

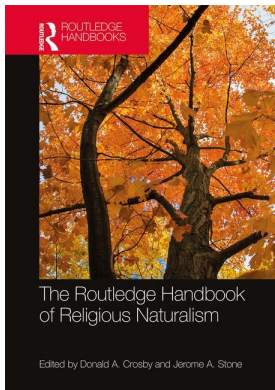
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## **The Routledge Handbook of Religious Naturalism**

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### **One Shawnee's Reflections on Religious Naturalism**

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## ONE SHAWNEE'S REFLECTIONS ON RELIGIOUS NATURALISM

*Thomas Norton-Smith*

### First introductions

kiwaakomelepwa nikannaki! nitesi8o Thomas Norton-Smith. saawanwa nilla no'ki nim'soma peleawa. That is, "Greetings to you all, my friends! I am named Thomas Norton-Smith. I am Turkey clan Shawnee." I speak for no one but myself, so any errors or misinterpretations are mine alone; I am full of mistakes. And, there will be misinterpretations, for, as I shared with Profs. Stone and Crosby, I am new to the discussion of religious naturalism. Indeed, I'm not even particularly religious; I'm just one often confused, mixed-blood Shawnee, trying to walk the right road.

I will offer reflections on religious naturalism both from an American Indian world version and from a realist Western perspective called *constructive realism*, grounded in the constructivism of Prof. Nelson Goodman (1983, 1988). While finding that there is much about religious naturalism to praise, I will argue that both constructive realism and the Native world version agree—albeit for different reasons—that religious naturalism's concept of the natural world is problematic.

I need to say something at the outset to explain this odd, apparently bifurcated little contribution. My reflections to follow will reintroduce themes from my book, *The Dance of Person and Place*—hereafter, *The Dance*—wherein I presented one possible interpretation of American Indian philosophy based upon a culturally informed realist revision of Nelson Goodman's constructivism. Thus, what will seem to be disjointed and unrelated reflections grounded within radically different philosophical traditions actually—and remarkably—have a common and interconnected history; but then, from a Native perspective, "everything is related."

With the understanding that various religious naturalists will differ in details, I will begin by discussing three tenets seemingly embraced by many. I will next rehearse my constructive realist account, which recognizes a plurality of equally privileged yet radically different world versions, and then consider how religious naturalism fares against a constructive realist critique. The section following will be devoted to important aspects of one of the world versions recognized by constructive realism—an American Indian world version—followed by its assessment of elements of religious naturalism. This will be ambitious, indeed, but with your kind attention, I believe we can do it.

### Religious naturalism

As I understand it, religious naturalism embraces three tenets: (1) *Naturalism*, that all and only the natural world exists; (2) *Inherent values*, that there are values inherent in the natural world; and

(3) *Religiosity*, that the natural world is sacred and an object of reverence. Appealing to religious naturalists Donald Crosby, Loyal Rue, and Jerome Stone, I consider each of these tenets in turn.

First, religious naturalism is a *naturalism*, and as such, as Rue observes,

[Naturalism] simply declares that whatever is natural is real and whatever is real is natural. That is, reality does not break out into two realms, the natural and the supernatural. Naturalism rejects the notion that anything at all transcends nature, except nature itself.

(Rue 2011: 97)

In Crosby's words, "nothing lies behind, is the ground of, or is set over against nature. For example, there are no beings such as the *supernatural* God, gods, spirits, angels, or demons envisioned in various cultures or religious traditions" (Crosby 2002: 17). Yet again, according to Stone, naturalism "involves the assertion that there seems to be no ontologically distinct and superior realm (such as God, soul or heaven) to ground, explain, or give meaning to this world" (Stone 2000: 1). That said, naturalism is "a very general metaphysical doctrine," consistent with realist or idealist metaphysical interpretations (Rue 2011: 97). Moreover, since human beings and their history and culture are clearly real, naturalism recognizes them as part of the natural world. "Nature is metaphysically ultimate, that is, there is nothing outside, beyond, or behind it. This statement includes human beings, who must be regarded as an integral part of nature" (Crosby 2002: 21). Finally, since naturalists believe that the natural world is all and only what exists, and the empirical sciences investigate the natural world—not only the "hard" sciences, but empirically based sciences of "human nature"—naturalists have confidence in the methodologies and results of the contemporary physical and social sciences. According to Rue:

If you are a naturalist ... taking the view that the natural order is ultimately real, then you will do well to focus your inquiry on nature. We may say, then, that inquiry into nature is close to the heart of naturalism. And this means, of course, that a commitment to scientific inquiry (the study of nature) is a central concern.

(Rue 2011: 101)

As Crosby observes, there is an "irreducible pluralism" in the sciences, since there is an irreducible pluralism in nature; the complex and messy human world of history and culture cannot be reduced to physics. "The sciences are unified in a common goal of understanding nature, but they remain conspicuously diverse in their ways of seeking that understanding" (Crosby 2002: 47).

The second tenet embraced by many religious naturalists is that there are values inherent in the natural world, values that are "objective, universal, and ultimate," as Rue puts it, at least in that they are a part of the natural world populated by living organisms. He argues that viability is the universal, objective, and ultimate value—the universal telos—of living things. Further, Rue holds that viability is an emergent value, emerging at the same time as life in the natural world (Rue 2011: 59). Crosby concurs, arguing that "[n]ature ... is replete with value, including religious value" (Crosby 2002: 21), and identifies a number of inherently valuable things, among them life, biological species, ecological systems, the biosphere, diversity, creativity and splendor. He also identifies disvalues in the natural world, among them death, suffering, and pain (Crosby 2002: 78–86).

Finally, religious naturalists embrace a third tenet, that the natural world is sacred—in whole or in part—and is an object worthy of religious reverence. Here I tread lightly—worried about leaving blundering, tenderfoot tracks—for the sacred is ineffable, ultimately important yet easily overlooked or misunderstood.

Defining “religious” and “spiritual” as equivalent terms, Rue regards the religious naturalist as one who “takes nature to heart,” one who treats nature as vitally important, central, and something that transforms one’s life. As something “taken to heart,” nature becomes part of—indeed interwoven into—one’s life, for nature bears heavily on fundamental matters of purpose and meaning, reordering of goals and values (Rue 2011: 110–111). Stone regards sacred things as “events, things, processes which are of overriding importance and yet are not under our control or within our power to manipulate,” and because some aspects of the natural world are fundamentally important yet beyond our control, that is, *sacred*—although we may not always be aware of the sanctity of a place, thing, or event—Stone is committed to religious naturalism (Stone 2000: 4). Finally, while acknowledging the existence of intrinsic evil in nature—pain, suffering, and death—Crosby writes:

This nature to which we intimately belong—a nature that sustains, renews, and inspires us in countless ways—can command our wholehearted religious commitment ... nature itself, when we rightly conceive of it and comprehend our role in it, can provide ample context and support for finding a purpose, value, and meaning in our lives. (Crosby 2002: 169)

In short, as I understand it, the religious naturalist sanctifies some aspect of nature—or nature itself—in the sense that nature is taken to be an object of supreme worth, perhaps even as an object of profound reverence. In words “roughly paralleling” theistic language, Rue reflects:

Religious naturalists typically refer to nature as “sacred,” in the sense of being inviolate and worthy of deep reverence. Religious naturalists are also likely to regard nature as creative and dynamic, not unlike traditional theistic talk about God. The religious naturalist will speak of nature as being, paradoxically, both intelligible and deeply mysterious, in parallel with theistic language about the revealed and hidden natures of God. For religious naturalists nature is ultimately real, the supreme giver of life, the source and destiny of all that is ... Nature is self-sufficient, sovereign, omnipotent. Theistic language about the grace of God is roughly paralleled by the religious naturalist’s assertion that nature constrains and enables. Theists claim that God transcends nature, while religious naturalists—especially the emergentists among them—will say that nature transcends nature itself.

(Rue 2011: 111)

### Constructive realism

Constructive realism embraces three tenets: (1) *Constructivism*, that facts are fabricated and worlds constructed by the use of language and other symbol systems; (2) *Ontological pluralism*, that there are many ontologically diverse, yet equally privileged constructed worlds; and (3) *Realism*, that—contrary to nominalism about universals—*kinds* of fact fabricating and world constructing processes exist. My debt to—and sins against—Nelson Goodman should be obvious, and I thank and apologize to him here.

First, constructive realism is a *constructivism* maintaining that there are no “bare facts,” that facts are created by the use of symbol systems, principally language. Consider my backyard feeder and the birds around it. There are three cardinals, and the one atop the feeder is red, so it is neither green nor blue. The feeder stands to the left of the cold frame. It is the same feeder

that I filled a couple of days ago, and it's not moving. Finally, there are no persons dining at the feeder. Clearly, these are facts about my feeder, these facts make true corresponding statements about the feeder, and that my true beliefs are justified—I know my feeder is not moving.

Remarkably, because the content of my sense experiences alone underdetermines how the world *really* is, there are many odd sorts of backyard world “facts” that are consistent with my experiences. Suppose we regarded “red” as an intransitive verb like “move,” and “move” as an adjective like “red.” Then the true statements would be “The cardinal atop the feeder redded” and “The feeder is not move.” What if, instead of distinguishing blue from green, we used the predicate “bleen”—where a thing is bleen if it is either blue or green. Then the fact would be that the cardinal atop the feeder is not bleen. “There was cardinal at the feeder” would be true, if “cardinal” were treated as a mass noun like “water.” Without the relation “to the left of,” “The feeder is west of the cold frame” might express the fact. Finally, in a Quinean world, wherein material objects come in day-long temporal slices, it is false that “It was the same feeder I filled a couple of days ago.” By the way, astrophysicists inform that, rather than being stationary, my feeder is moving at a blazing 67,000 miles/hour. These are some odd facts indeed, for most contradict our habit of thinking and talking about the world—but not one of them is inconsistent with the content of our sense experiences!<sup>1</sup>

Some of these odd sounding “facts” are quite at home in indigenous world versions. A Shawnee speaker might say “meci skwaawa,” expressing the fact “It redded” about the cardinal, because American Indian languages like Shawnee and Choctaw lack the verb “to be,” treating English adjectives like “red” as intransitive verbs (Hester 2004: 264–265; Cajete 2000: 26–27). Further, the Shawnee stem “skipaky-” applies to a thing if it is either blue or green—or better said, if the thing *bleens* (Voegelin 1939: 314). Having no notion of “to the left or right of,” the Tarahumara express the fact as “The feeder is west of the cold frame,” orienting the world using the cardinal directions.<sup>2</sup> And while “There were no persons around the feeder” is true in the Western version, in the Native world version the fact is that there were three persons around the feeder (Norton-Smith 2010: 21–22). In short, because sense experience underdetermines the way the world really is, there are many possible interpretations of the events taking place in my backyard.

So, the English speaker says “It is red” and the Shawnee speaker says “It reds”—two distinctly different “facts.” However, the question, “Who’s really right?” makes no sense, for what counts as a fact is determined by the way a linguistic community categorizes and organizes sense experience through the devices of a language. In general, all of the characteristics of the world—the things we understand to be objects and kinds—are relative to a particular world version, grounded in the fabrication of facts by a symbol system, principally language (Norton-Smith 2010: 19–20). The facts about my backyard scene are relative to a world constructed by my linguistic community.

Second, constructive realism embraces *ontological pluralism*, that there are many ontologically different, internally consistent, equally privileged constructed worlds—worlds whose versions satisfy certain pragmatic criteria for “rightness.” It is here Goodman and I begin to part ways, for his criteria for “acceptable” versions—deductive validity and inductive rightness, utility and simplicity—are biased against non-Western world versions, including an American Indian version. That said, we agree that acceptable versions cannot be *empty*, that is, cannot employ names and predicates that fail to organize or categorize any sense experience whatsoever. “Gods” and “demons,” “angels” and “Platonic forms” are labels that survive despite having no perceptual content. They label nothing, for supernatural gods, demons, and angels, and transcendental Platonic forms, are not the kinds of things that one can sense.

Finally, contrary to Goodman’s nominalism with respect to kinds, constructive *realism* maintains that kinds of fact fabricating and world constructing processes exist. Again,

ontological pluralism is committed to multiple ontologically diverse, yet equally privileged world versions constructed by symbol systems. This, however, is not wholly accurate, for we should regard symbol systems as linguistic *tools*; world versions are really the products of our *acts of construction with symbols*—collectings and sortings, composings and decomposings, weightings and valuing, among them—rather like the constructive acts of carpenters with hammers and saws transform the raw materials of boards and nails into a house. Now, acts of carpentry—hammering, sawing and so forth—are independent of any particular house, and many different wooden structures can be built using a single set of tools. Likewise, constructive realism maintains that the many equally privileged worlds are constructed using a common set of world constructing processes. Whether counting “two women” in an English world version, or “niiswi kweewaki” in a Shawnee world version, the same sort of collecting is required. While ontological pluralism implies that there is a multiplicity of ontologically diverse, equally privileged world versions, it does not imply that there is a multiplicity of ways of constructing worlds. Otherwise, I’d know how the Western world version was constructed—but how radically different world versions were constructed would be an inscrutable mystery.

### The constructive realist critique of religious naturalism

To be blunt, from a constructive realist perspective theistic talk of supernatural beings and events—gods, miracles, and such—is either meaningless or fails in its intended reference. Assuming that the supernatural is imperceptible, “God,” when referring to a *supernatural* entity, categorizes no perceptual experiences, while “miracle” refers to the unexpected experience in the natural world, but fails to refer to a supernatural influence. Thus, constructive realism wholeheartedly agrees with religious naturalism’s rejection of the supernatural.

Rue writes, “Religious naturalists bear an attitude of reverence toward the universal as a whole, and toward the earth in particular—and they are disposed to expressing their reverence by affirming that nature is both sacred and mysterious” (Rue 2011: 114). Denying the supernatural, yet recognizing that one *can* experience reverence and gratitude, awe and humility with respect to the natural world is again in accord with constructive realism. “Reverence” and “gratitude” are words that categorize emotional experiences, hence are meaningful. Further, religious naturalists have naturalized theistic categories—e.g., the “spiritual,” the “religious,” and the “sacred”—divorcing them from supernatural meaninglessness.

Perhaps most significant, in their embrace of values in nature, Crosby and Rue have suggested a solution to a long-standing concern I’ve had with constructive realism, and I thank them here. The problem is that an ontological pluralism seems more at home with a moral relativism than a moral realism—but, I believe the former to be inconsistent. Moreover, among the world constructing action kinds we can clearly add “valuing” as a way to organize and categorize experience, but valuing is notoriously perspectival. However, Crosby sketches a *relational* view of values—quite consistent with constructive realism—such that values, like facts, are constructions on and of experiences. “[W]ere there no valuers,” he observes, “there would be no values,” and since human and nonhuman valuers are part of nature, natural values exist and are prevalent in the world (Crosby 2002: 75–77). Rue grounds his moral realism by arguing that *viability*—“the continuation and fulfillment of life”—is “a universal, objective, and ultimate value” for living creatures (Rue 2011: 59–60). We might propose, then, that human beings—as a part of nature—universally categorize as valuable those perceptual experiences that are, for them, likely to continue and fulfill their lives, so at least some “valuing” is inherent in nature and not merely perspectival.

On a less positive note, Crosby anticipates my principal constructive realist concern with religious naturalism:

[S]ince we obviously cannot *experience* the totality of nature, encompassing everything that is and extending into the farthest reaches of space and time, as well as into the most minute, submicroscopic domains, how can we refer to that totality? If we cannot refer to it, how can our conception of it be meaningful?

(Crosby 2002: 18)

The problem, expressed as a constructive realist, is that meaningful words organize and categorize sense experiences—facts are fabricated through the devices of a language. “God” and similar words purporting to refer to supernatural entities, categorize no experiences, hence are meaningless. But at first blush, the word “nature”—understood by religious naturalists as referring to “everything that is and extending into the farthest reaches of space and time, as well as into the most minute, submicroscopic domains”—seems to fare better, but only a bit. Clearly, the sense experiences I have while catfishing in Couwachenink—on old Lenape ground—are a part of the extension and meaning of “nature.” However, isn’t the vast majority of the natural world to which religious naturalists purport to refer both temporally and spatially beyond my experience?

Crosby’s correct reply is that talk of the whole of nature may be abstract, but that doesn’t imply that theoretical term “nature” is vacuous. (Crosby 2002: 18). Indeed, the general term “cardinal”—which categorizes and organizes my backyard experiences—is, as well, a nonempty abstraction. “We obviously do not experience nature as a whole; all of our experiences of it are partial and fragmentary at best, but the abstractions of broad-ranging conceptual schemes can help fill in the gaps” (Crosby 2002: 26). The “broad-ranging conceptual scheme”—the *model of nature* Crosby develops—“is intended to order and elucidate important aspects of our experience of nature” (Crosby 2002: 26). His “conceptual and imaginative” model of nature intends to capture its plurality and diversity, its regularity and unrelenting change, and the “inexorable, disruptive workings of chance and novelty” (Crosby 2002: 34). Indeed, for Crosby the term “nature”

Suggests a dynamic, restless energy of growth, nurture, productivity, and change. It points to nature as the fruitful womb of all that is, has been, or ever will be. This etymology even hints at the wonderful power of nature to produce and sustain myriad forms of life, here on earth, in all likelihood in other regions of space, and probably in other epochs. These aspects of the concept of nature are for me the ones that are the most definitive, awesome, and compelling.

(Crosby 2002: 42)

While not vacuous, I believe that Crosby’s conceptual and imaginative model of nature suffers a problem similar to its supernatural counterparts, as Rue’s earlier parallel theistic language about nature reveals. I’m reminded of bygone days when, as a mathematics student, I puzzled over the cardinality of the natural numbers. The numbers are, of course, a countably infinite set—remarkably, the same cardinality as the rational numbers, despite the fact that the former are a proper subset of the latter—which made me wonder what sort of concept of the “infinite” one can have. I certainly have some notion of the infinite—but nothing like the concept of the cardinality of the natural numbers—an actual or completed countable infinity. At best, “the infinite” for me denotes the more pedestrian notion that “every number has a successor,” that

is, “I could keep counting”—a concept of a potential infinity. Now, don’t get me wrong; I was taught to *say* lots of things about the actual infinite. But that does not imply that I have a clear conception of it—imaginative or otherwise.

Likewise, it seems to me that Crosby and Rue’s conception of nature as “the universe as a whole,” “the totality of nature,” or even its power to produce and sustain life, “here on earth, in all likelihood in other regions of space, and probably in other epochs” are as inconceivable as the actual infinity—although religious naturalists *say* lots about it. That does not imply, of course, that the concept of “nature” is vacuous. I am suggesting, however, that “nature” cannot refer to what religious naturalists believe it refers; perhaps the *inconceivability* of nature is the source of mystery and awe. This, by the way, is not a crushing objection to religious naturalism; indeed, from a constructive realist perspective, it fares quite well.<sup>3</sup>

### An American Indian world version

I argued in *The Dance* that an American Indian world is numbered among the ontologically diverse, internally consistent, yet equally privileged actual worlds. As one surveys various Native traditions, four common themes appear—which constructive realism sees as world constructing principles: (1) *Relatedness*, that everything in the natural world is interrelated; (2) *An expansive conception of persons*, that both human and nonhuman beings can be persons; (3) *The semantic potency of performance*, that performance with symbols is the principal vehicle of meaning; and (4) *Circularity*, that time and space are ordered in cycles and circles. I also cautioned that because *incommensurable* worlds are constructed by radically different languages, it will be difficult to describe—let alone wholly comprehend—the Native version, for the description will impose Western categories on the American Indian world. But, we’ll do our best.

I’ll begin by sharing an old Menominee story, “The Indian and the Frogs” to introduce elements of a Native world. At first blush, it seems merely to be a story about one Indian’s encounter with “nature”—but, it teaches far more:

Once an Indian had a revelation from the head of all frogs and toads. In the early spring, when all the frogs and toads thaw out they sing and shout more noisily than at any other time of the year. This Indian made it a practice to listen to the frogs every spring when they first began, as he admired their songs, and wanted to learn something from them. He would stand near the puddles, marshes, and lakes to hear them better, and once when night came he lay right down to hear them.

In the morning, when he woke up, the frogs spoke to him saying: “We are not all happy, but in very deep sadness. You seem to like our crying but this is our reason for weeping. In early spring, when we first thaw out and revive we wail for our dead, for lots of us don’t wake up from our winter sleep. Now you will cry in your turn as we did.”

Sure enough, the next spring the Indian’s wife and children all died, and the Indian died likewise, to pay for his curiosity to hear the multitude of frogs.

(Skinner and Satterlee 1996: 82)

Perhaps the most striking thing for one unfamiliar with indigenous stories is that the frogs speak. But why shouldn’t they converse with the Indian as other persons do? The *equality* of humans and other creatures in the natural world has been long misinterpreted as a lowering of human beings to the status of other beings—a mark of “savagery” according to J. W. Powell



(1877). However, Indians strongly affirm and raise other creatures to the status of *persons*. In the Native world, a *person* is an animate being standing in a nexus of relationships with, relationships sustained by respect for other persons—clearly a circular definition, but Indians don't mind. And, of course, the Indian in the story is in a relationship with the frogs and toads, and so is in "nature." There is no artificial distinction between the human and non-human worlds; this is no mere encounter with the natural world seen as another realm.

At this point, however, I need to say a word about *animation*, a category so important in the Native world that it is marked grammatically in Algonquin languages, much like gender is in many Western languages. For Indians an animate being is one experienced as having and discharging *power*—including, importantly, the power to transform. Thus, among the usual candidates, Natives regard some rather unusual entities as animate—plants and animals, sacred places and physical forces, the sun and moon, even Mother Earth, herself—and, of course, tobacco and flint.

The next striking thing is the Indian's punishment for his "curiosity"—something that baffles the Western ethicist, for he neither harmed nor intended to harm the frogs. However, in a world where everything is related, the Indian's behavior made him *brother* to the frogs, and so he and his family shared their fate. But, what "behavior" merited such harsh punishment? The dynamic nexus of relationships between persons of various sorts and powers in the Native world is kept in equilibrium only by the respectful exchange of gifts—an instance of meaningful performances with symbols. The Indian, however, sought to acquire the frogs' knowledge without their permission, *stealing* what should only be *given* with the obligatory gift of gratitude in return. Because of his disrespect for other persons, the Indian and his family shared the frogs' fate. The story, therefore, does not tell of the Indian's mere encounter with nature; instead we see that his thoughts and actions—like those of all human and non-human persons alike—create and recreate the dynamic, unfixed, and unfinished "nature" to which he—and we—are inextricably bound.

The Menominee story teaches yet another lesson, that Indians live in a moral universe wherein everything thought, said, or done—no matter how "innocent"—has a moral dimension. Imagine the Western moral human world of motive and action extended to and multiplied by a plethora of other non-human persons with all of the needs and desires, volitions and beliefs that human persons have. But that moral universe is a "universe" of limited scope; my "universe" encompasses only the human and non-human persons to whom I am related: my family and friends, my ancestors and descendants, my tribe and its sacred places, and the green, water, winged, and four-legged people who nourish me—the catfish gifted to me by Cou-wachenink—and, of course, the Grandmother. Walking the right road is being mindful of and fulfilling my obligations to my human and non-human relatives—including the Menominee story that has taught me so much, and I thank it here.

### A Native critique of religious naturalism

I begin by reiterating my earlier caveat about incommensurable worlds constructed by radically different languages: Examples of radical differences in Western and indigenous ontology abound. These traditions categorize and recognize the value of the animate and inanimate differently. Witness that flint, pipe, and tobacco are animate in American Indian traditions and animation is important enough to be marked grammatically in Algonquin languages. Persons are categorized differently. The sun, moon, Earth, cardinal directions, and other critters are persons for Indians. Attributes are conceived differently. Without the verb "to be" in many indigenous languages, Western properties such as "red" denoted by predicates are understood as activities denoted

by intransitive verbs—“redding.” What the Western ontologist understands as disjointed and unconnected material events, the Indian ontologist knows are intimately related and interconnected moral events. The Western ontologist observes two natural events to abstract the similarities in form while the Indian ontologist focuses on their individual uniqueness. And if differences in ontology weren’t impediment enough, there are radical differences in corresponding notions of truth and verification, utility and knowledge. Even the logics in each tradition are different. Comparing the worlds of Native religion and religious naturalism, therefore, will be especially difficult and fraught with dangers. Perhaps only a fool—or the trickster Coyote—would try!

Native traditions tend not to draw sharp distinctions between literature and philosophy, science and religion (Burkhart 2004: 22). Nor are there sharp distinctions between fact and value, subject and object, the spiritual and material, or this-worldly and otherworldly (Deloria 2012: 201). Unlike the Western tradition, Indians’ collection of information about the natural world is comprehensive, arising from immediate experience. Moreover, the Western tradition recognizes only objective and replicable experiences as verifying; yet no experience—even the private and unique—is discounted in Indian traditions (Deloria 1999: 66). Thus, the Native experience of “spirit”—whether in visions, dreams, or in sacred places—is *genuine* (Deloria 1999: 355–356).

In this light, it might seem remarkable that I believe that Indians would agree with religious naturalists that there is no supernatural world, that only the natural world exists. Speaking of the Ojibwa, Hallowell opined that “[i]t is unfortunate that the natural-supernatural dichotomy has been so persistently invoked by many anthropologists in describing the outlook of peoples in cultures other than our own” (Hallowell 1960: 28). Yet, indigenous people are not shy about talk of “manitoo,” “mana,” or “wakan”—usually translated as “spirit.” However, I argued in *The Dance* that the air of the supernatural is imposed on the Native world version because of a mistake in translation: All of the Western supernatural connotations wedded to “spirit” are imposed on their indigenous counterparts. I suggested that “life force” is a better translation (Norton-Smith 2010: 86–89). Deloria suggests “power” or “energy” (Deloria 2012: 203). Neither uses “supernatural” as a translation.

For Indians, the natural world of experience is the only world that exists, hence, there is no supernatural world—but in the natural world we most certainly experience the power of sacred places, places with the power to move us in profound ways. For Natives these places are animate—they have power and discharge that power to affect us. So interpreted, there are “spirits” in the natural world. Nor, agreeing with religious naturalism, is the human world distinct from the natural world—another false distinction by Native lights. Western science, philosophy, and religions—save religious naturalism—view humans as not only superior to but different in kind from other critters in the natural world. Indeed, through ceremony human beings help shape and create the unfixed and unfinished world—also through the unceremonious burning of fossil fuels.

With regard to values in nature, Rue argues that certain values—certain “meanings”—are emergent and inherent. On his “strong emergentist” view, the natural world is now filled with *tele*, purposive activities: “The astonishing claim here is that a pointless process created the conditions for the pointfulness of biological functions. A universe with no telos, a universe without an agenda, just *inadvertently* made possible the spontaneous emergence of purposeful activity (Rue 2011: 54). Crosby argues that, while “[n]ature as such lacks purpose, sentience, or consciousness ... it is not devoid of value but is replete with value, including religious value” (Crosby 2002: 21). Nature is “replete with value,” because values are relational and contextual, that is, you cannot have values without valuers—both human and non-human—and these valuers value *life* and the conditions that sustain life (Crosby 2002: 74–85). An assumption uniting both Rue and Crosby is that Western natural science teaches that over time life evolved from a lifeless and purposeless material world of causal processes, so values emerged hand-in-hand with the emergence of life.

Deloria frames the Native response: "It cannot be argued that the universe is moral or has a moral purpose without simultaneously maintaining that the universe is alive. The old Indians had no problem with this concept because they experienced life in everything" (Deloria 1999: 49). Deloria motivates three observations. First, if you are living in a moral universe—populated by all sorts of human and non-human persons—wherein there is no absolute distinction between fact and value, then it goes without saying that values are inherent in nature, as are facts. But not so much, I think, the rather pedestrian biological values of life or viability. *Respect*, without which the Native world of equilibrium would dissolve into chaos, must be the fundamental moral attitude and an inherent value. Second, if the mark of animation is having power or energy and discharging that power—as experienced by the "old Indians"—then the animate extends beyond the narrow biological Western scientific category: There was power and energy, animation and purpose before the emergence of biological life. Finally, when time and space are organized cyclically and circularly, it is not clear to what extent it makes sense to say that life emerged "over time"—a linear, not cyclical ordering of time.

Having mentioned "Western natural science," I would be remiss should I not say a word about the way in which religious naturalists view the methodologies and findings of science and how it differs from the Native view. While correctly arguing that the natural sciences alone cannot give a comprehensive account of nature, Prof. Crosby acknowledges the importance of those methodologies and findings: "Past and continuing contributions of the natural sciences to our understanding of nature are thus of immense, indispensable importance and ought always to be taken into account in philosophical reflections about nature" (Crosby 2002: 45). Rue concurs, because religious naturalism is a *naturalism*, naturalists believe that the natural order is ultimately real, and science studies the natural order, so religious naturalists are committed to scientific inquiry into the nature of nature (Rue 2011: 101).

Now, Deloria and other Indians are famously hostile to Western science—far more than I am, by the way. However, I will take this opportunity to observe that the methods, findings, and *purpose* of Western science are radically different from Native "science." As I wrote in *The Dance*, the Western tradition constructs an inert, material, mechanical, law-like natural world. The role of science is to explain, predict, and ultimately conquer, manipulate, and exploit that natural resource. Yet, in a dynamic, animate, interrelated moral universe, wherein our actions and choices create and recreate the world, the role of Native "science" is to show how one ought to behave—what is necessary to walk the right road. The frogs again illustrate: Using a Western scientific methodology and purpose, the Indian observed the frogs hoping to learn something from them—rather like contemporary bio-colonialists who appropriate and exploit indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants (Whitt 2009). Forgetting that knowledge is given as a gift—not something to be disrespectfully stolen—the Indian learned an indigenous "scientific" finding.

Finally, there is no doubt that Indians agree with religious naturalism's religiosity with respect to nature. It is commonplace in the literature that certain sites in the natural world are regarded as sacred by indigenous people. Indeed, writers like Deloria distinguish Abrahamic religions like Christianity from "tribal religions," arguing that the former are grounded by sacred events in time while that latter are based upon sacred places in space (Deloria 1994). Moreover, Deloria correctly observes that many Western religions consider the natural world to be corrupt and corrupting—to be an unredeemable realm to which we are condemned until death (Deloria 1994: 80–81). To its credit, religious naturalism does not follow the Western religious practice of vilifying the natural world; indeed, reiterating Rue's earlier assessment: "Religious naturalists typically refer to nature as 'sacred,' in the sense of being inviolate and worthy of deep reverence" (Rue 2011: 111). But despite this virtue by Native lights, religious naturalism shares a different feature with other Western religions that distinguishes it from its Native counterpart. The

followers of Abrahamic religions, reverencing sacred events in the distant past—for example, the Christian resurrection—are reverencing a mere *conceptualization* of the sacred event, a conceptualization shaped by and abstracted from its original context—its time and place. Likewise, the “nature” reverenced by religious naturalists is a conceptualization, an abstract concept—as Crosby earlier shared—rather like the abstract notion of *humanity*. But, just as I cannot love an abstract conception of *humanity*, I cannot reverence an abstract conception of *nature*. “[Indigenous] peoples always have a *concrete* reference—the natural world—and the adherents of the world religions continually deal with abstract and ideal situations on and intellectual plane” (Deloria 2012: 211).

That said—and knowing well the dangers in comparing incommensurable world versions—it seems that religious naturalism is closer in “spirit” to Native religions than other Western supernatural, temporal, doctrinal, dogmatic, and event-grounded religious traditions. “The great bond of experience with nature,” observes Deloria,

incorporates the emotional and intuitive dimensions of our lives much better than do the precise creeds, doctrines, and dogmas of the great world religions and as such provides us with continuing meaning as long as we treat our apprehension of the great mystery with respect.

(2012: 207)

### A closing reflection

As a dawning religious tradition within a Western world version, religious naturalism fares well in relation to a constructive realist critique; and, to the extent that it can be compared to a radically different indigenous world version, it again fares well. Constructive realism and the Native view it recognizes both agree that there is no supernatural world; that the human world is a part of nature; and that values are inherent in the natural world. However, religious naturalism’s over-conceptualized and abstracted notion of “nature” is suspect on a constructive realist analysis, and goes well beyond the concrete, immediate experience of nature grounding Indian religious traditions. A sacred nature, a nature reverenced, must be—literally and figuratively—close to home. *pesalo no’ki tanakia!*<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

- 1 I understand “sense” and “perceptual experiences” to include visual and auditory experiences and the like, but also Humean sorts of “inward impressions.” Specifically, in response to a concern raised by Prof. Crosby, I maintain that it makes perfect sense to speak of experiences characterized as “religious.” Indeed, Prof. Rue develops a naturalized account of the “religious” or “spiritual person” (Rue 2011: 110–112).
- 2 At the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meetings in 2014, Lera Boroditsky shared that a “bleen-like” predicate is so common in indigenous languages that anthropologists have adopted the predicate “grue” to refer to it. She also shared these findings about the Tarahumara.
- 3 My friend Jerome Stone clarified his view to me in the following way: “I would say that the totality of nature is conceivable, abstract but conceivable, but not experientiable ... The religious dimension of my own naturalism alternates between conceiving of *nature-as-a-whole* and appreciating *that particular* bald eagle swooping over the Wisconsin River. Hence there is, for me, as I use language to describe my reactions, an alternation between relating to nature-as-a-whole and specific natural events.” Indeed, the whole of nature is beyond our experience; but unlike Stone’s view, it is also beyond my conception. This, perhaps, says more about *my* limited ability to conceive the abstract and unlimited than about the

conceivability of the nature-as-a-whole. After all, my mathematics professors had little trouble discussing Cantor's universe of infinities.

- 4 My research for this chapter was supported by Kent State University at Stark; one could not be a part of a more splendid institution.

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