therefore more lowly. Judeo-Christian monotheism, therefore, and especially the notion of a single creator, provided people with a new outlook about themselves and extinguished the "superstition and bewilderment" about the forces of the natural world. Those who came to view everything as the creation of one God became open to new knowledge about the surrounding world and themselves as a more important presence within it (Gore, pp.255, 260).

To illustrate the evolution of nature/religion opposition through the Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian periods, Maureen Tilley turns to the presence of animals in myths and scriptures. As animals constitute the most animated representation of "wild" nature, the supposition is that early attitudes about the natural world are reflected in how they are portrayed, especially in their behavior toward humans.

Shadowing the transmigration of philosophical thought from the Greek and Roman traditions outlined by Gore and others, Tilley traces the norms of later, and even present day, allusions to animals back to the rich mythology of these civilizations. The overwhelming pattern, she contends, shows animals, and even inanimate nature, endowed with a sense of justice and love toward humanity. Creatures helping, saving or protecting good humans and attacking evil ones is a recurring theme, showing the Aristotelian view that humans, animals and the rest of nature are, if not rationally or spiritually equal, at least connected by the common strand of divine creation (Tilley, p.100).

Judaism reveals a similarly positive view of animals in its own body of stories. As the creations of God, they have the ability to recognize good and evil in people and respond to it. They often come to symbolize the virtue of those they are interacting with — lions sent to kill Moses came to internalize his goodness, therefore becoming wiser and more holy than those who sent them. Whereas the Greeks and Romans never accepted the argument for animal rationality, Judaic stories begin to play with the notion that creatures have some rudimentary sense perception, or mind, and more importantly, that they may have a soul. This question gains some support by the fact that they seem to have suffered the Fall together with Adam and Eve. Originally doting and compliant, the Old Testament shows them falling victim to the spiritual chaos resulting from Ori-

ginal Sin and becoming carnivorous and wild (p.103).

What with Christian dogma cementing the conception of humanity as wholly divorced from nature in body and spirit, it is not surprising to find some continuity in animal portrayals in early Christian folk tales and scriptural stories. Many stories of the martyrs tell of animals and inanimate nature showing love and respect for holy people — a boar refused to injure Perpetua and Felicitas, and turned to attack the Romans; rocks would not tear the body of the bishop Marculus who is thrown from a cliff. In other capacities, animals show an ability to discriminate between and reflect the attitudes of good and evil people, just as they could in Judaic stories, and even respond to the instructions of holy individuals. And, as exemplified in a case where the monk Abba Amoun called on snakes to protect him, animals are even responsive to the will of holy individuals (p.106).

Subtle though they may be, Tilley reveals parallels between an evolution of attitudes in these stories and the concurrent intellectual patterns. The Greek concept that humans, animals and all of nature are of the same divine ordering is reflected through a mythology in which people, while above them in mind and spirit, share a common physical realm with animals. In the Jewish and early Christian traditions, religious virtue becomes exalted, and stories become lessons for embracing goodness and eschewing evil. As Tilley explains, "The human sinner is higher than the animal in rationality. When that person sins, however, s/he has to look up to the creature," up to rationality (p.108).

Clues into the opposition of religion and nature derived from this study enlighten us to the possibility that in the early centuries of Christianity there continued a strong philosophical link to earlier pagan civilizations. The questions of whether animals were or were not rational, if they had souls, and if they were intrinsically morally and spiritually below humans were yet unclear in the minds of devoted Christians. Evidently, rhetoric from the New Testament, the Word as taught by the Church, even Christ Himself as the savior of humankind, all reasserting the transcendence of the human world from the natural one, was not yet fully internalized. To some extent, people continued to look around them with a degree of wonder.

Naturally, attempts to reconcile whatever doubts lingered in the Christian heart as to human/nature duality sought to explain it in ways which would reaffirm both Christian theology and people's undeniable sense of "belongingness" to nature. The 4th century Antiochene view is one school of thought which addresses this problem with two beliefs about the position of humanity with respect to the natural world: "1) that we humans image God to one another and the world around us, and 2) that we are also the bond of the universe" (McLeod, p.226). The essence of this view is that not only are we made in God's image, we represent the sole way all peoples, animals and the rest of nature can find God. We are the only visible means for attaining Grace. Second, the elements of the universe are either rational or irrational, yet we are linked to the spiritual world through our souls, and to the physical world through our body; we are the boundary and binding force of both.

As the critical connection between nature and the Cosmos, it is our responsibility to find union with God for ourselves, all people, and the entire natural world. Writes Fred

McLeod, "we humans stand horizontally as the bond of the universe uniting both the spiritual and corporeal worlds within ourselves, and also vertically as the image who both represents and presents God in a visible way to these two disparate worlds" (p.227). Echoing other sources of Christian dogma, the ecological message is submerged in the larger mandate to care for all things and guide them to the salvation of God's grace. We embody a mission, therefore, to reach down to the rest of Creation and save ourselves by saving it, and it is through this relationship that we are intimate with nature.

The Antiochene view is one of the two strands of Christianity which we can identify as most pervasive and influential. Realized by the Benedictine tradition, it saw humans above nature but shouldering a sense of responsibility for maintaining the physical world. As God's chosen race, humanity is the steward of nature and the environment. The second strand, realized by the Franciscan tradition, was less eager to affirm a privileged position for its followers. Humans are one part of a God-created universe, it contends, and as He is present in all things, all enjoy a degree of spiritual equality. Yet while the Franciscans celebrated the beauty and divinity of the natural world, this was only for its reflection of God, not for any belief in its intrinsic importance or value. As the destiny of humanity is union with Christ, nature was largely left out of consideration, as well as any significant sense of responsibility for preserving it (Simmons, pp.129-31). In either case, for Christians concerned with finding salvation, nature was a relatively unimportant consideration, and its perceived value outside of this quest only existed to the extent that it was available for human exploitation.

The invasion of philosophy and science

In the early 17th century, Rene Descartes' view of the world as a mechanistic, mathematically explainable set of patterns was to ignite a revolution in science, and his largely Platonic notion of humans as disembodied, introspective beings in search of truth about the self was to be one of the most enduring and influential in Western philosophy. The machine metaphor he used to explain reality showed nature as a symbol of disorder, implicitly sanctioning human domination over it. The dualism this suggested between nature and humanity was an equally powerful argument for a dualism between the body and the soul. The result of this vision was to be a "technological society (which) furthered the 'new image of nature as female, to be controlled and dissected through experiment (which) legitimated the exploitation of natural resources'" (Bianchi, p.137).

Shortly thereafter, Sir Francis Bacon asserted the distinction between moral (religious) knowledge and scientific fact (without moral significance), effectively divorcing science from the Church and freeing it from any moral responsibility for its power over and inevitable toll upon nature. While science and philosophy had seized a degree of independence, for the next two centuries they continued to be frozen in Christian dogma, hardly deviating from established patterns of thought. Philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704), for example, continued to reinforce the Christian ethic, using the same language to advocate the same human/nature relationship found in Genesis.

The attitudes of the larger masses also reflected the traditional ideology. Nature was

dirty, immoral and without spirit. As plants and animals had no souls they could not feel pain, and were consequently shown no compassion. To display behavior or attitudes which were considered too close to the realm of nature and animals was condemned as inhuman and guarded against with religion and rigid moral education. The poor, minorities and others who seemed dirty and close to the animal world were therefore prone to discrimination and abuse. And, as the functions of the female anatomy, especially child-bearing and breast feeding, were regarded as equally bestial, women too suffered maltreatment (Bowlby & Lowe, p.162).

Despite this, by the 18th century gradual ideological shifts began to occur. In England an appreciation of the rural landscape began to develop as industrial advancement brought more people to the cities. Pollution from burning coal, construction of roads and canals, and other problems of urbanization instilled in people a new appreciation for the unspoiled countryside. In addition, explorers returning from the various British colonies with strange and exotic specimens of flora and fauna ignited a widespread interest in natural history. Such developments fueled a more general trend of increasing sensitivity toward animals and nature which continued to grow through the 19th century (pp.162-3).

An undercurrent of naturalism was developing in America as well. In spite of prevailing attitudes advocating human responsibility to subordinate nature, well summed up by a Virginian man in 1728, who suggested that horseflies were created "that men should use their wits and industry to guard against them" (p.162), literary naturalists such as Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman reflect swelling appreciation for untouched nature, which was already being threatened by industrialism and urbanization. These writers showed a new sensibility to nature as being therapeutic and necessary for true living, knowledge and spirituality.

For the first time, instead of decrying the immorality of nature, philosophers decried the blasphemies of humankind against it. While maintaining the Christian understanding of body and soul duality, Emerson (1803-1882) embraced both equally: "[Nature] is loved by what is best in us, as the city of God" (Black, p.269). The natural world is the game board on which we all play our lives; it is fair, makes the rules we live by, makes Godly judgements, and is the master artist in all of our endeavors. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) wrote of the alienation of modern civilization from the spirituality and ultimate wisdom of the wilderness: "The earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass, it is a body, has a spirit, is organic, and fluid to the influences of its spirit, and to whatever particle of that spirit is in me" (Bowlby & Lowe, p.164). The impulse to connect with and learn from the earth as a kindred spirit and nurturing mother of humanity is more than just a refutation of the Cartesian vision of a human-controlled, mechanistic reality, it challenges the enduring Christian doctrine of Grace, of the superiority of human spirituality, which had heretofore been the cornerstone of Western civilization and culture.

With his publication of *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), Darwin dealt a further and more crucial blow to the Christian view of the nature/human relationship. His theory that processes such as natural selection and evolution determined the relationships between

nature and all living things was revolutionary in denying the presence of God as a necessary element of creation and change. Whereas earlier scientists could only explain their work through religion, Darwin toppled the transcendence of humanity by placing it in an animal world which apparently progressed independently of God's direct influence. This, the first scientific challenge of Greek philosophy and Christian morality with respect to the evolution of nature, touched off philosophical and scientific inquiry into the human species and its connection to the environment.

Of the ideas preached by these naturalists, the notion of nature as vital for people's spiritual well-being was to become a founding concept for future thought and scientific inquiry. Philosopher Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), a leader of early environmental advocacy, blasted the role of *Homo sapiens* as conquerors, stressing the need for a land ethic making them members of the larger community of plants, animals and other natural elements. "In human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows, *ex cathedra*, just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves" (Leopold, pp.27-8). This argument, that the human race does not know how nature works nor what is good for it, is a further affirmation of the concurrent trend in science declaring that humans are only one small piece in a balance of relationships more complex than we had originally known.

The concept of nature as a web of relationships sustained by a flow of energy between them was not new when Sir Arthur Tansley introduced the term "ecosystem" in 1935. It nonetheless contained two important implications concerning the human/nature relationship which were embraced and later built upon. One was that the earth could be understood as a system, scientifically explained without theistic or divine reference. The second was that it empirically isolated the human position within the global system as unquestionably rooted in the animal realm. The human being had become a purely biological creature. The Gaia hypothesis, developed by James Lovelock in the mid-1960s, was the next logical generation of natural science. Named after the Greek goddess of the earth, this theory maintains that all the organic and inorganic elements of the earth are one self-regulating system, as if one organism. The balance of this system is perfected and maintained by its organic components so as to best preserve life on earth. In addition to stimulating new ways of thinking about the earth and its processes of change, this theory was most influential in its holistic view of nature, that influence and control is exerted on the relationships existing between all natural components (Mannion & Bowlby, pp.11, 13).

It was no coincidence that the appearance of the Gaia hypothesis coincided with the "flower-power" political activism of the 1960s. The proliferation of the Cold War and nuclear weapons, Vietnam, and increasing pollution levels were all instrumental in fostering a distrust in advancing technology and a sense of alienation from the natural world. Peace movements were closely linked to environmental or "green" movements, and caused enough attention to elicit more inquiry into environmental problems. By the 1970s, when a

glut of information on environmental issues sparked unprecedented public concern, environmental pressure groups and Green Parties surfaced in many European countries (Bowlby & Lowe, p.165). By this stage there remained little consciousness of the Christian directive to control nature, indeed of any relevance between religion and nature.

Discussion

The proliferation of scientific theories explaining our existence has caused us to view the universe as a system of whirling matter governed by physical and mathematical laws. In effect, Descartes' vision has been realized. The lexicon we use today to describe our relationship with the earth ("bioethics," "social justice," or "appropriate technology") replaces that of an earlier era shaped by Christianity ("subdue," "dominate," or "control") and reflects a shift in consciousness from humanity in opposition to nature, to humanity rooted in it. In response to this, and to the changing needs of industrializing societies, the Christian Church has undergone a gradual transformation as well. Criticisms of the Church's prior condemnations of nature, amidst outcries for human salvation by saving the earth, have put the Christian establishment on the defensive and sent it scrambling to clarify, or rectify, its position. Even in the notoriously conservative Catholic Church, Biblical interpretations and once popularly cited references have been revised to advertise a more ecological bent. Perhaps speaking to his own constituents as much as anybody, in 1989 Pope John Paul II declared that "people everywhere are coming to understand that we can not continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past," and that we have "a serious obligation to care for all of creation" (Gore, p.262). In keeping with environmentalism's attention to bioethics and social justice, the Pope also identified "man's moral crisis" as the source of current ecological problems (p.263).

But the Cartesian vision and the science it yielded can not be given all the credit, or blame, for these developments. The naturalists' idea of spirituality through nature was instrumental in providing people with a new way to think about their own connection to the Cosmos. And, the sense of dislocation and alienation from nature which arose out of the all-too-sudden sociological changes of "advancement" instilled a longing for reunion with Mother Earth.

Asians might snicker at the West's theological shift from reverence for the human race to reverence for biodiversity, ecosystems, the atmosphere, oceans, and the balance between these elements. The "enlightenment" of 20th century science has, after all, only affirmed the principles that Buddhism, Confucianism and other Eastern religions have been practicing for millennia, namely that humans and their environment are inseparable. To state that views of nature in the East and West are merging, however, is to ignore the determinism of sociological evolution, for the rise of Western science could only have been born out of the Christian doctrines which it eventually eclipsed. There is no mistake that Western technology is a manifestation of the Christian license giving humanity domination over nature. In fact, as technology has empowered individuals to realize their every whim, it has had the inestimable effect of distancing them further from nature's

laws and processes. With Western technology becoming the enlightened ideal of the entire world, the effects of this phenomenon on Japanese populations will be one of the questions addressed in the next section.

Japan

Western investigations into nature/religion opposition are rarely able to sustain any discussion of Asian countries for more than a few pages. Efforts to define the blending of nature with Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, or Shinto are predictably repetitive and appear superficial or shoddily-researched. They seem to be included only to lend perspective to much longer and more complex examinations of nature and Christianity in the West, or slipped into the text for exotic flavoring. Considering the interest in Eastern philosophy which has spread through the West in the last three decades, poor research or lagging demand for sociological, ecological, or religious information about Asian countries is not a likely explanation. Rather, the nature of this opposition in Asia may be comparatively simple, requiring only a few pages to fully explore what Christianity requires a book for.

Simplicity is the foundation of many Asian religions. They are ancient, contain a wealth of scriptural resources, are theistically complex enough to provide for all the spiritual and mundane needs of a civilization, yet the backbone of these religions is a view of a world with a simple order, where people have simple responsibilities. Not surprisingly, there are strong parallels between Asian belief systems about nature, and without exception these are closely tied to the fabric of religion. In Hinduism, for example, there is a history of non-injury, or *ahimsa*, to all animate or inanimate things, providing people with a built-in environmental protection mechanism. In accordance, Ghandi advocated vegetarianism and a simple lifestyle so that human populations would take a minimal toll on the earth. Buddhism also encourages vegetarianism and a life of low-impact on natural surroundings. This involves adapting to the rhythms of the cosmos rather than changing them to fit us, the rationale being that there exists a unity which must be maintained between humans, animals and the rest of nature. Shinto is similar in its nature-consciousness, non-duality of humans and nature, and lack of division between subject and object. For the Japanese, the expression *mono no aware o shiru*, or "feel the pathos of nature," is indicative of the interfusion of humanity and nature, and how the *kokoro*, "heart/mind," permeates external objects. In Islam too, the earth is the gift of Allah and during their temporary existence people are to be its stewards. To be favorably judged after death requires just action toward the environment during life (Simmons, pp.132-3).

In all of these cases, the self is submerged in the natural world, and as nature can not be objectified an environmental ethic becomes a matter of course. The concept of rights, human or natural, in the West is absent in Eastern religion and philosophy. Whereas for Western people things are ascribed some intrinsic value, and therefore given rights, in the East things are endowed with a spirit, an element of divinity, and so have significance in the universe (Nash, p.113). Called *dharma* by Buddhists and *kami* by

Shintoists, this essence cements the oneness of all nature's components.

In early Japan there were no consistent explanations of nature nor of the processes of human life and death. The word *shizen*, or nature, did not even exist in ancient Japanese. Instead, terms like *ametsuchi* (heaven and earth) and *ikitoshi ikerumono* (living things), found in the *Nihon Shoki*, reflected the belief that people and all things were, as children, umbilically connected to the earth. In sharp contrast to Genesis, the Shinto story of creation tells of Izanagi and Izanami, born of the sun god Amaterasu, creating the islands, the natural features and divinities of Japan, but not its human inhabitants. Humans sprang out of the natural processes which govern the world. *Shizen*, literally meaning a mode of personal being, appeared later, and the existence of a natural order as understood today was not embraced until the Meiji Period, when confrontation with Western views of the world first spawned the concept of an objectified natural world.

The degree to which nonduality permeated ancient Japanese civilizations can not be fully appreciated judging from the country's post-feudal culture. Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), perhaps the first Westerner to fully penetrate and record interpretations of Japanese religion, asserts that in old Japan the welfare of the dead heavily influenced the lives of the living. An act of moral wrong-doing or behavior transgressing the bounds of social obligation to ancestors would provoke the *kami*, bringing on some form of public misfortune. To this extent, he says, "the ghosts of ancestors controlled nature" (Hearn, p.106).

Traditionally, every town had an *Ujigami* — originally meaning the ghost of the first patriarchal ancestor of the *Uji*, or clan-family, but later serving as a reference for the deity of the town or city district — to which all community members, or *Ujiko*, were expected to regularly pay their respects at the local shrine. The *Ujigami* was a centerpiece for the community and each individual shouldered the lifetime responsibility for maintaining a strong relationship with it. When a child is born it is taken to the local shrine and its name registered under the protection of the *Ujigami*. Thereafter, the *Ujiko* will visit the shrine on holy days, celebrate annual festivals with the rest of the community, and continue to pay obeisance regularly (pp.84-5).

The individual is therefore closely linked to a number of deities. It is an *Ujiko*, a spiritual descendent of the clan which rules the district and a parishioner of the *Ujigami*; as the child of its own bloodline, it is responsible for the continuing appeasement of the ancestral spirits; and as a human being in the natural world, it is subject to the blessings and cruelties of the pantheon of deities existing in the surrounding natural elements. While they weave a common ethic among the members of a family and community, these bonds to the spiritual and natural worlds explain and give meaning to human life.

Boundaries between the living and ethereal worlds are thin and clouded. Family ancestors and *Ujigami* were once mortals, now separated only by death. Some particularly revered living mortals can also take on a god-like status within the community. This tenuous line between mortal and god creates and preserves a closeness with the natural world which was a part of the moral fabric of human life in Japan. And, as previously mentioned, inherent in this closeness is a perceived mysteriousness in the world which

hasn't been present in Western cultures since Judaism introduced monotheism.

Buddhism both complicated and clarified the equation. While Shinto did not attempt to answer many of the questions of the world, merely identifying the elements within it and their relationships to each other, Buddhism gave meaning to it all. For the first time there appeared explanations of the mysteries surrounding life and death, which illuminated the nature of the misery and happiness of living. To die was not to forever wander the earth as a ghost, but transmigration, rebirth to shoulder the consequences of the previous life. All circumstances are consequences of the past, and life was just one more step on an endless road (Hearn, p.195). The Japanese mind, consequently, came to see the human being as a cog in the gears of nature. Human life itself is a cycle of death and rebirth, interspersed with periods of disembodied spirituality or godliness. The individual, therefore, is nature itself, interchangeable with a mountain, a bird which nests nearby, and a cloud which rains down on them. Any consideration of one is a reflection onto the other.

Clearly, to think of Japanese religion is to think of nature, and perhaps vice versa as well. Eastern and Western perspectives seem to agree that the Japanese are a nature-loving people who have preserved a culture rich in time-honored "naturalness." Famed haiku poet Basho Matsuo (1644-1694) writes:

Make the universe your companion, always bearing in mind the true nature of all creation — mountains and rivers, trees and grasses, and humanity (McLuhan, p.117).

And Zen Buddhist scholar Suzuki Daisetsu:

... the Japanese mind is so attached to the earth that it would not forget, however mean they may be, the grasses growing under the feet (p.117).

Monks were naturalists, as to embrace Buddhism was to embrace nature, and conversely to live in the wild was to be immersed in spirituality.

The meeting of the human spirit and the spirit of nature is described as the essence of Japanese aesthetics. The intricacies and refinement of Japanese gardens, flower arrangement, tea ceremony, painting, poetry and other art forms is achieved by "a balancing of forces which appeals to the emotions, a unity of a meeting of spirit" (McLuhan, p.134). Philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro states that this "meeting of spirit" is not merely fuel for artistic expression, it defines the make-up of both humans and the natural landscape in which they live: "... the characteristics of nature should be understood as related to the spiritual make-up of those who live with that nature. ... while the Greeks sensed through sight, the Japanese saw through sense" (p.134). Reflecting on a grove of pines surrounding a temple, Watsuji elaborates on this point in his book *Pilgrimages to Old Temples* (1919):

Nor can we, by even the furthest stretch of imagination, conceive that a Gothic

cathedral would in any way match with the gently sloping curves of these graceful pine branches. Such buildings should only be contemplated in conjunction with the towns and cities, forests and fields of their respective lands. Just so do our Buddhist temples have something intimately connected with and inseparable from the characteristic features of our native shores (p.137).

It is hard to support the argument that Japanese affinity to nature is the result of some uniqueness in the countryside. The links between culture and landscape are well-documented, but clearly can not fully explain a people's understanding of nature. At least as influential was ancient Japan's dependence on agriculture, out of which Shinto emerged. Families were bound to the land, which was presided over by the *Tanokami*, or rice paddy deity, and to ancestors, whose spirits also overlooked the crops. To own land was to be assured of security and the continuance of the family, and this continues to be rooted in Japanese consciousness today (p.147).

Dharma and Sentience

Much of the previous discussion of nature and Christianity centered around the ordering of the godly, human, and animal or natural worlds, identifying exactly what the responsibility of the human race was within this framework, and determining how these constructs may have shaped the attitudes of Western civilizations with respect to nature and the environment. But the formidable task of untangling opposing traditions is not limited to Christianity. In Asia, too, religions have emerged, migrated, melded with others to form new hybrids, and layers of scriptural interpretations have clouded any once clear understanding of the natural, human, and spiritual worlds. In Japan particularly, where Shinto, an evolved Buddhism, Confucianism and later Christianity have been stirred together for centuries into a theistic mudpie, attempts to extract the roots of Japanese beliefs are always open to debate.

One such question surrounds the orthodox Buddhist contention that nonsentient elements of the natural world are unable to attain enlightenment. The Buddha-nature, or *Dharma*, the divine seed inherent in all creatures giving them the capacity to attain Buddhahood, it claims, is not present in plants or other non-rational entities. Obviously, this notion flatly contradicts the entire basis of the animistic Shinto tradition, already long-standing when Buddhism was first introduced to Japan in the 6th century. In spite of this, and the fact that the concept of nonsentient Buddhahood was debated among Buddhists up through the Muromachi period, deep-rooted Shinto understandings of the nature of humanity and the universe were preserved and largely incorporated into Japanese Buddhism.

William Grosnick highlights the varying interpretations of Buddhist scriptures as a major source of these debates. One such example is seen in the "Medicinal Herbs" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, wherein the Buddha is compared to "a great rain cloud which 'rains down on all grasses, trees, shrubs and forests, and medicinal herbs,' providing life-sustaining moisture for them all, without distinction" (Grosnick, pp.199-200). While the

sutra uses this rain cloud metaphor to show that the Buddha proclaims the Dharma to all people, without regard for status, goodness or morality, some have chosen to interpret it literally, arguing that Buddha is raining it down upon all things, without distinction for sentience (p.200). A more commonly cited example is traced, erroneously Grosnick claims, from the *Chuingyo* (Antarabhava Sutra).

When a single Buddha attains the Way,
And contemplates the Dharma-realm,
The grasses, the trees and the land
All becomes Buddha.

Though it was apparently in existence beforehand, this passage is first seen in the 12th century in a writing by Shoshin, who was actually using it to *oppose* the concept of nonsentient Buddhahood. Nonetheless, Buddhists as well as authors of Noh plays, which commonly adhere to the idea, have seen it as evidence that plants are capable of enlightenment and therefore must possess a Buddha-nature, a soul, or a *kokoro*. In fact, reference to the presence of *kokoro* in plants is seen elsewhere in Japanese Buddhist writings, and the enlightenment of plants is an important recurring theme in Noh plays (Grosnick, p.201).

As suggested earlier, the prevailing explanation is Shinto animism, which can not tolerate any notion of dualism between humans, animals, plants, and other natural forces. All the major writings of philosophy, religion, or poetry and literature (the *Nihongi*, the *Manyoshu*, the *Kojiki*, the *Engishiki*) give accounts of *kami* interacting with humans and displaying distinctly human behavior (p.202).

As their primary purpose was to establish a fertile bed for their doctrines to take root and spread, early Buddhist monks bringing the religion to Japan didn't quibble over Shinto-inspired alterations which compromised theistic purity. Shinto nondualism, in fact, was remarkably well-suited to the Buddhist conception of enlightenment, the essence of which was oneness with all. If, as in the scripture cited above, "The grasses, the trees and the land; All becomes Buddha," then Buddha must also become them, and everything else in the universe. Oneness includes not only a mutual understanding of the intellect and the senses with all things, but full internal possession. From the Shinto standpoint, this idea only reaffirms the numerous accounts of god-possession in myths and literature, where humans or other creatures are inhabited by a *kami*.

Dogen, revered Zen master from the Kamakura period, identified the nonduality of the Buddha and all else, the enlightened mind and its objects, as the only important consideration. In other words, as union is fully mutual, enlightenment is as meaningful for the individual as for "the grasses and the trees," making any distinction between them impossible, and any sentient-nonsentient debates invalid. Grosnick cites Dogen's *Sansuikyo* (The Scripture of the Mountains and the Water) as showing that "'outer' things are not necessarily to be regarded as nonsentient, and 'inner' things are not necessarily to be regarded as sentient: 'The green mountains are neither sentient being nor nonsentient being. One's own self is neither sentient being nor nonsentient being'" (p.206).

Two ecological implications can be gleaned from this argument and from the prevailing precepts of Japanese Buddhism. The most obvious is that the natural world is full of spiritual and divine entities which are linked to and constantly interacting with human life. The Buddhist understanding of life as suffering is therefore naturally extended to include all things in the animal, plant, and mineral worlds, requiring an essentially universal compassion. In this sense, nature must necessarily be respected as sacred, worshipped and preserved. The second invokes the nature of Buddhist enlightenment as characterized by a joining with all things. This relationship uncovers an ultimate truth about humans as inseparable from their environment, intrinsically implying that respect or love that we feel for anything is a reflection on all of nature, as there can be no distinction between the one and the whole (p.207).

“Being Japanese is itself a kind of religion.”

As in many areas of Japanese society, the evolution of thought about nature was drastically rerouted by Western influences embraced during the Meiji Period. As prescribed by Buddhism and Shinto, people had traditionally taken a position of deep humility before the natural world and lifestyles largely reflected an attitude of non-interference, precluding the possibility of the human race permanently destroying the environment. Yet in the frenzy to “catch up,” Japan’s Western-style industrialization program unwittingly included completely foreign attitudes about nature, namely that science and technology are given license by the superiority of humanity over the earth. The prospect of opportunity was so vivid in the public consciousness that the Japanese sense of smallness before nature was glazed over and the essence of religion—submersion in nature—and its importance in daily life were eclipsed. Many saw an urban lifestyle as the enlightened goal of society, which should strive to outgrow the stagnant traditions of feudal times. Adverse spiritual effects of abrupt sociological reprogramming are evident in all areas of the world, but they appear to be especially noteworthy in Japan. Several Japanese and Western scholars have examined this issue, most succinctly identified by poet and farmer, Fukuoka Masanobu: “The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings ... When he parts from the land, man is no longer able to maintain the stability of heart” (McLuhan, pp. 148-9).

From Rice Paddy to Ski Slope, Opkyo Moon’s ethnography of Hanasaku, a farming town in Gunma Prefecture, shows how peoples’ connection to nature helped to preserve a strong, unified community, and how this was compromised by the opportunities afforded by industrialization. The young moved to the cities to look for work, or took jobs in the ski industry in town. Prosperous farmers bought machinery, upsetting the agricultural alliances and systems of shared labor which had long existed between neighbors. Free mass labor also disappeared. Moon reports that because of the limited availability of *kaya* (miscanthus) reeds used to thatch roofs, access to it was limited to two family members, two days each year. From its supply collected during these two days, a household would have to contribute a portion to the one house selected each year to be

thatched by the community. Yet certain families reroofed with tile, removing themselves from the need to receive and give communal favors, and undermining the system of mass labor and communal unity. Peoples' connection to nature, and to each other, was severed and the community became fragmented (Moon, pp.67-9).

The personal, inter-personal and communal chaos caused by such transformations in rural areas indicates the importance of nature to the Japanese understanding of self, which both Japanese and Western scholars have shown as rooted in nature. Jennifer Robertson explains the term *furusato*, literally "old village," as tied to feelings of nostalgia for the perceived comfort and safety of nature in the countryside, where the *kokoro* is set at peace. She sees crowding, pollution and other problems characteristic of urban lifestyles as instrumental in creating a longing for the safety and simplicity of the *furusato* (Robertson, p.22). As the term is seen to represent concepts of nature, and therefore religion, we can understand the relationship between Japanese and their notions of what is safe and simple as highly correlated to what is "natural." Consequently, shifts from rural to urban or agricultural to industrial lifestyles imbue individuals with the psychological tension of being misplaced or alienated from the "good wife, wise mother" constituted by the natural world. In the early 1970s, when the Oil Shocks marked the start of widespread public concern about the consequences of economic development, especially the problems of urbanization, people came to identify with the natural aspects of their past, and to support the notion that natural forces are the "original forces that nurture the Japanese sense of aesthetics, have nurtured it in the past and will nurture it in the future" (Shiga Shigetaka in Robertson, p.17).

Watsuji Tetsuro attempts to shed light on these human/nature ties in *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*. He saw the natural environment, which he chose to call "climate," as the principle means through which humans understand the self. Climate can not be conceived of as separate from human life, or history, and as it determines the clothing, food, art, livelihoods, and all other forms of culture, it also shapes reality. It is because of this that humans can not divorce themselves from nature (Watsuji, p.5-8).

This being the case, it stands to reason that any sort of rapid development which alters the elements of culture but not the elements of the individual or the community, will leave the latter dislocated, without means of self-identification. In urban settings, where climate is either controlled or limited, individuals are stripped of this historical connection. Nostalgia for a natural environment, humanly natural because of climatic naturalness, and aversion to the city are attitudes which grow out of this dislocation. The phenomenon can be conceived of as community culture shock.

Dislocation occurs at a different level in the case of those who learn to understand themselves through an urban reality, as for example those born into it. Watsuji calls this "climatic limitation."

... clothes, food and the like, as being tools, assume climatic character;
but ... if man is already suffering climatic limitation when he attains self-compre-
hension, then the character of climate cannot but become the character of this
self-understanding (p.15).

The source of alienation for the climatically limited, therefore, occurs when they offset this notion of self with the notion of being Japanese, which is grounded in an affinity to the natural elements. As not only traditional forms of culture but also the historical reality of a people are constructed from climatic conditions, individuals or communities which can not relate to them will find deep-seated dislocation within the self. This view of the nature/human relationship gives philosophical support to Robertson's argument that the former is a force which nurtures and provides spiritual peace and stability for the latter.

Moon shows one example of a shift away from nature due to industrialization and urbanization, and Robertson and Watsuji explain the dislocation which results. This is a dislocation from the self — from nature — which extends to an alienation from religion. According to this argument, it appears that nature/religion opposition in modern Japanese society exists within two separate levels of consciousness: the old (animistic), and new (dualistic).

When asked about the effects of this development on Japanese religion, one Buddhist monk answered, "Shinto and Buddhism have not quarreled with technology, development or militarism. They have been very flexible. Japan has shown a unique tendency to avoid any great strain between the pull of religion and the push of the modern age." And questioned about any danger of religion dying out, answered: "Being Japanese is itself a kind of religion" (Engel & Engel, p.217).

While this statement may ring true in the hearts of many Japanese, the problem of defining exactly what constitutes "being Japanese" is certainly not as easily identified as it was one hundred, or even twenty years ago. The pattern of non-confrontation characteristic of Buddhism and Shinto was reflected in Japanese attitudes about the environment and became an underlying cause of unprecedented environmental degradation. It was only in the late 1960s, when the integrity of peoples' immediate living space became dangerously contaminated, that there was any reflection upon the human being and nature as opposable entities. While religion and tradition maintain their tenuous places in "being Japanese," the understanding of nature as objectified and manipulatable has been embraced in the last thirty years, fully aligning Japanese and Western nature consciousness.

Discussion

Religion's relevance to nature wanes as science provides people with building blocks to construct a new understanding of the physical world. The concept of human homelessness clearly illustrates this progression.

Idealized by religions in many cultures, a feeling of homelessness is an important reflection of human ambivalence toward physical existence. The renunciation of the family and home for a detached, wandering lifestyle in search of union with the divine is a common theme in the scriptures, teachings or hymns of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and many other faiths (Haught, pp.27-9). In the Western interpretation, homelessness is exile, whereas in the East it is a search for oneness. In either case, the

state of natural permanence is undesirable and the directive to transcend is actually one to sever connections with living reality.

To a large degree, a proclivity for human homelessness in Western science and philosophy seems to have replaced this religious one. Materialism, a theory which explains all reality as matter, gives scientific perspective to human detachment. According to materialism, the only concrete aspects of the universe are "primary qualities" (mass, momentum, shape, position). "Secondary qualities" (color, taste, sound, smell, texture) require a perceiving subject and are therefore not objective and less real. This means that the importance of nature is only what we assign it through our perceptions. As all is our projection, we as humans are exiled from the rest of the Cosmos. Even philosophically and psychologically we adhere to a post-modern objectivity against what is constructed by humans. In order to identify anything we must stand detached from it. Existentialism, too, explains our instinct for homelessness as the need for freedom. Human subjectivity and morality is boundless and separate from the determined order of the natural world. Freedom can only be obtained outside of the determinisms of unfree nature, and so we turn to Christianity for the liberated homelessness we need in order to feel satisfaction (Haught, pp.30, 35).

For the Western populace, religious, scientific and philosophical aspects of civilization compose the backbone of socialization and constitute at one (generally submerged) level of consciousness a separation from nature. Even while today's environmentalism, born out of scientific discovery and popularized as a political issue, buries this predilection under a superficial layer of eco-consciousness, nature/human duality will continue as long as there is no ethical revolution within these institutions. As White concludes: "Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not" (White, p.14).

In Japan also, the human relationship to nature has been redefined by economic and technological development. In pre-Meiji times, Zen Buddhism and Shinto combined to form one of history's most environmentally submissive philosophies which "encouraged people to value the quality of their surroundings to a degree probably unsurpassed by any other human group" (Simmons, p.13). Yet this consciousness has also become submerged, blanketed by Western-style growth and the environmental countermeasures needed to clean it up. We can no longer take a view of the Japanese as "ecological saints" for whom, as Buddhist scholar Suzuki Daisetsu claims, "the idea of nature's conquest is abhorrant" (McLuhan, p.177). Modern lifestyles no longer require dependence on religion nor the attachment to nature tied to it. As in the West, the concept of nature has largely lost its religious foundation and become more molded around scientific knowledge and information fed us by the media.

The result is a dual consciousness emerging in both East and West, moving away from theologically or spiritually defined conceptions of nature, toward a more universal and reified understanding of it. Gratefully, to the degree that culture and nature reflect on each other, respective views of the natural world will never fully merge. Yet it appears that the only hope of reestablishing human reverence and theological connectedness to it exist in whatever traces of spirituality or mystery remain.

Bibliography

- Aristotle. "[From] Politics." Lori Gruen & Dale Jamieson (eds.). *Reflecting on Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Bianchi, Eugene. "Psychospirituality: The Ecological Matrix." Michael Barnes (ed.). *An Ecology of the Spirit*. Lanham, Maryland: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1994.
- Black, Walter. "Nature." in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York: Walter J. Black, Inc.
- Bowlby, S.R. & M.S. Lowe. "Environmental and Green Movements." A.M. Mannion & S.R. Bowlby (eds.). *Environmental Issues in the 1990s*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1992.
- Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method; Meditations*. New York: Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1960.
- Engel, J. Ronald & Joan Gibb Engel (eds.). *Ethics of Environment and Development: Global Challenge, International Response*. London: Belhaven Press, 1990.
- Haight, John. "Religion and the Origins of the Environmental Crisis." Michael Barnes (ed.). *An Ecology of the Spirit*. Lanham, Maryland: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1994.
- Hearn, Lafcadio. *Japan: An Interpretation*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1955.
- "[From] Genesis." Lori Gruen & Dale Jamieson (eds.). *Reflecting on Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Gore, Al. *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*. New York: Plume, 1993.
- Grosnick, "The Buddhahood of the Grasses and the Trees: Ecological Sensitivity or Scriptural Misunderstanding?" Michael Barnes (ed.). *An Ecology of the Spirit*. Lanham, Maryland: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1994.
- Leopold, Aldo. "[From] The Land Ethic." Lori Gruen & Dale Jamieson (eds.). *Reflecting on Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Mannion, A.M & S.R. Bowlby. *Environmental Issues in the 1990s*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1992.
- McLeod, Fred. "Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Gift from the Sea* as a Religious Myth." Michael Barnes (ed.). *An Ecology of the Spirit*. Lanham, Maryland: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1994.
- McLuhan, T.C. *The Way of the Earth: Encounters with Nature in Ancient and Contemporary Thought*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Moon, Opkyo. *From Rice Paddy to Ski Slope*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1989.
- Nash, Roderick. *The Rights of Nature*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Robertson, Jennifer. *Native and Newcomer: Making and Remaking a Japanese City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Simmons, I.G. *Interpreting Nature: Cultural Constructions of the Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Tilley, Maureen. "Martyrs, Monks, Insects and Animals." Michael Barnes (ed.). *An Ecology of the Spirit*. Lanham, Maryland: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1994.
- Watsuji, Tetsuro. *A Climate: A Psychological Study*. Transl. by Geoffrey Bownas, Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Japan, 1961.
- White, Lynn Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." Michael Barnes (ed.). *An Ecology of the Spirit*. Lanham, Maryland: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1994.

(W.Puck Brecher 講師)
(1994. 12. 19 受理)