

## **Environmental Theology: A Judeo-Christian Defense**

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Much of the modern environmental movement has found it necessary to develop new theologies of nature and humanity. However, the traditional beliefs of Judaism and Christianity provide a better perspective on nature and offer ample grounding for a realistic environmental ethic. Anthropocentrism is a necessary component of any workable system of human responsibility and the doctrine of sin means that Jews and Christians understand both the promise and perils of modern technology. Human creativity is a gift from God and can be used appropriately to alter the natural world. Jews and Christians should be forthright in defending their faith as relevant and sufficient for dealing with environmental issues.

### **Introduction**

When examining the history of the environmental movement, one is struck by two major phenomena. First, the environment is relatively new as a major political and economic force. The relationship of humans to their natural environment has always concerned some members of society, but only in the last several decades, and largely in the West, has concern for the environment expanded to be a matter of intense public discussion. In the process, environmentalism has also become, for the first time in history, a major driving force in economic and political affairs.

However, a second ideological revolution has also taken place—namely, the rising influence of religious concerns in environmental issues. There are two major strands to this new religious consciousness. The more radical is the effort to develop whole new theologies of nature and humanity to replace existing religions that are viewed as having been responsible, in a significant way, for the environmental degradation of the world. The second, and less radical, approach is the alteration of traditional theology to take better account of environmental concerns.

Whatever the particular religious response to the issue, it has become increasingly clear that simply discussing the environment in terms of costs and benefits and trying to make rather narrow utilitarian arguments about the efficacy of particular environmental policies is insufficient. Environmental argu-

ments are not value-free. We can attempt to assess the efficiency of a particular activity, but the question arises: Efficiency in achieving what ends? The whole issue of who counts in the social calculus is a fundamental one that every society must address: Do just the members of my tribe or ethnic group count, or does some larger concept of humanity matter? Do animals and fish have rights? What about plants and rocks? Can we use nature to expand human happiness? If so, how should that use be limited? How should we understand economic growth and technological change? Each of these questions involves a host of normative and theological issues, and participants in the environmental debate have begun to frame these questions in religious terms.<sup>1</sup> More recently, a group of Jews, Catholics, and Protestants have jointly issued "The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship."<sup>2</sup>

The religious community's response to the increasing concern about the relationship between humans and nature has been vast and varied.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, it has been simply to form bodies to explore ways of raising environmental consciousness. In 1990 an open letter to the religious community was drafted by astronomer Carl Sagan; the Very Rev. James P. Morton, president of the Temple of Understanding; and Paul Gorman, vice president of public affairs for the Cathedral of the Divine in New York City. This effort led to the 1992 formation of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), an alliance of the United States Catholic Conference, the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC), the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (CEJL). The NRPE has been actively distributing "creation care resources" to congregations as well as lobbying in the public policy arena.<sup>4</sup>

In other cases, however, the alterations to traditional theology have been substantial. Matthew Fox, an Episcopal priest and founder of the University of Creation Spirituality, has argued for an end to dualism, in which humans and nature are seen as separate. He posits instead a "creation-centered spirituality," which overturns the usual Christian emphasis on the Fall and redemption.<sup>5</sup> Christian worship services have been altered to include a more explicit emphasis on nature. The Episcopal Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York City, which is also the home of the NRPE, has led the way in the greening of Christian liturgy. In addition to sponsoring the Gaia Institute, whose purpose is to expand and explore the Gaia hypothesis (that the earth is a living, self-regulating entity), the church now blesses animals on the Feast of Saint Francis.

Nonetheless, others have argued that Christian theology is at the heart of the environmental problem, and only a completely revised theology of nature

that rejects anthropocentrism and dualism is adequate to the task at hand.<sup>6</sup> James Lovelock, the originator of the Gaia hypothesis, represents one strand in that effort, while others have moved to a straight-forward biocentrism, with its “basic intuition ... that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere ... are equal in intrinsic worth.”<sup>7</sup>

Even what we might think of as completely secular messages about the environment have religious overtones. Joseph Sax, who has argued for lessening the human presence in our national parks, sees himself and other environmentalists as “secular prophets, preaching a message of secular salvation.”<sup>8</sup> The language of many environmental appeals is couched in terms that are clearly reminiscent of salvation, the defeat of evil, and the return to a paradise similar to the Garden of Eden.<sup>9</sup>

It is becoming increasingly difficult to separate religion and the environment. Too many of the issues surrounding the environmental debate are fundamentally ethical in nature, and too many of the participants in the debate have chosen to phrase their arguments in explicitly religious terms. To say that religion is important, however, is not to say that all religious perspectives are of equal value for interpreting environmental questions. My argument is that we do not need so much to revise our spiritual heritage with respect to the environment as to rediscover it. We do not need a brand-new spirituality; in fact, efforts to create one are fraught with danger. A return to the orthodoxy of the Jewish and Christian faith offers our best hope for a healthy and internally consistent perspective on environmental questions. I believe the Judeo-Christian understanding of nature and humanity is superior to the modern effort either to develop a brand-new theology or to revise the old along similar paths to the new. Several reasons will be offered below for why the orthodox theology of Judaism and Christianity yields appropriate insight into environmental questions.

### **The Validity of Anthropocentrism**

If there is any one significant theme throughout recent theologizing on the environment, it is the claim that anthropocentrism is at the heart of the environmental crisis. Moreover, the teachings of Judaism and Christianity are considered the main historical causes of this anthropocentrism. Thus, efforts to move toward a biocentric view of the universe are applauded, and any vestiges of anthropocentrism are seen as evidence of our failure to adopt a correct environmental theology. However, the effort to ground any humanly designed pattern of thought into anything other than anthropocentrism is doomed to failure.<sup>10</sup>

In defending an anthropocentric view of the world, I am not arguing for a

narrow, utilitarian interpretation of that position. Some have interpreted the “dominion” passages of Scripture (cf. Gen. 1:26, 28) to give humans unlimited power over nature and to teach that nature is valuable only insofar as it satisfies human material needs.<sup>11</sup>

However, Scripture provides a different view in that even before the creation of humans, God honored other parts of the created order by calling them good (cf. Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The fact that the created order also gives glory to God (Ps. 19:1), completely apart from humans and what they do with creation, would indicate further that nature serves something beyond human purposes and, as such, it must be respected and honored. Biblical passages such as Job 38 through 41 also emphasize creation’s vast scope in relationship to human understanding. The Judeo-Christian tradition is anthropocentric, but not in the sense that there is no transcendent standard that requires humanity to account for its stewardship of the created order. *Appropriate dominion* means acting as responsible stewards of creation. We are creatures made in God’s image, which surely involves genuine respect and appreciation for nature, for understanding and treating it as God would.<sup>12</sup>

However, the effort to move beyond an anthropocentric to a biocentric view neither fits with our moral sensibilities nor yields useful policy prescriptions. First of all, the various attempts to derive a biocentric theology have been stymied in determining agreed-upon stopping points for the rights of nature. Although early efforts concentrated on the concept of sentience, philosophers and theologians have been unable to present a workable definition of what sentience includes. Edward Abbey, a leading deep ecologist, has said, “unless the need were urgent, I could no more sink the blade of an ax into the tissues of a living tree than I could drive it into the flesh of a fellow human.”<sup>13</sup> Rene Dubos, a prominent bacteriologist, believes that just as people and wolves should coexist, so should people and germs.<sup>14</sup> Philosopher Paul Taylor argues, “The killing of a wildflower, then, when taken in and of itself, is just as much a wrong, other-things-being-equal, as the killing of a human.”<sup>15</sup> But even granting rights to living creatures does not solve the problem, since several leading figures in the environmental movement now argue, in the words of Michael J. Cohen, that “rocks and mountains, sand, clouds, wind, and rain, all are alive. Nothing is dead...”<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, the Genesis creation account makes a clear distinction between humans and the rest of the created order. We alone are made in the image of God; therefore, there are clear and meaningful differences between humanity and nature. Again, this is not to argue that there is a single purpose for nature, viz., the service of humankind. However, because people reflect God’s image, it

is appropriate to speak of human rights and responsibilities that do not extend to other parts of the natural order.

One test of a moral theory is its fit with common-sense notions of right and wrong. This is not to say that morality is subject to ratification by majority vote, but if people generally find that sophisticated ethical theories fly in the face of what the person on the street thinks of as right, one must ask if those theories are correct. The fact that most humans want to draw a distinction between the well-being of their child and that of the diphtheria bacteria competing for the child's life should tell us something. The fact that even the most ardent fans of biocentrism eat spinach salads and walk on grass should also reveal something concerning the internal consistency of the claim that "all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization...."<sup>17</sup>

At the policy level, anthropocentrism is also essential. Every call to save the environment is predicated upon human action. We are asked to respond to stories of environmental disaster, to evidence that nature is being altered in unfortunate ways, and to appeals to reverse the damage that humans inflict upon the natural order. But every one of these is a call to change, and it is humans who are being asked to change. This presupposes that humans are the reasoning creatures of the universe, the ones who respond to moral arguments. This is a human-centered perspective that depends upon a human-centered view of the universe.

It is unclear how, in a world of human attempts to develop an appropriate perspective on nature, it is possible to have anything but an anthropocentric perspective. A standard definition of anthropocentrism is the interpretation of the world through human values, and it is this human-centered worldview that many radical environmentalists want to expunge from our thinking. When people call for an acknowledgment of rights for nature, they are suggesting that humans, through their thought processes or actions, recognize those rights. If there are rights embodied in nature, they will have relevance in our world only because humans choose to recognize them. Any rights that have significance for human institutions will be conceived of and acted upon by humans. It is difficult to see how one can have any meaningful policies or ideologies that practically affect nature unless they are seen through human eyes.

Laurence Tribe has called for us to choose "processes ... which ... avoid a premise of human domination."<sup>18</sup> But the very process through which Tribe chooses to express the rights of nature, namely, the legal system, has no way of removing human domination. In fact, the claim he makes for nature to have rights independent of any human influence is really a claim that particular

people or groups who have certain views about nature should be given special voice, and others with different views should have less influence. Thus Tribe and other biocentrists are really making arguments about human claims, particularly concerning which of these claims take precedence over the others.

Once the recognition is made that there is no realistic way for nature to speak for itself, one is left wondering, Who does speak for nature? Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gary Snyder has suggested that poets are “uniquely positioned to ‘hear voices from trees.’”<sup>19</sup> But what if poets disagree as to what the trees are telling them? Who qualifies as a poet sensitive enough to hear such voices? Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas has given us an additional criterion: “those who have that intimate relation with the inanimate object about to be injured, polluted, or otherwise despoiled are its legitimate spokesmen.”<sup>20</sup> Again, Douglas is not specific about how one resolves competing claims of intimacy.

One suggested alternative to having certain people speak for and listen to nature is to provide nature with direct representation in the political and judicial processes. In 1978, in *Palila v. Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources*, a small Hawaiian bird, the palila, was the plaintiff in a judicial hearing. This is the first time in United States legal history that a non-human was accorded such status. However, the palila seemed strangely incoherent when offered the opportunity to speak to the court, relying instead upon the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and the Hawaiian Audubon Society to represent its wishes.<sup>21</sup> Exactly how these organizations had insight into the bird’s mind is unknown.

Likewise, the possibility of granting voting rights to nature has been seriously entertained. Christopher D. Stone, one of the early advocates of rights for nature, has said,

Yet could not a case be made for a system of apportionment which did take into account the wildlife of an area? It strikes me as a poor idea that Alaska should have no more congressmen than Rhode Island primarily because there are in Alaska all those trees and acres, those waterfalls and forests.<sup>22</sup>

The human-centered nature of such a proposal is obvious. Humans who live in Alaska should have more than proportional representation in Congress because there is more nature in Alaska. Regardless of what one makes of the argument that Alaska should have more representation in Congress because it has an abundance of trees, claiming that such a concept removes “the premise of human domination” is silly. Until we devise a system for rocks, waterfalls, and trees to vote their preferences, our political and judicial systems will be decidedly

anthropocentric. The explicit recognition of this fact by Judaism and Christianity represents an honest statement of reality.

An anthropocentric view also resolves another contradiction in modern environmental theology in that such theology elevates nature and the natural processes as good but also condemns humans when they act in their own self-interest in a way that is “natural.” In the natural order, one species cannot be asked to accept responsibility for the survival of another species. In an anthropocentric order, however, one can request that humans accept responsibility for other humans, nature, and animals. Humans can be held accountable for their actions, and this accountability is a reflection of the human-centered nature of our political system and political philosophy.

### **Separation of the Created and the Creator**

The Judeo-Christian tradition views creation as worthy of respect and as evidence of God’s hand in the world. The natural order reflects God’s handiwork but is not the full measure of God. One can see evidence of him in creation, but one does not worship the creation itself. This contrasts with much of modern environmental theology, which either sees the natural order as being the actual embodiment of God or represents nature as all that is good and pure in the world. That perspective views humankind as less than “natural” and sees everything that humans do to alter nature as a move from the perfect to the less perfect. David Foreman, a leading spokesman for deep ecology, has argued that

[a] human life has no more intrinsic value than an individual grizzly bear life. If it came down to a confrontation between a grizzly and a friend, I’m not sure whose side I would be on. But I do know humans are a disease, a cancer on nature.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Paul W. Taylor has suggested that if humans were to disappear from the earth, it would not be a catastrophe but something that the rest of the community of life would, if it were able, applaud and say “good riddance.”<sup>24</sup> Much of the reaction to anything created by humans is captured in David Foreman’s desire to “free shackled rivers.”<sup>25</sup> “The finest fantasy of eco-warriors in the West is the destruction of [Glen Canyon] Dam and the liberation of the Colorado [River].”<sup>26</sup>

A more realistic view sees both nature and humans as imperfect, as marred by sin. Thus there is a creative role for humanity to play in interacting with nature, which means that human action cannot be viewed as categorically evil. Even though physical resources are limited in this world, the thoughtful application of creative effort by humans can keep those limitations from impinging upon us. The fact that resource prices keep falling in modern times (in real

terms) would indicate that human creativity has been at least partially successful in removing these physical limitations.<sup>27</sup>

This perspective does not automatically condemn economic growth as evil, nor does it view all technological change as a destructive force to the natural order. Thus biblical theology sees no reason to exalt nature over humanity. We can capture a glimpse of the glory of God in a flower, a mountain stream, or a symphony. Creative acts by humanity are just as much a part of God's plan as are unspoiled wilderness areas. Furthermore, human relationships such as a father holding his son's hand on a walk through the park, the joy of a family reunion, or the bliss of a happy marriage, each represent God's good gifts. This sharply contrasts with the majority of environmental theologians, who insist that true happiness can be realized only in a state of nature where human activities are of secondary importance.

### **Utopianism and Trade-Offs**

Both Judaism and Christianity are relatively non-utopian in terms of their belief that an appropriate commitment to their doctrine does not solve all the problems of human frailty. Both understand that humans, even those fully committed to the Judeo-Christian tradition, will fail to make sound judgments, and will often act in ways that are not good for them or for their fellow human creatures. The orthodox Jew or Christian sees ample room for human institutions that will generate information and channel human activity in socially productive directions.

This viewpoint contrasts with modern environmental theology, which implies that if people would only adopt an appropriate perspective with regard to nature, then environmental problems (and all other problems) would end. This prescribed unity with nature brings humans into perfect harmony with the world around them, eliminating the need for any concern about appropriate institutional structures. At the beginning of the modern environmental movement Charles Reich wrote, "There is a revolution coming.... Its ultimate creation will be a new and enduring wholeness and beauty—a renewed relationship of man to himself, to other men, to society, to nature, and to the land."<sup>28</sup> An even more radical utopia is pictured in the following quotation from the Church of the Earth Nation:

Everywhere, all over the earth, human beings have gathered in small groups, laying down their differences and focusing on their common wisdom. They call themselves communities ... coming into unity ... for a new age on earth which shall be the embodiment of every positive thought we hold in our minds, just as the old age embodied our fears. The construction has begun, of a new reality, where the mysteries are revealed



within each human being as s/he comes into harmony with the planet as a whole. We celebrate this sunrise ... and the building of one earth nation.<sup>29</sup>

If, on the other hand, one does not see a world of harmony naturally evolving out of correct environmental consciousness, one needs to think long and hard about appropriate institutional design. The rules of the game determine what incentives decision-makers face and what information is generated by the choices of individuals. The Judeo-Christian position does not rely entirely upon religious reformation to make the world better but looks to human creativity in designing institutions that improve human interactions and protect, when appropriate, environmental quality.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of institutional design is even more significant when one realizes that in a modern, complex society, individuals simply do not have enough information to be good stewards of all the resources they use or affect.<sup>31</sup> Good intentions cannot ensure that people manage resources appropriately or prevent environmental degradation. Given that much of what we see in the world is the unintended consequence of human interaction, simply reforming our intentions is an inadequate policy prescription.

The Judeo-Christian position also differs widely from modern environmental theology in that it sees a whole host of goals to which humans can aspire. Instead of making the preservation of nature as humanity's principal end, numerous other goals are also worthy of attention. The reduction of poverty, the creation of dignity-enhancing social conditions, the promotion of a political regime that respects human freedom, and numerous other goals ought to be pursued. However, whenever there are many goals, trade-offs will be necessary. The careful application of human reason is also necessary to adjudicate between diverging and conflicting goals.<sup>32</sup>

What if a certain amount of environmental degradation is necessary for economic growth? How does one balance environmental purity and jobs? The environmental answer is usually one of two types. The first is to argue that there are no conflicts, and that maximizing environmental quality also creates jobs and stops the exploitation of the poor. The second insists that nature concerns always trump human concerns, and that environmental quality should always be maximized, no matter what the cost. David Foreman argues, "Human suffering resulting from drought and famine in Ethiopia is tragic, yes, but the destruction there of other creatures and habitat is even more tragic."<sup>33</sup>

Neither of these positions is feasible, however, which means that a careful balancing of goals is necessary to achieve a just and prosperous society. In this balancing act, the institutional framework looms large. If trade-offs are to be

made, then decision costs must be appropriately reflected in prices. Property rights must be such that decision makers receive good information and are rewarded when they take actions that fit with societal judgments about what is important and unimportant. Because most environmental theology has evolved with the sole purpose of saving nature, there is little recognition of the necessity of good institutional design, nor is there any discussion of competing goals. Instead, human actions are almost always characterized as simply right or wrong, with the basis for the judgment being the effect of those actions on the environment.

Because Judaism and Christianity recognize a multiplicity of human goals, they maintain room for a reordering of goals over time. Much of the modern environmental consciousness is due to rising incomes and opportunities. We can now afford to be concerned about the environment because we are no longer struggling to subsist. The wilderness is no longer a foe standing in the way of our survival; it now is a haven for the harried urbanite. The Judeo-Christian perspective does not require reworking to accommodate such changes. Within certain constraints, there is a vast amount of room for differing subjective evaluations among individuals—evaluations that can even change over time. Because the ultimate meaning of life is determined by one's relationship with God, the temporal world and one's perception of its various components can change dramatically without necessarily altering one's basic theology.

Furthermore, given the new environmental religions' singleness of purpose, and since these religions have been developed with the sole purpose of saving the natural order, no such reordering of ends can occur without formulating a whole new theology. Even though these new religions seem to offer a definitive and unchanging theological statement, they may prove to be quite transitory in the face of changing values and aspirations.

### **Scientific Inquiry and the Search for Truth**

One of the interesting aspects of modern environmentalism is the susceptibility of many in the movement to ecological hysteria. The evening news is continually filled with stories about where the next environmental disaster is coming from and how we are tottering on the brink of destruction. Pesticide poisoning, global warming, acid rain, asbestos, radon, and electromagnetic radiation are among the many dangers that threaten to overtake us. Interestingly, American citizens have been only too ready to accept the worst-case scenarios, and many regard careful scientific inquiry into the extent of these dangers as irrelevant.

The case of Alar, a growth regulator used on apples, provides an intriguing

illustration of this point. Alar, or daminozide, had been subjected to numerous tests that found it to be non-carcinogenic. However, a 1977 test yielded results purporting to show that Alar presented a serious cancer risk.<sup>34</sup> When a group of scientists nominated by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health reviewed this study, they concluded that it was so seriously flawed that the results were invalid. Among the principal flaws of the study were that the experimental animals receiving Alar were dehydrated and the doses were equivalent to human consumption of fifty thousand pounds of Alar-treated apples per day for a lifetime.<sup>35</sup>

However, the flawed nature of the tests did not stop the National Resources Defense Council from taking the data, hiring a public relations firm to market the story, and going forward with the charge that Alar presented a significant danger to humans. Actress Meryl Streep joined the crusade, and numerous television shows did investigative stories that played up the danger from apple consumption. Any serious discussion of the scientific issues involved was dismissed as simply serving the ends of the chemical and apple industries. Only months later, after Alar had been removed from the market, did it become clear that the danger had been vastly overestimated and that no significant harm was likely to be caused from Alar-treated apples. Similar reactions can be shown with respect to other environmental hazards such as dioxin, asbestos, acid rain, irradiated foods, electromagnetic fields, and most recently, to genetically modified foods. In each case, upon further investigation, scientific research has shown that the supposed dangers of these hazards have been grossly overestimated and the effort to prevent or remove them have gone far beyond any sensible precaution.<sup>36</sup>

However, we live in a world of imperfect information, and decisions must be made even when we do not have full knowledge. Is it not better to err on the side of safety and prevent certain hazards even if we do not know the full range of the danger? Such an argument ignores the facts that the world is full of risks and that hazards will never be eliminated. Resources spent to reduce one type of risk are not available for other life-enhancing expenditures. For instance, removing all pesticides from food production would dramatically increase the price of fruits and vegetables. These food items are crucial to a balanced diet, and they also contribute to reduced cancer risk. It could well be that the increased benefits of safer food would be far outweighed by the decreased availability and increased costs of those items.

But the real issue is why Americans have reacted so positively to environmental scares and why they have been relatively uninterested in scientific in-

quiry to resolve issues of fact. While it would be wrong to attribute eco-hysteria susceptibility entirely to religious sentiments, the new environmental theologies have had a noticeable effect. Since these theologies are nature-centered, their proponents have tended to react to any alteration of nature with religious fervor. Because these beliefs see nothing outside of nature offering eternal hope, any threat to nature is seen as a threat to God. Therefore, attempts to deal carefully with issues of fact on environmental matters are dismissed as unhelpful and inappropriate rationalizations.

If one knows by virtue of divine revelation that nature is endangered by human action, then all of modern technology is suspect. Herbicides and pesticides are, by their very nature, an unwarranted alteration of the natural order. The burning of fossil fuels or the construction of high voltage power lines represents the hubris of modern civilization, and when these technologies are charged with fouling the environment or threatening human health, it is easy to believe such charges. This perspective locates salvation in a return to harmony with nature; therefore, it should not be surprising that modern environmental theology views technology as evil incarnate.

The Judeo-Christian position is more sanguine about modern technology, seeing it as the result of the God-given creative impulse in humans. This is not to say that science should be trusted completely, but neither should scientific endeavor automatically be categorized as evil. The theologies of Judaism and Christianity do not see science as solving all problems, but neither do they see it as completely irrelevant or totally harmful.

Several other aspects of Judeo-Christian theology lead to a more positive position on science. First, since these religions believe in an ordered universe that is discoverable by human reason, thoughtful use of the mind is an appropriate activity. Questions of fact regarding the effect of various technologies are significant, and careful pursuit of the truth by trained scientists is crucial to resolving those questions. The Judeo-Christian position implies an obligation to study these issues carefully and responsibly. Second, because the ultimate hope for Jews and Christians does not lie in this world, they can be less emotionally involved in debates about the environmental effect of certain measures. Nature does not encompass all of reality; thus it is easier to deal more dispassionately with issues concerning it.

## **Conclusion**

The preceding account has taken a decidedly instrumental view of Judaism and Christianity. The importance of these religions was presented entirely in terms of their efficacy for dealing with environmental concerns, which is not

meant to imply that the question of their ultimate truth or falsity is somehow irrelevant. Nevertheless, there are instrumental issues; one's religious perspective does affect how one sees and reacts to the world. I have argued that viewing environmental issues through a normative lens is inevitable and appropriate. However, I regard many present-day lenses as yielding unsatisfactory results. We must, by necessity, be anthropocentric. A dualism between humans and nature fits our moral sentiments and the biblical account of who we are. We also must not seek all answers to environmental problems in heightened religious awareness but recognize trade-offs and the importance of institutions. We should take science seriously, since it is necessary for solving perplexing questions about the relationship between humans and nature. The Judeo-Christian position fits these requirements well, and Jews and Christians should be forthright about defending the relevance of their faith to current environmental concerns.

## Notes

1. Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, has recently said that "many of the environmental challenges we face today are moral ones," and that coalitions between churches and environmental groups are appropriate because "America's impulse to redeem and transform itself ... often begins with the church." *Sierra, The Magazine of the Sierra Club* (November/December 1998): 16–17. This issue of *Sierra* has an entire section devoted to religion and the environment. For a more general discussion of how religious language and religious categories are used in environmental issues, see Robert Nelson, "Unoriginal Sin: The Judeo-Christian Roots of Ecotheology," *Policy Review* 53 (1990): 52–59.

2. The declaration can be found on the Web page of the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship: [www.stewards.net](http://www.stewards.net).

3. For a more complete discussion of the development of religious environmental thought, see Lawrence E. Adams, "The Greening of Politics, the Economy, and the Church," *Stewardship Journal* 2 (1993): 9–18; Doug Bandow, *Ecology as Religion: Faith in Place of Fact* (Washington, D.C.: Competitive Enterprise Institute, 1993); E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), chap. 1.

4. One can consult the Web page of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment ([www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)) for more information on the organization. The Web page also contains the 1990 document, "An Open Letter to the Religious Community."

5. Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988).

6. The classic statement of that position is by Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–07.

7. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1985), 67. For a more complete discussion of the development of various religious positions on the environment, see Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), chaps. 4 and 5. For other statements of biocentrism, see many of the chapters in Michael E. Zimmerman, ed., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998), esp.

Part Two; George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Shambala, 1995); Tom Hayden, *The Lost Gospel of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996).

8. Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 104.

9. Nelson, "Unoriginal Sin."

10. For Jews and Christians the correct perspective is neither biocentrism nor anthropocentrism but theocentrism. However, since it is the anthropocentric aspects of Judaism and Christianity that are so roundly criticized in most discussions of environmental ethics, I will attempt to defend them here.

11. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Anchor, 1989), 74, interprets the biblical account of Creation as embodying this concept.

12. There are numerous more complete expositions of theology that reflect traditional Judaic or Christian presuppositions but also represent an "enlightened" anthropocentrism. See, for instance, Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991); Richard A. Young, *Healing the Earth: A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*; and Michael Barkey, ed., *Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Wisdom on the Environment* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2000).

13. Edward Abbey, "The Crooked Wood," *Audubon* 77 (1975): 25.

14. Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 77.

15. Paul Taylor, "In Defense of Biocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 242.

16. Michael J. Cohen, *Prejudice against Nature: A Guidebook for the Liberation of Self and Planet* (Freeport, Maine: Cobblesmith, 1983), 65. For greater analysis of the argument that neither sentience nor consciousness is necessary for moral standing, see Tom Regan, "On the Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* III (1981): 22.

17. Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 67.

18. Laurence H. Tribe, "Ways Not to Think about Plastic Trees: New Foundations for Environmental Law," *Yale Law Journal* 83 (1974): 1340.

19. Quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 115.

20. *Sierra Club v. Morton*, 405 U.S. 727 (1972), as reprinted in Christopher Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects* (Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufmann, 1974), 76.

21. Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 177.

22. Christopher D. Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects," *Southern California Law Review* 45 (1972): 487.

23. Quoted in Douglas S. Looney, "Protector or Provocateur?" *Sports Illustrated*, May 27, 1991, 54.

24. Quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 155.

25. David Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (New York: Harmony, 1991), 21–22.

26. *Ibid.*, 21.

27. Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 25.

28. Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 4.

29. Statement of the "Church of the Earth Nation," quoted in Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indian to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 153.

30. Of the different paradigms for analyzing environmental problems, free-market environmentalism is, perhaps, the most sensitive to issues of information dispersement and incentives. For a summary of this perspective, see Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal, *Free-Market Environmentalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Predicated upon the idea that property rights are the institutional mechanism that best holds people accountable and generates good information about alternatives, free-market environmentalism argues for institutional reforms that better define and enforce these rights. Although one should be reluctant to characterize free-market environmentalism as the only paradigm that flows from Judeo-Christian theology, it is certainly based upon a set

of presuppositions that are consistent with that theology.

31. For a more complete statement of this argument, see Paul Heyne, "Are Christians Called to Be Stewards of Creation?" *Stewardship Journal* 3 (1993): 17–21.

32. For a careful exposition of this argument, see the *Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* and the supporting documents in Barkey, *Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition*.

33. Quoted in Looney, "Protector or Provocateur?," 54.

34. Ralph I. Freudenthal and Susan L. Freudenthal, *What You Need to Know to Live with Chemicals* (Green Hills Farms, Conn.: Hill and Garnett, 1989).

35. *Ibid.* See also Joseph D. Rosen, "The Death of Daminozide," in *Pesticides and Alternatives*, ed. J. E. Casida (New York: Elsevier, 1990).

36. Numerous works document the overreaction to supposed environmental crises. For instance, see Ben Bolch and Harold Lyons, *Apocalypse Not: Science, Economics and Environmentalism* (Washington, D.C.: Cato, 1993); Michael Fumento, *Science under Siege: Balancing Technology and the Environment* (New York: William Morrow, 1993); Joseph L. Bast, Peter J. Hill, and Richard C. Rue, *Eco-Sanity: A Common-Sense Guide to Environmentalism* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1994); Gregg Easterbrook, *A Moment on the Earth: The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism* (New York: Penguin, 1995); Julian L. Simon, ed., *The State of Humanity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995); Michael Sanera and Jane S. Shaw, *Facts, Not Fear* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1996); and Ronald Bailey, ed., *Earth Report 2000: Revisiting the True State of the Planet* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).