



# RELIGIOUS NATURALISM TODAY

The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative

Jerome A. Stone

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The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative

Jerome A. Stone

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I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed*, iii

Our responsibility to our forefathers is only to consult them, not to obey them. Our responsibility to our descendants is only to impart our most cherished experiences to them, but not to command them.

—Mordecai Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, p. 98

A humanistic religion, if it excludes our relation to nature, is pale and thin, as it is presumptuous, when it takes humanity as an object of worship.

—John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 54

To my friends in  
Collegium, the Highlands Institute,  
IRAS, Meadville-Lombard Theological School,  
Unity Temple UU Congregation, the Unitarian Church of Evanston,  
and everyone fighting for the Chicago Wilderness

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## Foreword

In *Religious Naturalism Today*, Jerome Stone has accomplished several things at one and the same time. His subtitle points straightforwardly to the most obvious—the author has provided an enormously useful and detailed map of what he considers to be a “forgotten” religious alternative. In his sketches—some lengthy, some very brief—he brings several dozen thinkers to our attention, interprets their contributions, and assures the future of this work as an indispensable vademecum for religious naturalism. In this respect, this book serves as a kind of Baedeker, a guide for visitors to a region of mind and spirit that while it is strange to most readers, is beloved for others.

There is more to Stone’s achievement in this volume: nature and naturalism are for us today urgent subjects for religious reflection. If we recount the ways in which the last two centuries of scientific knowledge have impacted our lives, what will top the list? The recognition that nature is constitutive of who and what we are as human beings. Whether or not we believe that there is something more, nature is so significant that all our beliefs must be reformulated so as to take nature into account. Whether it is our view of the world, our image of ourselves, or our beliefs about God—everything must be rethought in response to our knowledge of how deeply we are rooted in natural processes. Science has reimaged nature for us in ways so profound that we still have yet to take its measure. We know that nature is no longer “out there” or “over against us.” It is deeply within us; nature is who we are.

This being so, the question of considering nature *religiously* or *spiritually* obviously assumes a central place on the human agenda. Jerome Stone recognizes this, and the trend of thought that he surveys, religious naturalism, is important for all of us, whether or not we locate ourselves within the stream that this book charts

Stone has presented his work as invitation, offering readers access to a conversation, not as a manifesto or set of dicta that require obeisance. He himself has made decisions among alternative possibilities in ways

that enable us to retrace his process and make our own decisions. Is it possible or necessary to hold to a concept of God within this *natural* worldview? If so, what ideas about God are commensurable with the new worldview? How is sacrality defined in this framework? What spaces or values can count as sacred? Can we find both power and goodness in nature? Must we view nature as impervious, unconcerned with human values? Must we accept nature as we find it or should it be transformed? Is there grace within the framework of religious naturalism? What does it mean to be *religious* in a naturalistic mode? These are the kinds of questions that Jerome Stone has raised and the responses to which he maps in this book. Since he shares his own journey of insight and response with us in these pages, he encourages us to wrestle with the same questions and formulate our own responses—whether or not we finally name ourselves with his name of religious naturalism.

Vademecum—go with me, be my companion, journey with me. This book is an ideal companion and guide, the perfect example of a vademecum for traversing a great and urgent spiritual landscape.

Philip Hefner  
Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus  
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

## Preface

Religious naturalism, a once-forgotten option in religious thinking, is making a revival. It seeks to explore and encourage religious ways of responding to the world on a completely naturalistic basis without a supreme being or ground of being.

Who are the religious naturalists? Historical roots go back at least to Spinoza. Former religious naturalists included George Santayana, Samuel Alexander, John Dewey, Roy Wood Sellars, John Herman Randall, Mordecai Kaplan, Ralph Burhoe, founder of *Zygon*, and such Chicago theologians as Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Meland, and the later Bernard Loomer. Recent religious naturalists include William Dean, Willem Drees, Ursula Goodenough, Charley Hardwick, Henry Levinson, Karl Peters, myself, and perhaps Gordon Kaufman. Several articles in the 2000 issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* are on religious naturalism.

While its origins may be traced back to Spinoza, this study starts in the early twentieth century with George Santayana and Samuel Alexander.

What might be called the classic period of religious naturalism starts with George Santayana's *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* in 1900 (Santayana, 1989). There followed a florescence of writings in the religious naturalist vein, largely but not exclusively in the United States. These writings were philosophical, theological and literary. This period lasted for almost half a century until Henry Nelson Wieman published *The Source of Human Good* in 1946 and then left the Divinity School of the University of Chicago the following year (Wieman 1946). There followed a hiatus until Bernard Loomer's *The Size of God* was published in 1987. (It had been presented in 1978.) During this hiatus religious naturalism, when mentioned at all, was viewed largely as a quaint relic of the past. Randolph Crump Miller of Yale, who taught a course in Naturalism or Empirical Theology at Yale Divinity School, was like a voice crying in the wilderness (Miller 1974). Since the publication of Loomer's essay, however, there has been a rebirth of religious naturalism. There have

been a number of publications by and studies of religious naturalists and, significantly, the movement has found various institutional homes.

The purpose of this book is to trace this story and to analyze some of the issues dividing these religious naturalists, issues which a religious naturalist must face. My hope is threefold: that people casting about for a credible religious outlook might be aware of this approach and to realize that here is a tradition with immense religious and conceptual resources, that religious naturalists might face some of the issues dividing us, and finally that everyone might realize that there is a new major dialogue partner in the chorus of religious and theological voices.

One issue facing religious people with a naturalist outlook is whether the object of our religious orientation is the whole of the universe or a part of it, such as a creative process within it or the sum of creative and challenging factors. A second is whether we can reconceive the idea of God within a naturalistic framework and if so, what attitude should be taken toward it. Third, whether the object of the religious orientation has the quality of power or goodness, is morally ambiguous or determinate. Likewise, should our religious response be awe toward the whole, aspiration to grow toward the lure of goodness, or something more complex. Again, what sources of religious insight does naturalism explore, the world as understood scientifically or by an appreciative perception? What role do religious traditions play? Finally, what is it like to act and feel as a naturalist with religious leanings?

Any religious position today must be judged at least in part by its potential for empowerment and liberation. Generally speaking, religious naturalism has not grown out of a context of struggle for caste, gender, or class justice. However, it does have emancipatory significance in at least two respects. First, it represents the dismantling of the oppressive aspects of traditional theism. Not only that, it articulates an alternative religious stance which is at least as fulfilling and definitely more empowering than much traditional theism. Second, by being more in tune with the approaches and results of the sciences, it challenges the authoritative stance of some of the more religiously oriented conservative political and social movements. These two points are not insignificant. In addition, as readers of this volume will discover, specific religious naturalists have been especially focused on questions of social justice and individual empowerment.

The overall division of this volume falls naturally into two periods, before and after the thirty-plus year hiatus between 1946 and 1987. Part one deals with the birth of religious naturalism, from Santayana to Wieman. Chapter 1 deals with the philosophers who developed this viewpoint: Santayana, Samuel Alexander, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Roy Wood Sellars, and John Herman Randall. Chapter 2 presents

the views of theologians: the early Chicago school (George Burman Foster, Gerald Birney, Shailer Mathews, and Edward Scribner Ames), the humanists, the Unitarian Frederick May Eliot, and the later Chicago school (Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Meland, Bernard Loomer, and Ralph Burhoe), Mordecai Kaplan and Jack Cohen. Chapter 3 analyzes some of the issues debated between these early naturalists and presents a variety of attempts to develop a naturalist view of the mind. Too recently published to study are Richard Carrier's *Sense and Goodness Without God*, André Comte-Sponville's *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, Michael Dowd's *Thank God for Evolution*, and Robert C. Solomon's *Spirituality for the Skeptic*.

With the exception of the Interlude, this book will mainly study philosophers and theologians. This is partly a result of the limitations of the author's training, in part because a number of theologians and philosophers have been religious naturalists. It does mean that there will be a variety of source materials, such as that explored by Catherine Albanese in *Nature Religion in America*, which will not be utilized in this study.

The Interlude between the first and second parts briefly explores religious naturalism in literature. Part Two depicts the rebirth of religious naturalism following Loomer's presentation of "The Size of God." Over twenty current writers are presented. Chapter 4 analyzes three different sources of religious insight among contemporary religious naturalists, including experiences of grace and obligation, nature both as appreciated and as the object of scientific study, and the hermeneutics of religious and literary traditions. Contested issues are discussed in chapter 5, including whether nature's power or goodness is the focus of attention and also on the appropriateness of using the term "God." Chapter 6 sketches the contributions of other recent religious naturalists. Chapter 7 ends the study by exploring what it is like on the inside to live as a religious naturalist.

Since finishing the manuscript for this book I have discovered that George Riggan, former Professor of Systematic Theology at Hartford Seminary Foundation, can be read as a religious naturalist (Riggan 1973, 473–480) and that Owen Flanagan has an excellent discussion of naturalism in recent American philosophy (Flanagan 2006, 430–452).

I have discussed portions of this book with most of the living writers who share this view and am deeply indebted to their criticisms and encouragement. Thanks to William Dean for inspiring me, Charles Milligan for help with Bernhardt, Emanuel Goldsmith for help with Kaplan, Donald Crosby, Cedric Heppler, Nancy Hutton, and Henry Levinson for their kindnesses in research. Creighton Peden has been a constant inspiration and guide. Tim Philbin of William Rainey Harper

College and also the Interlibrary Loan Department of Riverside Public Library have been most helpful in securing books and articles. The academic community owes a deep debt to Nancy Ellegate and Allison Lee of SUNY Press for their work.

## Introduction

# What Is Religious Naturalism?

### Defining Religious Naturalism

Religious naturalism is a type of naturalism (Stone 2000). Hence we start with naturalism. This is 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. 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 for us to cope. The term “nature,” of course, has many meanings. I take it that here nature includes the worlds of culture and human history.

Religious naturalism is the type of naturalism which affirms a set of beliefs and attitudes that there are religious aspects of this world which can be appreciated within a naturalistic framework. There are some events or processes in our experience that elicit responses that can appropriately be called religious. These experiences and responses are similar enough to those nurtured by the paradigm cases of religion that they may be called religious without stretching the word beyond recognition. (This is adapted from Stone 1993. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* has a number of articles by religious naturalists in the 2000 volume.) As Charles Milligan, lifelong student of American religious naturalism, puts it, by religious naturalism “I take to be any naturalistic world view or philosophy in which religious thought, values and commitments hold an important and not merely incidental part. Or perhaps more simply, where religious discourse plays an integral role” (Milligan 1999).

One of the best definitions of naturalism is that of Arthur C. Danto in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. “Naturalism, in recent usage, is a species of philosophical monism according to which whatever exists or happens is *natural* in the sense of being susceptible to explanation through methods which, although paradigmatically exemplified in the natural sciences, are continuous from domain to domain of objects and events. Hence, naturalism is polemically defined as repudiating the view that there exists or could exist any entities or events which lie, in principle, beyond the scope of scientific explanation” (Danto 1967, 448). Personally, I place great emphasis on the phrase “in principle,” since there are many things that science does not now explain. And perhaps we need some natural piety concerning the ontological limit question as to why there is anything at all. But the idea that naturalism is a polemical notion is important.

One of the difficulties in giving a definition of religious naturalism is that it has classically been defined as the opposite of “supernaturalism.” However, many theologians today repudiate the notion of the supernatural. Nevertheless, as I try to show below, in contrast to naturalists of a religious orientation, these theologians refer to a dimension of reality which is other than the natural world. Many contemporary religious naturalists accept the term “naturalism” and I have continued to employ the term, despite difficulties in giving a degree of theoretical precision to the term. Furthermore, many religious naturalists find a congenial working relationship with some of these theologians because of a common interest in the processes of this world. It should be noted that the contrast term to “natural” in “naturalism” is not “culture” or “artificial.”

Charley Hardwick, whose *Events of Grace* is a recent naturalistic theology, utilizes a similar approach. 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 beyond itself to account either for its origin or ontological ground; (3) that nature as a whole may be understood without appeal to any kind of intelligence or purposive agent; and, (4) that all causes are natural causes so that every natural event is itself a product of other natural events. (Hardwick 1996, 5–6; Edwards 1972, 133–141)

Hardwick adds that there are two additional features which most naturalisms have included. “These are: (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.” Hardwick finds

these last two as problematic and unnecessary for the basic definition of naturalism. I am in agreement with him on this. For my part I am strongly committed to the value of science, but find that assertions like number five are often used to denigrate partially verified information or to downplay the value of appreciation or insights couched in pictorial images. In addition, we should expand beyond our anthropocentric approach to values. My growing appreciation of the nonhuman world and of the increasing difficulty of nurturing this appreciation and how this relates to our environmental crises have helped me question assertions like number six. Just because human values are anthropogenic, at least in part, does not mean that they should be exclusively anthropocentric.

Hardwick goes on to indicate the implications of naturalism for religious thinking. He holds that both classical and revisionary theisms generally have three things in common. These are: “(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” (Hardwick 1996, 8). 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 involving an alternative view.

At this point the question needs to be raised as to whether or not religious naturalism is a social construction, perhaps even a figment of the author’s desire to find people who think like him or her. The question is based on a misleading dichotomy. Religious naturalism is neither a clearly delineated natural object (analogous to a solar system) nor a pure fictive object (analogous to a constellation). Rather, like a galaxy, it is a cultural genus whose contours are clear enough once discerned (Delwin Brown 1994, 75–76).

This book does not pretend to achieve verisimilitude. But it does strive for accuracy in its portrayal. To shift the image, this book is like a portrait. Those who know my work will recognize my hand. But it is hoped that the figures themselves will be recognizable; in fact this is a group portrait. Unlike most group portraits, however, the portraitist is clearly stationed within the group being portrayed.

This notion of a portrait as a joint product of the artist and the subjects depicted is the hermeneutical image which follows from the epistemological stance developed in the author’s *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence* in which experience, understanding, and knowledge are seen as transactions between what we call the subject and the object (Stone 1992, 127–135).

Astute readers will note that I have not attempted a definition or theory of religion. I have defined religious naturalism as that type of naturalism that is similar enough to what we take as paradigm cases

of a religious orientation that the term “religious” may be used. By this logical maneuver I have avoided the necessity of formulating a theoretical definition of religion. It is important to have an adequate and sensitive conception of religion, but the burden of formulating such a notion is one which religious naturalism can sidestep. Naturalists have frequently come up with a simpleminded understanding of religion. One of the best treatments of religion by a religious naturalist is Loyal Rue’s *Religion Is Not About God* (Rue 2005). There is a complexity to the human religious response that overflows many attempts to theorize about it. Keeping an openness about our understanding of religion might free naturalists in their thinking. Note that religious naturalism is not the same as a naturalistic explanation of religion, although a complete religious naturalist position should include such. I offer a tentative definition of religion in the conclusion. Religious naturalism is about reconceiving the object of religion and about the orientation of affections to this world.

There are some alternative notions of religious naturalism associated with Ursula Goodenough and David Oler. For Goodenough naturalism with a religious orientation involves developing our interpretive (or theoretical, I would say), spiritual, and moral responses in the context of our scientific understandings of nature (including humans). It is a generic term for mindful approaches of these three types to our scientific understandings of the natural world. The one rule is that you cannot change the scientific understandings to fit or support your beliefs (Goodenough 2004). Her own version of religious naturalism, stressing a sense of awe and wonder, fits within this broader understanding. For David Oler religion is about moral transformation. As a consequence he is concerned about the potential for idolatry of the natural in Goodenough’s viewpoint. Both of these thinkers are treated more fully in what follows, but I suggest that this issue is worth serious consideration for both friends and critics of naturalism that claims to be religious.

### Who Are the Religious Naturalists?

The three pivotal figures, in terms of one or more of whom many contemporary religious naturalists orient themselves, are George Santayana, John Dewey, and Henry Nelson Wieman. I agree with Arthur Danto who sees Santayana as the stimulus for much naturalism in America (Danto 1967, 450). Santayana immediately influenced John Herman Randall. Dewey’s most direct influence has probably been on Wieman and myself. However, Wieman may have misunderstood Dewey, as we shall see below. And Dewey’s influence on myself, evident especially on

my pluralism, is modified by the presence of other influences, especially Bernard Meland. There are many similarities between Dewey and Mordecai Kaplan. Citing Eric Goldman, Allan Lazaroff suggests that “Dewey’s direct influence on Kaplan is difficult to trace, however, because most early twentieth-century American reformers were Deweyites before they ever read Dewey” (Goldman 1977, 123; Lazaroff 1990, 173). Kaplan did credit Dewey “with teaching him to think pragmatically and functionally about life in general and about education in particular” (Lazaroff 1990, 186). The third pivotal religious naturalist was Wieman who influenced Karl Peters, Charley Hardwick, and myself. And while there was probably little influence between Wieman and Kaplan, Emanuel Goldsmith has demonstrated many parallels between these two giants of American religion (Goldsmith 1990, 197–220).

One way of getting a synoptic view of the religious naturalists is to note that the two major roots of religious naturalism in American are Columbia University in New York, where Santayana was read and Woodbridge, Randall and Dewey taught, and the Divinity School and Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago where Henry Nelson Wieman and certain others of the Chicago School of Theology (George Burman Foster, Edward Scribner Ames, and Eustace Haydon) taught and where Meadville Theological School next door helped provide a matrix for religious humanism. Marvin Shaw has referred to or at least implied that there is a difference between “Columbia naturalism” and “Chicago naturalism,” a difference partly manifested in the fact that Santayana and Dewey primarily influenced philosophical circles while Wieman’s main influence was theological (Shaw 1995, 15–18). The difference between these two groups is also manifested in their views of whether the object of the religious orientation, that in the world toward which religious or quasi-religious attitudes and behavior is directed, is primarily its power or its goodness. A further difference is that Santayana and his followers distanced themselves from personal commitment to a religious orientation while Wieman, as well as Peters, Hardwick, and myself—who were strongly influenced by Wieman—were passionately committed to their religious outlooks. In other words, the Columbia naturalists tended to appreciate religion critically, while the Chicago naturalists tended to construct a religious outlook to which they could be passionately committed (Shaw 1995, 13–31).

It may come as a surprise to some readers to discover that many religious naturalists use the term “God” to describe the object of their religious orientation (as distinct from those naturalists, such as Santayana, who uses the term “God” or “gods” in describing human religions). To sort through this issue I propose the following typology. On the topic

of God I find that religious naturalists tend to fall into three groups: (1) those who conceive of God as the creative process within the universe, (2) those who think of God as the totality of the universe considered religiously, and (3) those who do not speak of God yet still can be called religious. In the first group belong, among others, Shailer Mathews, Henry Nelson Wieman, Ralph Wendell Burhoe, Karl Peters, and perhaps William Dean. In the second belong Spinoza, Samuel Alexander, George Burman Foster, Frederick May Eliot, the later Bernard Loomer, and others. The third includes Ursula Goodenough, Donald Crosby, Willem Drees, myself, and others.

What distinguishes my use of the term “religious naturalism” from that of some others is my inclusion of the first two groups within the term. This is a controversial usage and is one of the ways in which my conception of religious naturalism differs from religious humanism. As used in this book, religious naturalism is the more inclusive term. To conceive of God either as the creative process within the universe or else as the entire universe considered religiously fits within the definition of naturalism as used in this volume. There is no reference to a supreme reality distinct from and ontologically superior to the universe in these two views. Hence the first two groups may be considered as types of religious naturalism. Perhaps the term “naturalistic theism” might be appropriately used for these views. In this case naturalistic theism would be that variety of religious naturalism that continues to use the traditional term “God,” although within a rigorously naturalistic sense.

### Related Views

There are some related and overlapping views that it is helpful to distinguish from religious naturalism. The first is empiricism. Religious naturalism often has an empirical orientation, although the nature of this empiricism varies widely. Bernard Meland and others have a broad conception of empiricism, what I have called a “generous empiricism” (Stone 1992, chap. 4). Further, 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 religious naturalism need not be committed to an empiricist foundationalism.

The second view, which overlaps religious naturalism, is materialism or physicalism. Hardwick claims that a consistent and honest empiricism will be a physicalism. This is not, of course, old-fashioned mechanism, but it is still an insistence on the physical basis of all reality. Danto as-

serts that naturalism is compatible with a consistent idealistic view (Danto 1967, 448). There is a strong leaning toward physicalism in my own thinking. However, this is a philosophically strong position to maintain. Both for reasons of conversation with indigenous and neopagan religious thinkers who have experienced what they term spirits who 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 at the end of the day 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. Perhaps it is best to say that while naturalism does not logically entail materialism or physicalism, most religious naturalists tend toward a generous materialism that allows for much of what we designate by the terms “mind” and “value.”

A third orientation related to religious naturalism is religious humanism. In many ways the religious naturalists who do not use God-language are close to religious humanism. I am referring here to the viewpoints of classical humanists such as John Dietrich and Curtis Reese during the time of the Humanist Controversy (the 1920s) or the signers of the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933. Clearly these humanists are naturalists in that they focus on this world and deny the reality of God, soul, or heaven. I believe that they could also appropriately be called religious naturalists because their devotion to science and human betterment is analogous to the devotion of those whom we normally call religious. (See my critique of the *Humanist Manifesto*, Stone 1992, 196–202.)

There were writers earlier in this century who are often labeled humanists, albeit religious humanists, who can be distinguished from the humanists of the 1920s and 1930s. These include George Burman Foster of *The Place of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence* and Edward Scribner Ames in his book *Religion*. It seems to me that they are close to Shailer Mathews who carefully distinguished himself from humanism. As Marvin Shaw points out, these are not merely verbal disputes, but involve basic attitudes and orientations, namely openness to resources of grace (Shaw 1995, 17–30). Shaw appropriately calls them naturalistic theists. In *American Philosophies of Religion* Wieman and Meland referred to Ames, Dewey, Mathews, G. B. Smith, and themselves as “empirical theists” (Wieman and Meland 1936).

William Murry has distinguished older humanists of the 1920s and 1930s from many contemporary humanists. Among the characteristics of this newer humanism, as he describes it, is an openness “*to wonder and mystery and transcendence in a naturalistic framework*” (Murry 2000, 84;

see also Murry 2007, 25–59, 107–115). The older humanists might be considered as religious naturalists, if their passion for truth and justice are read as analogues of a religious orientation. However, the attitude of the newer humanists, as described by Murry, are definitely cut from the same cloth as religious naturalism.

Some of us find a significant difference of basic stance between some varieties of religious naturalism and that of many humanists, religious or otherwise. “The issue is that of openness to resources and challenges beyond the humanly manageable.” Thus some varieties of religious naturalism have “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 1993a, 35).

In short, religious humanism can be seen as one variety of religious naturalism, because the commitment of these humanists to the search for truth and the struggle for justice is the naturalistic analogue to commitment to the transcendent in traditional theism. (This represents a shift in my view; formerly I drew a line between religious naturalism and humanism. See Stone 1999.) Further, the religious humanists, represented especially by the humanists of the 1920s and 1930s, are to be distinguished from those newer humanists who have a deeper sense of wonder and mystery. And writers like George Burman Foster and Edward Scribner Ames, who are often called humanists, might better be described as religious naturalists. Indeed, Ames was not asked to sign the *Humanist Manifesto* (Wilson 1995, 91).

Another issue concerns process theology. Process thinkers often consider themselves as naturalists and thus as religious naturalists. However, there are significant differences between them and the group I am delineating. Their panentheism 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. Process theology has become a rather loose term. For those aligned with Hartshorne at least, there is one entity which is different from all others in being surpassable by no other entity except itself in a future state. It has maximal relatedness and compassion and often is conceived to confer objective immortality through its memory. These three characteristics of being: (1) surpassable by none except itself, (2) supremely related and compassionate, and (3) conferring conservation of value make it different from the writers grouped together in this book as religious naturalists. Thus, as I understand it, the God of process theology, while deeply immersed within this world, is so ontologically distinct and superior as to fall outside of naturalism as I understand it. To conceive of an entity which is surpassable by none except itself is not naturalist. Immanentist yes, naturalist no. As Robert

Mesle, an astute expositor of process theology, puts it, the difference between process theism and process naturalism, which I think is a type of religious naturalism, is “not naturalism vs. supernaturalism, but the question of whether the world of finite, natural creatures is unified in such a way as to give rise to a single divine Subject” (Mesle 1993, 127).

As an illustration of this, in his *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, David Griffin develops a Whiteheadian view that he calls “naturalistic theism.” He is using the term “naturalistic” in a different manner than that used in this volume. “Variable constitutive divine influence would be understood as *part* of the normal pattern of causes and effects, *not* an interruption of this pattern. Such a position could be called ‘naturalistic theism,’ or ‘theistic naturalism.’ It would be naturalistic, because it would reject the idea of any supernatural interruptions” (Griffin 2000, 40). In developing this theism, Griffin asserts that: “The supreme power of the universe is pure goodness, pure unbounded love. . . . Far from being a remote, inaccessible creator, this God is intimately involved in the origination of each event in the universe. Each experiential event in the world receives from God its ‘ideal aim’” (Griffin 2000, 97). Griffin is correct in using the term “naturalism” of this view in so far as it repudiates a supernatural interruption of the natural order. However, this process God is a supreme power, the only entity involved in the origination of every event and giving to each its ideal aim. This surely is a God who is radically different from the rest of the universe. This is another example of the same word, in this case “naturalism,” being used in two radically different senses. Given the cogency of Griffin’s use of the term within his framework, which is part of a well-recognized philosophical movement that had received its classical form by at least the 1920s, one can concede the validity of his use of the term as it functions within his conceptual schema. At the same time our use of the term is part of a well-recognized philosophical movement that is at least as venerable in age.

It should be noted that there are a number of other versions of what might be called revised theism that would claim to be naturalistic or at least repudiate supernaturalism. Indeed, many theologians today reject the term “supernatural” as having connotations of miracle, divine intervention, or even a two-level reality. For them there is a strong this-worldly orientation and a real immanence to God. However, at the end of the day for them, there is “a dimension,” which we humans can call God, that is in some sense not reducible to this world. This dimension does not appear in the group of thinkers that I distinguish as naturalists with a religious bent.

Furthermore, many religious naturalists find a congenial working relationship with some of these theologians because of a common

interest in the processes of this world. Joseph Sittler, John Cobb, Philip Hefner, John Haught, and Wentzel van Huyssteen may be taken as well-known examples of such theologians. Paul Tillich's claim that God is the ground of being, not the supreme being, may be taken as typical. Tillich is not a naturalist in the sense that we are using the term. His ground of being is so ontologically distinct from any being that it is not either the entire world or a process or entity within it. "God as the ground of being infinitely transcends that of which he is the ground" (Tillich 1957, 7; see the section "Beyond Naturalism and Supernaturalism," Tillich 1957, 5–10).

What is the difference between religious naturalism and pantheism? The answer is that these are intersecting concepts. Spinoza is often called a pantheist and this study claims him as the first major religious naturalist, while Bernard Loomer, toward the end of his career, spoke of the entire interconnected web of existence as God. Those naturalists who identify God with the entire universe would qualify as pantheists by most definitions. It is important to note that these thinkers usually identify a certain aspect of the universe as God or the universe when considered from a certain regard or perspective. Samuel Alexander, for example, considered God as the universe insofar as it was evolving toward a new and higher level. Edward Scribner Ames referred to God as the world in certain aspects and functions, namely, orderliness, love, and intelligence or order, beauty, and expansion. F. M. Eliot spoke of God as a symbol for the experiences of a moral imperative, of the orderliness and of the purposiveness of the world. On the other hand, those naturalists who identify God with part of the universe, such as Wieman for whom God is the integrative process within the world, that would not be pantheists.

Paul Harrison, the founder and president of the World Pantheist Movement (WPM), undoubtedly the world's largest religious naturalist organization, writes that "pantheism holds that the universe as a whole is divine, and that there is no divinity other than the universe and nature" (Harrison, 1999, 1). Note that he uses the word "divine" rather than "God." Harrison also points out that to say the universe as a whole is divine does not mean that every individual part of it is divine. "It doesn't mean that oil slicks or bits of chewing gum stuck to the pavement are divine," or nuclear weapons, factory smokestacks, or mass murderers (Harrison 1999, 71). He informs me that recently the WPM has dropped the use of the term "divine."

The World Pantheist Movement has developed a Pantheist Credo (with the proviso that it is intended as a guide and statement of consensus, not as binding on members). The first clause reads: "We revere

and celebrate the universe as the totality of being . . . It is self-organizing, ever-evolving and inexhaustibly diverse. Its overwhelming power, beauty, and fundamental mystery compel the deepest human reverence and wonder.” The third clause starts: “We are an inseparable part of nature, which we should cherish, revere and preserve in all its magnificent beauty and diversity.”

Paul Harrison distinguishes scientific pantheism, which is the focus of the World Pantheistic Movement, from idealistic and dualistic pantheism. While idealistic pantheism might be considered logically compatible with naturalism, as Arthur Danto affirms, religious naturalists typically are not idealists (Danto 1967, 448). Dualistic pantheism would seem to be incompatible with the naturalistic basis of religious naturalism.

A frequent view of pantheism is that it envisions absorption into the infinite ocean of being as a spiritual goal or a prospect after death or perhaps even that the identity of the individual human self with the great ocean of being is the true picture of reality. However, Charles Milligan suggests that pantheism in the past century or so has pictured a real independence and autonomy to the human self, a viewpoint which he himself endorses (Milligan 1987).

There is a similarity between those religious naturalists who speak of the entire universe in religious terms and the advocates of the Gaia hypothesis. Generally, however, these religious naturalists would use religious language of the entire universe, at least in certain aspects, rather than just the planet Earth. Furthermore, the Gaia hypothesis is often linked with interesting but debatable scientific hypotheses about the self-corrective nature of global biochemical processes which are not essential to religious naturalism.

### Who Uses the Term?

Who uses the term “religious naturalism” to designate their own views? The term “naturalism” was used in the 1920s, ’30s, and ’40s to designate a general philosophical position differentiated from two other widespread philosophical views, idealism and dualism, as well as from popular theism and the modified theism of liberal theology. (See Krikorian 1944 and Danto 1967). Wieman’s widely read *Source of Human Good* distinguishes “the newer naturalism” from the “older naturalisms, which tended toward reductive materialism” (Wieman 1946, 6. See 6–9). Wieman refers to the chapter on “Categories of Naturalism” by William Dennes in Krikorian’s book. Two explicit corollaries which Wieman draws from his naturalism are significant. One is that nothing has causal efficacy except material

events and nothing has value except material events and their possibilities, understanding material events to be “not merely pellets of inanimate matter” but also “biological, social, and historical forms of existence” (Wieman 1946, 8). Naturalists generally will agree that biological and historical forms are basically material, highly developed but none the less material. Many naturalists, starting with Alexander, Sellars, Dewey, and Smuts in the 1920s, developed a nonreductive form of naturalism, often taking an “emergentist” viewpoint whereby novel forms, such as life and human culture emerge from while still remaining rooted in the material world, thus allowing for the distinctiveness of biological and human existence and values as idealism had earlier insisted while yet retaining the universality of the material world, plus its possibilities (Alexander, 1920; Sellars 1922, 260–286; Dewey 1981; Smuts 1961). However, some naturalists, such as Arthur Danto, assert that naturalism is logically independent of materialism, while others, such as Charley Hardwick, like Wieman, explicitly develop a materialist (or physicalist) religious viewpoint.

The term “religious naturalism” was in frequent use at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School and its *Journal of Religion* in the 1940s and 1950s, if not earlier. (I owe thanks to Nancy Hutton and Cedric Heppler for their help here.) In 1929 Wieman titled his review of E. S. Ames *Religion*, “Naturalism Becomes Religious.” In 1958 Wieman published an entry “Naturalism” in *A Handbook for Christian Theology* (Wieman 1958). In 1963 his “Reply to Weigel” refers frequently to “religious naturalism” and to “the religious vision in naturalistic terms” (Wieman 1963, 363–377).

At the same time George Perrigo Conger, in *The Ideologies of Religion*, refers to religious naturalism as a view with which he has sympathy (Conger 1940; I have not been able to secure a copy of this book). Also in the 1940s Edwin R. Walker, H. H. Dubs, and N. P. Jacobsen are using the term to refer to a then-contemporary type of religious thinking (H. H. Dubs, 1943; Jacobson 1949; I owe the references in this paragraph to Nancy Hutton and Cedric Heppler).

Thus the term “religious naturalism” was in frequent use among certain theological writers in America in the early 1940s. However, there was a nearly complete hiatus in the use of the term from 1946 to 1987, a gap that will be discussed briefly at the beginning of part two. This hiatus is the reason why this volume is subtitled *The Rebirth of a Forgotten Tradition*.

Around 1955 Bernard Meland wrote an unpublished paper on “The Roots of Religious Naturalism” (Meland 1955; see also Meland 1962, 130). Meland uses the term in a wider sense than used here, includ-