



A Journal of Ecological Spirituality

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Beginning with this issue, we more formally identify Ecospirit as "A Journal of Ecological Spirituality." This change reflects the content of previous issues and provides a focus for future contributions. We will further clarify this change by examining ecological spirituality's relationship to spirituality and to ecology.

Spirituality on the individual level is an experience of self and world which is integrating, pervasive and deep. A spirituality usually reflects a desire to see life whole, to live it deeply and with meaning. Individual spiritualities may be classified further according to whether the basic concerns and aspirations regarding self and world are articulated in terms of the natural, human or divine (in its widest sense). One might tentatively call these spiritualities the ecocentric, anthropocentric, and theocentric, respectively. Each type is recognizable by a common set of feelings, values, attitudes and beliefs concerning its primary focus of concern.

Ecological spirituality is characterized by: an awareness of the interrelatedness of all beings, a sensitivity to their various modes of presence, an attitude of respect toward all living beings and the earth, a belief in their self-worth and integrity and a moral consideration of their good and interests. This results in a worldview that may be described either as cosmic or ecocentric.

The exact expression and articulation of these themes will depend on the cultural or religious traditions within which an individual functions. Respect for other beings, for example, might be articulated in terms of their souls or in their sharing with humans a common evolutionary heritage. Ecospirit seeks to present and explore various expressions of ecological spirituality originating in other cultures or present within our own in artists and visionaries.

Ecological spirituality, however, is not simply a new term for an old wisdom, but reflects the influence of the science of ecology on its contemporary manifestation. Ernst Haeckel, a German zoologist, first defined ecology as "the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature--the investigation of the total relation of the animal both to its organic and inorganic environment." Eco-spirituality, while not unconcerned with knowledge about the economy of nature is more concerned with how humans participate in it. Full and proper participation requires modes of knowing and experiencing that go beyond "investigation." The investigator is not outside of the earth household (ecos), peeking in through a window, but is already and always a part of it. And since being a part of it is essential to being human, the development of one's humanity is inextricably linked to a growth in more sensitive and responsible relations with other organisms and with our mutual earth home (ecos). Such is eco-spirituality.

This linking of self-development and ecological relatedness is also an insight of the Neo-Confucians, whom Mary Evelyn Tucker explores in our first article. These Confucianists were able to do justice to the peculiar moral, aesthetic and interpersonal aspects of human existence without alienating humanity from or placing it "over" the Earth. Steve Lewandowski, a Conservation Education specialist and poet, creatively appropriates material from the Chinese, Iroquois and Shaker traditions in a plea for a more peaceful and ecologically sound world. His hope rests in the quiet renewing "waters" that are present throughout the natural world and even in the seeming "desert" of modern urban life. Mr. Lewandowski's article also provides a bridge to our next issue which will deal entirely with ecological spirituality in Native American traditions.

DONALD P. ST. JOHN

RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL
CONCERN: CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION IN
CHINESE THOUGHT

by Mary Evelyn Tucker

The topic of the religious foundations of environmental concern is clearly a large one for it involves an assessment of our response to the current assault on the natural world by industrial processes. It is important to note from the outset that we cannot minimize the complexity of the problem at hand nor can we simply vilify all industrial processes. Nonetheless, the conflict between economic and environmental concerns is a major issue of our times. We are involved with increasingly complex global problems regarding the pollution of our air, our water and our soil at the same time that the loss of top soil, the effects of erosion, and the destruction of our forests is occurring on a scale never before witnessed in human history. The essential challenge, then, to all of us is the means towards a viable future which will not undermine the very sources of our existence. What is currently lacking, however, is a moral basis for changing our exploitative attitudes toward nature. What should concern us is to what extent do the great religious traditions of the world provide us with a moral rationale for altering our consciousness about the earth and our life on it. In other words, can the insights of some of the great world religions be brought to bear on the question of the role of the human in relation to the natural world?

While very few of the world's great religions have traditionally espoused an ecological morality, nonetheless, their spiritual insights have something to say to our own times. The Chinese have a significant contribution to make in this regard because from their earliest recorded history the earth has been an integral part of their religious discourse. The great trinity of Chinese thought is heaven, earth, and human. Our Western religious traditions, on the other hand, are almost exclusively concerned with divine-human interaction. God as Creator, as transcendent, and as One are the shared characteristics of monotheism in its Jewish, Christian, and Islamic forms. Concomitant with the understanding that God is transcendent to the natural world is a devaluation of the sacredness of nature.

The locus of the meeting of divine and human in the West has largely been in the human soul, and concern for personal salvation has often overridden all others. Western theology has tended to concentrate on discussions of the characteristics of God, the problem of evil in the world, the fallen nature of humans, and the means of overcoming this fallen nature through grace or actions leading to redemption. Morality, then, has been largely a matter of humans in relation to other humans and of humans in relation to God. Thus, our religious concerns in the West have been almost exclusively anthropocentric. Questions of sin, morality, guilt, redemption, and salvation supercede all others.

Where has this anthropocentric vision left us? With regard to nature, our religious legacy has been largely one of hubris, self-obsession, and disconnection from the natural world. Indeed, as Mircea Eliade and others have shown, we have lost sight of the fact that even our religious rituals have their origin in the cycles of the season and in the symbolic patterns of the natural world. We are, therefore, lacking a sense of the sacrality of the earth on which we live and we have little moral basis for countering the assault on the earth which we have launched in the name of progress. We turn, therefore, to the Chinese world to see what their traditions might contribute. We will be speaking primarily out of the Confucian context in its Neo-Confucian form. There are two areas in which Neo-Confucian thought can contribute to our discussion. The first is in terms of cosmology or naturalism; the second is in terms of self-cultivation. The two are obviously connected.

Naturalism

Chinese thought (which includes both Confucianism and Taoism) can be described in general as a form of naturalism. For purposes of our discussion it can be said that Chinese naturalism is characterized by an organic holism and by a dynamic vitalism. This cosmological sensibility undergirds Chinese thought and gives rise to distinctive patterns of self-cultivation in each of the major Chinese religious traditions. Clearly, how they viewed the universe shaped their interaction with nature, with their selves, and with other

human beings. I hope to clarify this understanding and its bearing on ecological concerns.

When we speak of Chinese naturalism as characterized by organic holism, we are referring to the fact that the universe is viewed as an integrated unit and not as discrete mechanistic parts. Everything interacts and effects everything else since all is interconnected. This principle of the interconnectedness of reality is elaborated in the correspondence of the elements with seasons, directions, colors, tastes and even virtues. This type of classification which began in the third millennium B.C.E., remains an important aspect of Chinese thinking down to the modern period. The notion of oneself as microcosm related to the universe as macrocosm a central theme of Chinese thought must be understood in this context of correspondences and organic wholeness.

Chinese holism does not necessitate a creator god behind the universe. As Frederick Mote of Princeton has written: "The Chinese...have regarded the world and man as uncreated, as constituting the central features of a spontaneously self-generating cosmos having no creator, god, ultimate cause or will external to itself."¹ He goes on to say, "the genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of organismic process, meaning that all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process."²

The absence of a creator god may seem strange to someone raised in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But the Chinese are less comfortable with theories of origin or creators than with the notion of a self-generating, interconnected universe. This interconnected quality has been described by Tu Wei-ming as a "continuity of being," implying a great chain of being that links the inorganic, organic, and human.³ This linkage is made possible because of ch'i, the material force or psychophysical element of the universe. This element unifies the cosmos and creates the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the natural world.

The second aspect of Chinese naturalism is its quality of dynamic vitalism which is

inherent in ch'i. The seventeenth century scholar, Wang Fu-chih, described ch'i in the following manner:

The fact that the things of the world, whether rivers or mountains, plants or animals, those with or without intelligence, and those yielding blossoms or bearing fruits, provide beneficial support for all things is the result of natural influence of the moving power of ch'i. It fills the universe. And as it completely provides for the flourish and transformation of all things, it is all the more spatially unrestricted. As it is not spatially restricted, it operates in time and proceeds with time. From morning to evening, from spring to summer, and from the present tracing back to the past, there is no time at which it does not operate, and there is no time at which it does not produce. Consequently, as one sprout burst forth it becomes a tree with a thousand big branches, and as an egg evolves, it progressively becomes a fish capable of swallowing a ship...⁴

In Neo-Confucian thought, then, the material force as the substance of life is the basis for the continuing process of change and transformation in the universe. The term, sheng sheng, "production and reproduction," is repeatedly used in Neo-Confucian texts to illustrate the creativity of nature. The recognition of this ceaseless movement of the cosmos arises from a profound meditation on the fecundity of nature in continually giving birth to new life, constitutes a sophisticated awareness of change as the basis for the interaction and continuation of the web of life, and celebrates transformation as the primary characteristic of the creative processes with which humans should live and act in harmony. In sum, human beings are urged to "model themselves on the ceaseless vitality of the cosmic processes." The Neo-Confucian understanding of holism, vitalism, and harmony with change provides the metaphysical basis on which an ecological morality can be developed.

Self-Cultivation

For the Neo-Confucians of the eleventh and twelfth century, the idea of self-cultivation implied, as Tu Wei-ming has put it, "creative transformation." Thus, the fact that the universe is an organic, dynamic, and vital whole has a direct bearing on the moral and spiritual formation of human beings and on their action in the world. The essential metaphor for human connectedness with the cosmos is that of a trinity (heaven, earth, human). Self-cultivation seeks to activate this basic identity so that the human may participate fully in the creative transformation of the universe.

This implies that personal cultivation and environmental concerns are not two distinct processes. This differs from a purely anthropocentric viewpoint. As Tu Wei-ming writes,

"Confucian humanism is...fundamentally different from anthropocentrism because it professes the unity of man and Heaven rather than the imposition of the human will on nature. In fact the anthropocentric assumption that man is put on earth to pursue knowledge and, as knowledge expands, so does man's dominion over earth is quite different from the Confucian perception of the pursuit of knowledge as an integral part of one's self-cultivation.... The human transformation of nature, therefore, means as much an integrative effort to learn to live harmoniously in one's natural environment as a modest attempt to use the environment to sustain basic livelihood. The idea of exploiting nature is rejected because it is incompatible with the Confucian concern for moral self-development."⁵

In developing their moral nature, then, human beings are entering into the processes of change and transformation. Just as the universe manifests a complex pattern of flux and fecundity, so human beings nurture the seeds of virtue within themselves and participate in the human order in this process of ongoing transformation. The connection of the two has also been understood as a correspondence between human virtues and cosmic processes. The great Neo-Confucian, Chu Hsi, for example, speaks of humaneness as similar to the spirit of life and growth. He writes, "Humaneness as

the principle of love is comparable to a tree and the spring of water," and "It is like the will to grow, like the seeds of peaches and apricots."⁶ Thus, humaneness is like "the vital force of spring" which blossoms in humans, linking them to heaven, earth, and all things. "For humaneness as constituting the Way, consists of the fact that the mind of heaven and earth to produce things is present in everything."⁷

The relationship of heaven and earth, to the human, has also been expressed as a parental one with humans being children of the universe. Perhaps the most well known statement of this idea is the Neo-Confucian Chang Tsai's Western Inscription written in the eleventh century:

Heaven is my father and earth is my mother and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters and all things are my companions.⁸

The larger cosmological implications of this important statement have been clearly articulated by Tu Wei-ming:

Chang Tsai reminds us that no matter how small a being we find ourselves to be in the vastness of the cosmos, there is not only a locus but also an intimate place for each of us. For we are all potentially guardians and indeed co-creators of the universe. In this holistic vision of man, an ontological gap between Creator and creature would seem to be almost inconceivable. It appears that there is no post-lapsarian state to encounter and that alienation as a deep-rooted feeling of estrangement from one's primordial origin is nonexistent. Furthermore, the idea of man as a manipulator and conqueror of nature would also seem to be ruled out.⁹

In summary, then, Chinese thought and especially, Neo-Confucianism, is a rich source of rethinking our present ecological concerns. Its organic holism and dynamic

vitalism give us a fresh understanding of the interconnectedness of all life forms and renews our sense of the sacredness of this intricate web of life.

Moreover, the Chinese understanding of the dynamic vitalism underlying cosmic processes provides a basis for reverencing nature. In this perspective all life forms share ch'i. This common psycho-physicality makes possible a reciprocity between humans and other beings.

The Confucian tradition also gives a rich basis for harmonizing with the natural world as a part of self-cultivation; in its doctrine of the human as a child of heaven and earth; and in its understanding of virtues as having both a cosmological and a personal component.

Finally, just as Confucianism has passed to the other countries of East Asia and Southeast Asia, in our own time we are witnessing its further transmission to the West. Two hundred years ago the European Enlightenment thinkers, impressed by the rational and humane aspects of Chinese thought, utilized the insights of this tradition as a stimulus to their own thinking. However, their view of Confucianism overemphasized the rational and ethical aspects at the expense of the cosmic and spiritual dimensions. We are appreciating these more in our own time as translations are gradually being made available.

How appropriate it is, then, to call upon this Chinese Confucian tradition, as well as others from Asia, to help us resituate ourselves in relation to the cosmos, to each other, and to the deepest sources of our own humanity.

NOTES

1. Frederick F. Mote, Intellectual Foundations of China (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 17-18.
2. Ibid. p. 35.
3. Tu Wei-ming's Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation, Ch. 2.
4. Wing-tsit Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 698-699.

5. Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation, p. 75.
6. Chu-tzu ch'uan shu, trans. by Wing-tsit Chan in "The Concept of Man in Chinese Thought" in Neo-Confucianism, Etc., (Hanover, New Hampshire: Oriental Society, 1969), pp. 115, 155.
7. Chu-tzu wen-chi CTTC, 67: 20a and translated by Wing-tsit Chan in Source Book, p. 594.
8. Sources of Chinese Tradition, p. 469.
9. Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation, p. 158.

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WATER MOVING UNDERGROUND

For David Byrne
by Stephen Lewandowski

According to the Iroquois, the creation of our world begins with the suggestion that a tree be uprooted. When it is done, a hole appears where the tree stood in the ground, which would be our world's sky. Through this opening, worlds which had been kept apart, mix. The history of the natural world begins with this uprooting.

A similar event closes the story of the founding of the League of the Iroquois by the peace activists, Hahyonhwatha and Dekanahwideh. At the end of their labors to bring warring nations together to live in peace and to convert the wizard Tododahoh into a suitable leader for their confederacy, they have collected a large pile of blood-stained weapons, axes, spears, bows and arrows, and knives. After the peace has been agreed to by all and a white pine has been planted as symbol of the Great Peace and that tree has grown magically to be the biggest tree in all the forest, the two peacemakers suddenly realize they have a pile of weapons yet to deal with. Thinking for a while, they uproot the huge white pine whose roots reach down into the earth. Into the hole stretching down to the deepest flowing waters under the earth, they throw

the weapons and watch them be swept away in the waters. Then they replant the white pine and it grows on, hugh and healthy, as symbol of peace, its white roots in contact with earth forces as its crown spreads over the heavens.

A tree as symbol of peace would be understood by nearly every religion on earth. Greeks worshipped in the temenos or sacred area beneath oak trees. Celts called their place of worship the nemeton, implying a deep grove and solitary place where the heavens might be glimpsed. Closer to home, Joseph Smith, who established the Mormon religion, received his visit from the Angel Moroni while dozing in a grove near Palmyra, New York.

Chinese Taoists have not bothered themselves much with the distinction between sacred and mundane. Some hoped to slip away from all public, social life, which they found inherently corrupt and corrupting. Like Thoreau, they settled in woods, near streams and ponds, and took natural forces and forms as models of right life. Taoists studied the flow of elemental energy, which they likened to wind and water. They thought of the elemental energy, or ch'i, as flowing through hidden veins in the earth's body, sometimes surfacing like a spring, sometimes moving deep and unseen beneath the surface. Taoist thought emphasizes the importance of this flow of ch'i to the health of the earth and the well-being of human life on earth. Properly sited burial mounds, shrines, public buildings and homes could tap into the flow of elemental forces and bring good fortune to families and societies. The I Ching's oracular voice speaks of this flow in landscape terms. The strictly disciplined dance of tai-ch'i chuan aims at balancing and spreading ch'i through the body. In a similar way, Taoists envisioned the society's health being influenced by the flow, sometimes dispersed, sometimes constricted, of elemental forces.

A Taoist would have no problem understanding how history might begin with a cataclysmic ecological event such as the uprooting of a tree or why peace-loving people would wish to cast their weapons, symbols of aggressive, destructive energies, back into the waters flowing beneath the earth. Returning weapons to the flow of water or energy would seem quite proper to them.

We must ask ourselves the same questions Hahyonhwatha or Tuan Yuan Ming pose. What shall we do with this energy, these weapons? Can we ground the energy? We cling to our weapons out of possessiveness and fear. Can we accept that energy is neither constructive nor destructive by its own nature, and find ways to turn it? Taoists are famed for answering complex questions with simple images.

A dam in a stream. When the pool behind the dam is full, water flows over the top, eroding soil, breaching and washing the dam away. We can either release the water gradually, gently through safe channels in the terrain and lower the dam; or we can declare our need for this impounded water and build the dam higher yet. When more water flows in behind the heightened dam, collects in a deeper pool, we face another decision and an even more potentially destructive situation.

What can we do with these weapons, our nation's armor? Can hope thrive in the ground of mutual fear? Though some analysts point with pride to four decades of "stable" life in the shadow of our weapons pile, others sense poisons building in the closed system and note that four decades is only a moment in the earth's life. Four decades of such stability, bought at such a cost, and yet we find ourselves still at the brink. How close can we come without jumping?

Some of us wish to turn back from the brink. We wish to get on with our lives, which do not take place at the brink but in broad fields, by running streams, under the bright sky. We take no comfort or pride in the "security" of our nation's armor. We feel that the threat of such weapons is without direction, as likely to destroy us as any "enemy." We want to let go of the anger which our government assures us we must feel for these "enemies." We want the real comfort of seeing such destructive feelings, and the weapons which are their symbols, returned to the depths of the earth, to the flowing waters.

Does any political leader embody these feelings and values? No, nor is any likely to do so. The political process makes such a leader unlikely. Power and authority seem so frozen and linked with acquisitiveness that such a leader cannot arise. Yet our conviction is not altered by the absence of

such a leader. Imagine many leaders. Imagine leaders, like those of the Iroquois, committed to offering the nation's hospitality and exemplifying the principle of generosity: Everyone shall have enough. Imagine leaders vested with natural symbols and powers of authority yet the poorest persons among us. Imagine water flowing underground.

We are not without exemplars. That well-known American Taoist community, the Shakers, sang their response to power and confrontation:

'Tis a gift to be simple
'Tis a gift to be free
'Tis a gift to come down
Where you ought to be.

And when we find ourselves
In the place just right
We will be in the valley
Of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we will not be
ashamed.

To turn, to turn will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning we come
'round right.

Like the whirling Sufis, Shakers believed in turning about, in dance and in life, in contemplation as a way of turning a matter over and over in the mind. To this discipline of contemplation, they added the virtue of flexibility: there will be no shame in bowing and bending. The Chinese Taoists hold up an image of a reed bending, and enduring, in currents of wind and water. What stands in the way of this "coming down where we ought to be?" Pride and inflexibility. How did we get so frozen? Slowly, from insecurity and doubts, personal and national. We find ourselves faced with a challenge equally personal and national. Can we question our motives deeply, root out sources of selfish egotism, stop merely reacting out of fear and ignorance, and prepare the way for "bowing, bending and turning" which is a way back from the brink of nuclear war?

There are hopeful signs in the land. To hold true to my metaphor, though, I'd insist that the Nuclear Freeze should be called the Nuclear Thaw. Could we allow our frozen postures of aggression to melt and flow? Can we dance? Do you love me, now

that I can dance? Can we find an appropriate place, maybe a use, for the energies which fuel our prideful aggressions? They remind me of nothing so much as "hungry ghosts" through whom our hands will pass but who may do us great harm if they wish it so.

From reading Iroquois tales, one might become convinced that they were fascinated with ghostly, vampirish man-eaters. Story after story tells of a wanderer stumbling on a lonely cabin in the woods set away from villages. Because of skill, bravery, luck and perhaps some magical helpers, the wanderer overcomes the man-eater. In these tales we see the Iroquois attitude toward aggression: we are hearing about the fear that one man may overcome and devour another, stealing his ch'i.

In the famous story of the founding of the League, Tododahoh is such a wizard, death-dealer, man-eater. Birds flying over him fall dead to the ground. And yet Tododahoh is the very person chosen by the peacemakers to bring what shall be the League into the Great Peace. We may speculate about some of his unique qualifications, but we must agree that his power, formerly used for destroying others, is enormous. How do the peacemakers go about turning Tododahoh's head? Several ways.

First, they let him glimpse them in strange ways. They confuse him. Peer down the smoke hole of his lodge. He shakes his head, talking to himself, "I did not know I was so strange a man. My way of living must be wrong." Next, they gather the tribes of peace-seekers together, and bring their chief to speak to the wizard. As they speak, he begins to cry. Consoling him, the chiefs point out the smoke from their campfires, evidence of the people gathered all around. They introduce him to the one they call "this great woman our mother," Jiknosahseh, the Mother of Nations or Peace Queen. Finally the chiefs swear their allegiance to Tododahoh and gathering around him, though his touch may mean death, they take hold of him. They hold him and rub his body, smoothing the kinks and twists, combing the snakes from his hair until he begins to look like other men. This is their goal, to massage him into human form and to turn his great powers away from destruction and toward their common interests in peace.

I have tried to suggest rather than define what we, like our predecessors on the planet, might learn from observation of natural forms and forces. As I have tried to give shape to my image of the Great Peace, it has become apparent to me that such a peace is not only a goal, but a process. In the words of A. J. Muste, "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way." If we cannot find a way in our hearts to peace, there is no way. If we pay no attention to how land and water and wind moves, we will miss the turnings of our hearts.

Even in the desert, we find evidence of water moving underground: springs, seeps, green spots in an otherwise forbidding landscape. Your desert may be Thoreau's "life of quiet desperation." Your desert may be the city, with its rushing waters piped and channelled and its winds polluted. Like any tribe wandering through such a wilderness, we love the water when it appears. It turns our expectations around, refreshes and shelters us. We celebrate its ability to turn the barren to a garden. In such turning, turning, let us learn to "come 'round right."

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