

The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

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By 1986, on the other hand, several reassessments tempered any totally upbeat view of our Space-Age rebirth as eco-earthlings. In the papers from a conference on ecofeminism, Yaakov Jerome Garb raised questions about whether our vantage point from outer space represented "perspective" or, after all, "escape." He deconstructed the whole-Earth photograph to find an alienating distance, a literalistic image, and a disturbingly univocal sign of the "one-true-story." Peter Bishop weighed in with a Jungian critique of "the shadows of the holistic Earth," fears of immensity, loss, and fragmentation hidden in our Space-Age fantasies of environmental harmony and order. I contributed a milder warning with a piece called "Getting Back to Gaia," a prelude to my *Approaching Earth* book, in which I pointed out Lovelock's ignorance of the implications of the name he borrowed for his hypothesis – and the consequent need for a non-scientific sophistication about the myths and metaphors at play in our Space-Age reconsiderations of Earth lest these be lost in exclusively cybernetic strategems.

The explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle that same year was another disquieting factor, turning us away from space exploration and toward earthly agendas, to be sure, but offering a reminder that our reconnection could be tinged with tragedy.

In the end, though, as appraised from the dawn of a new millennium, when millionaire Dennis Tito has just returned from orbit with an "ordinary citizen's" reiteration of the inspiration the whole-Earth view gave him to be a horn-again earthling, the most striking lesson to retain from our first forays into space is clear. They eventually provided the angle of vision that galvanized a new environmentalism, including an emergent ecofeminism, which "greened" most religious expressions, while perhaps as well specifically promoting a resurgent neo-paganism. Admittedly these movements have not swept aside the arguably patriarchal politics of pollution and exploitation. But space exploration provided a new start, and new hope, for the forces seeking ecological sanity and spirituality in a technological future.

Or perhaps it was Earth herself who was calling us back, teaching us that at the height of our highest technological leap beyond her bounds, our humanness required a seemingly outmoded grounding in the dark wet soil of home, Eiseley's ancient sunflower forest. A miracle indeed – a last one, we are well-advised to imagine, in that it is, finally, a remarkably positive legacy from the end of the troubled century when we first ventured into space.

Daniel C. Noel

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See also: Astronauts; Eiseley, Loren; Fuller, Buckminster; Lovelock, James; UFOs and Extraterrestrials.

Spinoza, Baruch (1632–1677)

Few thinkers have been as controversial, both in their lifetime and long after, as the philosopher, theologian, and Torah scholar Baruch (or Benedict) de Spinoza, usually referred to simply as Spinoza. At the age of 23 (on 27 July 1656) Spinoza was excommunicated from his synagogue in Amsterdam, in the ceremony known as the *cherem*, for his denial of the personal immortality of the soul and his doubts about the divine origin of the Torah. He was put under a ban that forbade any member of the congregation from communicating with him or reading any of his future publications. During his subsequent years as a self-supporting lens craftsman living in the southern part of the Netherlands, Spinoza experienced a more subtle form of censorship and was often accused of being an atheist for his anti-supernaturalism and his affirmation of the power of reason to disclose the nature of God. While he was able to get one of his works published in Latin, he had to modify his main work, *Ethics* (published posthumously in 1677) to get it ready for a Dutch language edition. Specifically, whereas in the Latin version Spinoza equated God and nature (*Deus sive natura*), in the sense of power but not in the sense of materiality, in the intended Dutch version he felt that he would have to drop out this correlation with nature. In his political and hermeneutic text *Theological-Political Treatise* (published in 1670) the correlation of God and nature is more boldly asserted, but again, in the sense that each is the power and the manifestation of being as infinite substance.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the charge of Spinozism, which carried the taint of pantheism and even atheism, would appear when thinkers of the Protestant left struggled to articulate a more naturalistic conception of the divine. A famous instance occurred when the German Reformed theologian Frederick Schleiermacher (known as the grandfather of liberalism) was accused of importing this dangerous non-biblical and heretical doctrine into the church in his 1799 *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Schleiermacher, while publicly

affirming the influence of Spinoza on his thinking, was able to deflect this charge and get his early work past the censor. Yet decades later Schleiermacher's colleague at the University of Berlin, G.W.F. Hegel, strongly criticized any hint of Spinozism in religion – going so far as to say that Eastern religion was actually a form of Spinoza's pantheism because of its alleged corollary belief in one substance. For Hegel, Spinoza's substance was devoid of spirit or self-consciousness and thus could not be a worthy religious object. Even in the twentieth century both Jewish and Christian theologians have often had to tread lightly around any affirmation of the clear pantheism in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Yet Spinoza's positive impact on the Enlightenment, with its quest for a universal religion, and Romanticism, with its hunger for the hidden abyss of nature, can be measured by the courageous ways in which a few major thinkers of this period revived the study of nature as a religious theme in its own right.

It is often assumed that Spinoza lived an isolated life that was cut off from contact with the creative minds of his time. In fact, he frequently entertained visitors of distinction in his home and was fully aware of what was taking place in the major universities of the Netherlands and beyond. He engaged in lengthy correspondence with noted philosophers and scientists and was able to answer some of the first criticisms of the pre-published manuscript version of his *Ethics*. He was an early champion of the ideas of René Descartes, and continued to teach the Cartesian philosophy to private students who visited him from Leiden University during the period in which such thought was effectively banned from Dutch universities – further damaging his reputation in the eyes of both Jewish and Christian theologians. Yet his championing of Descartes was not unquestioning, especially concerning the ideas of soul and substance.

For Descartes, the world is constituted by two fundamentally different modes of substance, whose interaction is somewhat shrouded in mystery even though he held that there may be a link between them through the pituitary gland in the brain. On one side is extended substance, which exists in three spatial dimensions and can be plotted on a three-axis (x,y,z) coordinate system. This is the realm of matter that can be analyzed using the principles of a mechanistic physics. On the other side is non-extended substance, the realm of mind, which has no spatial traits and is not located within any type of coordinate system. Non-extended or thinking substance provides direct evidence of its own existence through a process of introspection and self-conquering doubt of external reality. From a self-evident foundation of pure internal intuition consciousness can establish both its own immortality and the existence of a perfect deity.

For Spinoza, this dualism produced severe problems that he set out to resolve in his own metaphysics of substance. Unlike any manifest order within the world, sub-

stance is that which bears traits, while not having traits of its own; that is, "A substance is prior in nature to its affections (*Ethics*)." Yet for Spinoza there could only be one substance, not two or more. The one infinite substance has an infinite number of affections or modes, only two of which are immediately knowable by us; namely, the physical and the mental modes. Consequently, contra Descartes, there is one substance with two known modes, not two separate substances with a dubious connection. Mind and matter were simple, different modalities of the one nature or God. Further, Spinoza distanced himself from the atomism implicit in Descartes' vision of nature and affirmed a deeper unity that he denoted by the Latin and medieval term "*natura naturans*" or nature naturing – somewhat akin to his use of the Latin concept of *conatus* or striving. Given the principle of unity in his fundamental ontology, Spinoza argued that the most basic value of life, and the foundation of ethics, was the intellectual contemplation of the divine infinite substance. Spinoza did not have any personal or social religious practices that pointed to an experience of the holy as a part of nature, but he did articulate a kind of liturgy of the mind that sought a deep parallelism between the human understanding of the infinite (via two of its modes) and the infinite substance itself. By rejecting supernaturalism and any notion of a personal immortal soul, Spinoza came very close to a kind of nature mysticism in which the distance between the human individual and the divine is overcome through the human instrument of reason. This model provides no place for special historical revelation or for the sacredness of any text, as neither is necessary for the intellectual contemplation of God as nature.

Specifically, Spinoza argued that God (as nature) was unique, a necessary existent, the necessary cause of all things, and was devoid of will or intellect. Further, all things, no matter what their attributes, have their being in and are sustained by God. Again, the distinction between a creator and its creation is denied since both dimensions of nature are part of the same infinity. Interestingly, Spinoza's form of pantheism is necessitarian and denies anything like free will (both in God and in human beings). One implication of this is that, "... all final causes are nothing but human fictions (*Ethics*)." God as nature has no lack in its infinite reality and hence can neither have nor hold forth any unfulfilled goals. This view of the divine puts Spinoza on the opposite side of the divide from contemporary process perspectives, which affirm teleology and incompleteness in the divine and in the human order as it relates to the divine.

For centuries the epithet "Spinozism" has been a term of reuke, yet very few thinkers have actually probed into the meaning of so-called Spinozism and into its key role in the evolution of our understanding of nature. While Spinoza has had little impact on contemporary eco-feminism, he has had a strong influence in two areas of

thought that are of growing importance. In the French postmodern milieu he has appeared as a crucial dialogue partner and goad to the reflections of Giles Deleuze who developed a non-linguistically centered ontology of nature and its inner dynamisms. This has opened up an avenue of reflection that is not ensnared in the stultifying debate between French structuralism and deconstruction. In the revival of classical Euro-American pragmatism, which rethinks the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts of Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, and William James, there is now a movement to unfold a metaphysics of nature that has clear and conscious ties to Spinoza. Among thinkers who have acknowledged this tie are Justus Buchler, Don Crosby, Jerome Stone, and this author. Process metaphysics is less open to a dialogue with Spinoza because of the latter's perceived eternalism and static view of the one infinite substance. However, insofar as process thought focuses on the extensive continuum, creativity, or the Platonic container, it may find itself more open to an appreciation of the power of Spinoza's key concept of *nature naturing*. By compelling us to take the concept of immanence with the utmost seriousness, Spinoza makes it possible for us to unfold a fully radical and consistent naturalism that neither romanticizes nature nor leaves it in the hands of an alien creator God.

Robert S. Corrington

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- See also: Corrington, Robert S.; Deep Ecology; Environmental Ethics; Naess, Arne; Pantheism; Religious Naturalism.

Spirit and Nature

A theological term analogically borrowed from early natural sciences – namely, stoicism and Platonism – Spirit remains intimately correlated to a culture's philosophy of nature. Inasmuch as the philosopher William James once observed that "[r]eligion is our manner of acceptance of the universe" (Goodenough 1998: 47), a given culture's sense of embeddedness or, conversely, self-exclusion from ecological systems may be deduced from its articulation of

spirit. Despite the affiliation of dust and spirit in the creation stories of the Hebrew Bible, predominant correlations of Spirit and nature in the twenty centuries of Western Christianity have tended to legitimate an aversion of the Earth through the evocation of Spirit's transcendence.

Early Semitic stories, like many indigenous cosmologies, employed the concept "spirit" (in Hebrew, *ruach*, translated as "breath" or "spirit") without substantively pulling the sacred out of the ecological matrix. Spirit, rather than forcing the value of life to stand away from or against nature, conspired with the physical: quite simply as the air is indivisible, so the breath (spirit) of life that God breathes into the first human is indistinguishable from the human's own breath (Gen. 2:7). Among the Jesus movements of the first century, "Spirit" was a predominant name for the experience of the immanent power and presence of God, that which promised the renewal of creation.

During the first centuries, Christian theologians, philosophically girded with Platonic and Stoic dynamic materialism, capitalized upon Spirit as causal agent or efficacy of the sacred. Yet, two significant tidal turns in Spirit's affiliation with nature transpired during these transitional centuries: 1) Spirit was, given its later Semitic affiliation with prophetic word and textual inscription, increasingly construed as a human, rational phenomenon; and 2) the apocalyptic cosmology of communities politically resisting the Roman empire, which had seemingly returned the Earth to "waste and void" (see Gen. 1:1-2), construed Spirit as another viable life region to which they might immigrate. Later Christian theologians read "the fall" of the Earth not as Earth's conscription by empire, but as an ontological devolution of matter itself. Quite simply, nature, having once been a paradise, wasn't itself any more, but had taken on qualities averse to life in the Spirit – namely, transience, temporality, and suffering.

While Stoicism and Platonism considered Spirit to be the most refined, purified form of matter, with the onset of neo-Platonism in the fourth century, "spirit" (*pneuma*, in Greek, affiliated with "air" or "wind," and "*spiritus*," in Latin, meaning "breath") came rather to designate that which was by definition immaterial. To invoke Spirit as the causal agent of a "new Earth" (Rev. 21) henceforth signaled Christianity's revulsion toward the conditions of finitude, spoilation and mortality. These psychic aversions were simultaneously visited as the occasion of women's subjugation, since (according to Aristotelean sensibilities) while man rationally ensouled, the human woman bequeathed to it its flesh-body. Consequently Spirit, Western Christian theologians up to this twenty-first century have claimed, liberates nature from its "bondage to transience" (Rom. 8:21), its temporal and finite constitution. Spirit's promised "second birth" through baptism lifted "man" out of the history of the animal, organic body, a conviction which has consequently legitimated Western

by such thinkers as Kitaroo Nishida (author of *Zen no kenkyuu* Studies on Goodness, 1911) and Tetsuroo Watsuji (author of *Fuudo*, Climate and Culture, 1935), he began studying Japanese Buddhism and then Shintoism, the indigenous religion of Japan. He assumes religious imagination to be the key to the rise and fall of civilizations. Thus, from the outset, Umehara's thought attempted to bridge the gap between East and West in order to lift Japan and the world itself from the ruins of modernity.

Umehara's studies of Japanese culture, developed in such works as *Jigoku no shisoo* (*The Concept of Hell*, 1967), *Kamigami no ruzan* (*The Exiling of the Gods*, 1985) and *Nihonjin no anoyo kan* (*The Japanese View of the Other World*, 1989), culminated in *Mori no shisoo ga jinrui o sukuu* (*The Worldview of Forest-dwellers Will Save Human Beings*, 1991), which addresses the relationship of religion to nature. In this book he rejects the traditional assumption that the Japanese come from a homogeneous race of rice-growing farmers - first by noting that 67 percent of the land in Japan has been preserved as forest, thereby reflecting widespread worship of trees, and then by proposing an alternative view that the original culture of the Japanese is retained in the minority Ainu and Okinawan cultures. He points out various elements common to Ainu and Okinawan religious rites and mythologies, and to Japanese Shintoism and Buddhism. He interprets the well-known Japanese Mahayana Buddhist phrase "Mountains, rivers, grass, and trees, all can become Buddha" as advocating the equality of all living beings. All can go to the other world (*anoyo*) where there is neither distinction of heaven and hell, nor final judgment, and eventually all will return to this world. Today, after many stages of transformation and syncretism, Buddhist temples take care of the rites for the dead, while Shinto shrines celebrate the birth and growth of all beings in nature. Belief in reincarnation can be found in the Ainu rites of sending bears and other animals back to the world of the gods above and in the Okinawan rites of communing with the eternal other-world of ancestors beyond the sea.

Umehara reinforces his assumption by referring to the findings of archeologists and physical anthropologists, which suggest that an early type of Mongoloid people, of whom Ainu and Okinawans are the remnants, had lived throughout the archipelago as hunters or fishers and gatherers during the Jomon period (ca. 12,000-300 B.C.E.) with a highly developed pre-agricultural forest culture, exemplified by their sophisticated earthenware. Then, around the third century B.C.E., a newer type of Mongoloid people arrived on the Japanese islands with a rice-growing culture. They expelled some of the indigenous people, and mixed with others to build the Yayoi culture (ca. 300 B.C.E.-300 C.E.). Umehara asserts that the natural religion born in the ancient forests survived the transition of cultures and even the introduction of such a powerful world religion as Buddhism in the sixth century. He

believes that human beings today should reevaluate the polytheistic natural religions of the forest and view the cyclic movements of life as a whole beyond individuals, races and species. It is an ecological and practical necessity for human beings to stop conquering nature and to live harmoniously with others in order to survive in the postmodern world.

Umehara has headed archeological expeditions to the sites of ancient civilizations in China and the Middle East as well as within Japan. He served as president of Kyoto Municipal University of Arts, was the first Director General of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto, and has been president of the Japan Pen Club since 1997. He is also a Kabuki playwright. He has won major literary awards and was honored with the Order of Culture in 1999.

Sadamichi Kato

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See also: Heidegger, Martin; Japanese Religions.

Unitarianism

The Unitarian movement can be defined as a radical tradition that emerged into self-consciousness during the European Reformation in the sixteenth century as an alternative to the authoritarian traditions of Luther and Calvin. Like their Anabaptist cousins, the Unitarians were suspicious of the misuse of ecclesial power to enforce such non-biblical teachings as the eternal Trinity, infant baptism, the exclusivity of revelation, and the doctrinal method of establishing worthiness for salvation. On the positive side, Unitarians affirmed a more immanent deity closely bound to nature, universal salvation, and the necessity of religious tolerance and freedom of the pulpit. Because of these beliefs, many Unitarians lived under religious persecution from both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic authorities until well into the eighteenth century. The most infamous case of this occurred when the Spanish Unitarian theologian Michael Servetus was burned at the stake by Calvinist forces in 1553. Servetus' crime was to have published a treatise, *Christianismi Resitutio* in 1552 in which he attacked the Trinity, orthodox Christology as it was determined by the Council of Nicaea in 325 - which affirmed the eo-equality of Christ and God while rejecting the proto-Unitarian view of Bishop Arius who denied this equality - and the doctrine of infant baptism. Implicit in his views was a pantheism that found God

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to be co-equal with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and rejected the punitive character of the Christian religion.

Unitarianism was founded in 1805, when William Channing, a Unitarian minister, was appointed to the Unitarian Chair of Divinity at Harvard University. He was the first to institute a Unitarian ministry in America, and he initiated the Unitarian movement in Boston. He established the Unitarian Society, which he believed was a more rational and humane form of religion, based on the equality of all people and the freedom of conscience. He was a leading figure in the Unitarian movement, and his ideas were influential in the development of Unitarianism in America.

The Unitarian movement was a response to the religious and social changes of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was a movement that sought to reform the Christian religion, and to establish a more rational and humane form of religion. It was a movement that was based on the equality of all people and the freedom of conscience.

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to be co-extensive with nature. This early Unitarian laid the groundwork for a universalist pantheism, which rejected a transcendent, sovereign, deterministic and punitive God.

Unitarianism's most readily identifiable form emerged in 1805, when radical professors at Harvard won the Hollis Chair of Divinity for their Unitarian candidate Henry Ware, thus marking the end of Congregational power at that institution. Soon Unitarianism was rocked by the even more radical religious movement of Transcendentalism initiated by the former Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson when he threw down the gauntlet to the church establishment in his 1838 *Divinity School Address*, in which he went so far as to divinize the self, deny the centrality of Jesus, make nature holy, and posit a form of purely personal revelation that was self-validating outside of any form of ecclesial community. Three years later the Unitarian minister Theodore Parker delivered an equally controversial ordination address, *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity*. While more Christian in tone than Emerson's address, it rejected the importance of dogma, liturgy, and anything other than ethics and a gospel of love.

Theologically, contemporary Unitarianism is diverse in expression and often even questions the need for theological reflection insofar as there is no agreement as to the real or alleged object of such reflection. However, there are identifiable philosophical commitments that mark Unitarianism as a decidedly nature-oriented perspective. Historically the distinction between liberal and conservative Protestant traditions was expressed by the difference between positive and natural religion. In the context of the post-Kantian milieu in which this distinction came to the fore, positive religion stressed a unique historical revelation, a unique textual record of that revelation, the centrality of a founder whose eternal word was embodied in a spirit-guided church, and the superiority of Christianity to any other religion. Natural religion denied any special revelation while placing a great deal of value on universalizable reason. It rejected the importance of texts in favor of a renewed understanding of the book of nature. The power of autonomous natural and atemporal reason replaced the role of the historical founder. Reason operated within the framework of a radically open experience of the whole or the infinite. Further, Christianity was often seen as a religion that had begun to exhaust its resources, thus paving the way for an honest exploration of other religions. Unitarianism has long embraced the basic commitments of natural religion, but has moved them more directly into a post-mechanistic view of a growing, infinitely complex, and fecund nature.

Insofar as Unitarianism would affirm a metaphysics it would deny the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, while asserting that nature has neither beginning nor end, with the stipulation that the world of astrophysics, which affirms

the Big Bang creation, is but one world within the infinity of nature which has its own subaltern conception of creation, perhaps out of imaginary time. Transforming the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century distinction between positive and natural religions, it is perhaps preferable to speak of anti-naturalist and naturalist religions. The anti-naturalist forms embrace supernaturalism, miracles, a sovereign and external Creator, and a devaluation of creation over its Creator. Naturalist religions, which can be either pantheistic or pantheist, but not theistic or personalistic, are not only immanentist, but also affirm that nature is the genus of which the object of religion is the species. Nature is the all-encompassing category, and actually transcends the genera (classes) of all orders that occur within and as nature. Hence the term "nature" functions as both the highest category and a pre-category, that is, there is no opposition term to nature precisely because nature is all that there is, both actual and potential. For many Unitarians all-encompassing nature is itself holy while for others nature is neither holy nor unholy *per se*; it simply obtains in its infinite unfolding.

Pantheist naturalism retains some remnants of the Christian traditions insofar as it affirms that a dimension of the divine is discontinuous with the orders of nature (the dimension of *nature natured*), even though fully relevant to them. Pantheist naturalism is more radical in that it decisively moves beyond the Christian traditions by asserting that the dimension of the divine in nature can in no way be discontinuous from any or all orders of *nature natured*. This deeper dimension of the one nature is often denoted by the term "*nature naturing*," a term used by Emerson in this sense.

Within the Unitarian movement this tension is expressed as the difference between a more optimistic somewhat Christian progressivism tied to the evolutionary advance of the divine (pantheism) and a more quietist post-Christian meliorism correlated to a less optimistic view of human prospects within infinite nature (pantheism). In either case, Unitarianism affirms that supernaturalist religion remains a destructive force in culture insofar as it masks our deeper relationship to the eternal self-creating nature.

This underlying, and not always self-conscious, naturalism is manifest in both the liturgy and practice of the contemporary Unitarian Universalist Church. In 1961 the-then separate but theological similar movements of Unitarianism and Universalism joined to form a common Fellowship that is now called the Unitarian Universalist Association. Since 1961 the liturgy of the Fellowship has been shaped in ways that mark the transition to a more nature-centered worldview. Services are now dedicated to solar and lunar events as well as to the inner rhythm of the seasons. Generally the liturgy celebrates cyclical rather than historically unique events, although traditional world religious holidays are often celebrated as well, and the

services use texts from all of the major religious and secular traditions.

Native American and pagan traditions are often used to transform religious consciousness by returning to the premonotheistic world, a world held to be friendlier to nature than that of the supernatural monotheisms. Among the more important yearly events is the Flower Communion in which each member of the congregation is asked to bring a flower that is placed in a common vase at the front of the meeting room or sanctuary. At the end of the service, each member takes a different flower home. The Czech Unitarian minister Norbert Capek created this service before the Second World War. Capek also created the symbol of the flaming chalice, which combines the naturalistic symbols of enlightening fire and the wisdom-holding cup, which is now the central liturgical object in the Unitarian Universalist movement. Capek was executed in a Nazi concentration camp in 1942 for his resistance work in which the symbol of the flaming chalice was used as a code to help escaping Jews.

Along with a strong social gospel tradition, Unitarian Universalists today fully participate in the worldwide movement of the greening of the Church. There is a direct involvement in local issues of justice and the use of resources in a way that distributes them equitably and does minimal harm to the environment. Each member of the congregation is asked to use ecologically friendly practices in all dimensions of personal and social life. In the national realm, the Association works to create laws that will bring these practices into being. On the international level, the Association has long fought for forms of just trade and reduced First World consumption. One particular focus of this concern is with critiquing the growing power of international corporations as they control the yearly sale and distribution of hybrid seeds for which they have the patents. Given that Unitarian Universalism denies the reality of a potentially salvific deity who could create an apocalypse that would rescue a few of us from our abuse of nature, congregation members feel compelled by conscience to work toward the reversal of the natural degradation partially caused by the monotheisms.

Robert S. Corrington

Further Reading

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See also: Corrington, Robert S.; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Nature Religion in the United States; Pantheism; Spinoza, Baruch; Transcendentalism.

United Nations - See Bahá'í Faith and the United Nations; Earth Charter; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; United Nations' "Earth Summits."

United Nations' "Earth Summits"

The first international United Nations' "Earth Summit," formally known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from the 3rd to the 14th June, 1992. It included 172 national representatives (of which 108 were heads of state) and over 2400 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and addressed the threat of global environmental degradation as nations seek economic development. The gathered national leaders signed the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the conference itself adopted The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, The Forest Principles, and Agenda 21, a plan for coordinating environmental and national development by the next century. The Commission on Sustainable Development was formed to monitor and report on the implementation of these declarations and principles.

The 1992 Earth Summit emerged from an earlier United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held at Stockholm in 1972, which for the first time placed environmental issues before the international community, and led to the formation of the United Nations Environment Program. By 1983 the relationship between environmental degradation and economic and social development had led to the formation of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, known as the Brundtland Commission. This issued the 1989 report entitled *Our Common Future*, which defined sustainable development as "that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" and called for international strategies combining both environmental protection and development. Significantly, the envisioned programs include action not only at the international, but also at regional, national and local levels, and involving state and non-state actors. The United Nations General Assembly voted in 1989 to hold the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992.

UNCED was a watershed, but not only for the obvious environmental reasons. The United Nations moved toward