

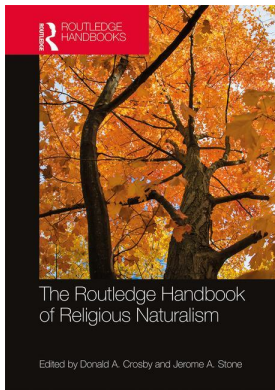
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The Religious Naturalism of Henry Nelson Wieman

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4

THE RELIGIOUS NATURALISM OF HENRY NELSON WIEMAN

Cedric L. Heppler

The launching of a career

In his 1917 doctoral thesis for the Philosophy Department of Harvard University, Henry Nelson Wieman (1884–1975) wrote in three sentences what I would call the epitome of his entire career:

The growth of consciousness reaches its acme when the antagonism of a great many interests forces the mind to take cognizance of that concrete field of time and space in which they all operate. All this is multiplied many times when the conflicting interests consist of those total systems which constitute human individuals or groups. There is no situation in which creative interest is so greatly stimulated and so abundantly satisfied as in those interactions between individuals which arise out of the necessity of adjusting themselves to one another.

(Wieman 1985: 132)

By a familiarity of Wieman's career, one can see his concerns with ethics, knowledge, and metaphysics in these sentences. However, on deeper analysis, one can see that these three sentences are *in nuce* the beginnings of Wieman's ideas of God, creative interchange, science, and community, among others. Since these statements come at the beginning of his career, one would not expect of them the maturity of expression that characterized Wieman's thoughts on these matters even up to the time of his death in 1975. However, his doctoral thesis, *The Organization of Interests*, contains much that he came back to from time to time in his later writings. But more significantly, it was from within his dissertation that he launched his career. One idea he put forward in this thesis should be looked at further before turning to the specific discussion of Wieman's "religious naturalism." The phrase above, "the mind to take cognizance of the concrete field of time and space in which they all operate," indicates that Wieman saw human life and all that is important to its growth, survival, and betterment as cradled in and as a part of what is generally referred to as "nature," and he assumed that nothing outside of "nature" would intervene supernaturally to rectify or "save" human life from its destructive propensities.

The founding of creative interchange

Wieman announces his “thesis” in the opening paragraph of *The Organization of Interests*: “Our problem will be to discover that organization of human interests which is most conducive to their maximum fulfillment. The object of our quest is the greatest good. The principle of organization, which we propose, we shall call creativity” (Wieman 1985: 3). Wieman was to argue against a particular type of philosophical persuasion that proposed to lead to “the greatest good” by setting forth how individual humans and groups could overcome conflicts, animosities, and antagonisms by coordinating them into a harmony where none would have the advantage over the others. In his argument against this view of harmonization of conflicts that purports to lead to “the greatest good,” Wieman wrote:

With reference to this method of coordination we shall raise the question whether it is possible to reduce the inalienable interests of human nature to a harmony. Freudian psychology has demonstrated that there are ineradicable interests which cannot be simply ignored. It is not possible to cultivate indifference with respect to them. They must find expression in some form or other ... The constant pressure they exert, even though it be altogether subconscious, will eventually turn the beautiful harmony we have fashioned into gall and worm-wood. This is the inevitable working of suppressed tendencies.

(Wieman 1985: 6)

When Wieman wrote these words the United States was just entering the “war to end all wars.” It was arguably a bad time for “harmonious happiness” to gain many adherents, and in the lead-up to the beginning of World War I, humans in general seemed not to have exerted themselves with any dedication to adopt and follow the principles of harmony of any persuasion for any length of time. The history of warfare is an open book of evidence against such harmonious happiness. Incidentally, the two persons advocating the harmonious happiness against which Wieman established his thesis were two professors in the philosophy department of Harvard while Wieman was there from 1915 to 1917; namely Edwin Bissett Holt, in his book, *The Freudian Wish* (Holt 1915), and Ralph Barton Perry, in his book, *The Moral Economy* (Perry 1909). One could hardly have a more intimate relation with one’s antagonists.

Wieman argued, given the fact that humans have trouble living together harmoniously, that a better option for life and any attainment of the greatest good would be to learn how to organize life so that its highest fulfillment would be possible in the midst of conflicts, animosities, and antagonisms. Wieman proposed an “organization of interests” wherein humans would take into account the “interests” of each other and learn from each other by coming to know the values of the other and to live in a creative interaction with each other. *The Organization of Interests* is an analysis of how this creative interaction may be aspired to, and Wieman uses the human dimensions of humor, play, work, art, friendship, and society at large to analyze the distinction between his “creative interaction” and “harmonious happiness.” He writes:

In humor, art and friendship it is the interaction of antagonistic tendencies which quickens the consciousness to a certain vivacity, emotional tension or process of idea-forming which is cherished by the person concerned as one of his most precious experiences. But it is the organized conflict of minds which is most highly valued and is most fruitful in developing all the ideas and emotions of which human nature is

capable. Friction between persons is necessary in order that there be any mutual interpretation of minds. This friction is an integral part of the interpretation.

(Wieman 1985: 7)

At this point Wieman speaks of what later, especially in his three books *The Source of Human Good* (Wieman 1946), *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Wieman 1958), and *Religious Inquiry* (Wieman 1968), he called the “creative event” and “creative interchange”:

Through this interaction each individual comes first to understand the purpose of the other, and then forms his own purpose in relation to this other, either as a cooperator or antagonist. The other person reacts in the same way, and there ensues a mutual creation of mind out of which has arisen that marvelous growth of idea and emotion which we call culture.

(Wieman 1985: 7)

Here are the four component parts of the “interaction” on which Wieman elaborated in various ways and with different symbols throughout his career and especially in his three books, namely, “the fourfold creative event” and “creative interchange.”

When Wieman arrived at Harvard in 1915 Josiah Royce was living out his last year. The year before, Royce had published *War and Insurance*, his lamentations over the opening of The Great War in Europe (Royce 1914). Wieman’s reaction to *War and Insurance* was critical, and he took the opportunity to elaborate further on his just-born concept of creative interaction: “In his book *War and Insurance* Royce proposes the banker, the judge and the insurance company as the great socializing and communizing agencies” (Wieman 1985: 101). Wieman points out that neither the banker, the judge, nor the insurance company can really deal with the conflicts, animosities, and antagonisms between human individuals or groups, unless through binding arbitration with the judgment of the arbitrator standing firm regardless of how close it comes to solving the original conflict. In such arbitration, neither party of the conflict would have had an interpersonal relationship with the other party. Perhaps persons of neither party would feel that the process of arbitration was especially creative, nor had they attained “maximum fulfillment” of their lives. Wieman concludes his criticism of Royce’s “third party” arbitrator by saying,

[a]s long as the bank intervenes, there is no mutual consciousness such as one can say: I know that you know that I know that I am serving you in this undertaking; I appropriate your interests and you assimilate mine; thus the consciousness of both of us is modified, its range expanded, its content further evolved toward a universal consciousness, and a genuine community established between us. As long as the bank persists nothing of the kind takes place. It inhibits all such creative interaction and establishes instead an intervening mechanism by which their activities are concatenated, like the cogs of a machine, so that certain results are produced without the need of personal intercourse and mutual understanding.

(Wieman 1985: 101)

Establishing a view of nature

Wieman’s “Introduction” to his initial book, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method*, gave a new definition of God that was both perplexing and applauded on the American theological scene

in 1926. At this time Wieman was still using theistic language to try to expound on his earlier formulation of the concept of creative interchange (or interaction). However, even with the use of theistic language, Wieman tried to make sure that the “theism” of which he spoke was not the supernaturalism of systematic theologians of most main-line denominational seminaries and divinity schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* wherein God was omnipotent and omniscient, as well as being wholly transcendent to the world. By 1926 Wieman was bold enough to exclaim:

Whatever else the word God may mean, it is a term used to designate that Something upon which human life is most dependent for its security, welfare and increasing abundance. That there is such a Something cannot be denied. The mere fact that human life happens, and continues to happen, proves that this Something, however unknown, does certainly exist.

(Wieman 1926: 9)

It is important to note that Wieman says, “whatever else the *word* God may mean, it is a *term* to designate that Something.” He would have said that this “Something” is a symbol; he tries to make clear that the word God is not “God Himself.” The word *God* has always been a symbol and the symbol has to be elaborated upon within a community of humans who are trying to say what it is that they worship because of the security, welfare, and increasing abundance they feel has been bestowed upon them.

Wieman continues his claim about this Something as functioning in life for human security, welfare, and increasing abundance:

[O]ne can say that there are innumerable conditions which converge to sustain human life ... But in that case either one of two things is true. Either the universe is a single individual organic unity, in which case it is the whole indivisible universe that has brought forth and now sustains human life; or else certain of these sustaining conditions are more critically, ultimately and constantly important for human welfare than are others.

(Wieman 1926: 9)

The first example given by Wieman is pantheism, which he rejects. The second example explicates the notion that within the whole of the universe, and specifically with reference to human existence and life, there are conditions that function to bring about the security, welfare, and increasing abundance of humans. Wieman is making a fine distinction here. He has rejected traditional supernaturalism, and he has rejected pantheism because when the All is Everything, there are no distinctions. Wieman avoids Spinoza’s “God or Nature.” For Wieman, Nature is that field of influence from which we are born; it is the field of activity upon which we live, mature, and die; it is the field of evolutionary differentiation where the inorganic and organic come into and pass out of existence; it is the field upon which we humans have our environments in which we establish our own habits and develop the cultures peculiarly identifiable as human—we still have basic instincts but reason and language distinguish humans from other forms of organic life. For Wieman, that Something for which he is trying to find empirical evidence is a process within Nature, along with and over against other processes that either sustain or destroy human existence.

In 1930 Wieman wrote the essay “What’s the World to Me” in an anthology of essays, *Ventures in Belief*.

We cannot live without the support of the world. Also we cannot live without making the world different so that it will support us more constantly and adequately than it otherwise would ... We are a part of the world and the world works in us and upon us and round about us... We as part of the world are sustained and made by that of which we are a part. This part which is ourselves reacts upon some other part to make it different; then this other part, thus changed, works upon us to make us still more different in ways that we never wholly foresee. The point is that in discussing the world we must not think of it as something outside ourselves and different from us, but as including us.

(Wieman 1930: 79–80)

Wieman was not advocating that we humans can know the whole of the world, or the whole of nature, or the whole of the universe. We know only that which we change and which changes us. We can be aware of changing that part of the world that lends itself to us for the necessities of our livelihood, and we can be aware of our own lives being changed by the reaction of the world upon us. But we can never devise a “science” to explain everything: “Why can we not? Because there is no such thing as a science about the world. We have only the several different sciences and no one of them studies the world as a whole. No one of them even tries to study that feature or aspect of the world which most critically depends upon human welfare” (Wieman 1930: 81).

In line with Wieman’s views on human dependence and interdependence with nature, there is an interesting, brief essay he wrote in 1945 for the cooperative volume edited by Vergilius Ferm, *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (Ferm 1945). Wieman was assigned to write eight short interpretive essays, and the one I turn to now is titled “Faith.”

In this essay, Wieman assumes that humans live dependent on and interdependent from the various fields of influence within Nature. Thus Wieman does not consider faith to be based on “revelation ... or ... indubitable intuition or ... mystical experience or in some other way ... set beyond the bounds of human inquiry and testing” (Wieman 1945a: 270). He asserts, “If the reality to which one gives himself in faith is physiologically and psychologically inescapable, one does not need to cling to any belief.” He goes on to say,

Thus neither knowledge nor belief is the source of genuine faith. The knowledge which one gets is a consequence of the faith. The source of faith is in the human body. The body so reacts that one is coerced to be aware that one is sustained and that something-or-other is most important. Beliefs of the mind may distort, suppress, conceal or confuse this apprehension that emerges from the body. They may also clarify and inform the bodily apprehension with true knowledge. But beliefs of the mind cannot do this latter if they are themselves made the objects of faith. They can clarify and inform the faith only when used as means of reaching out after whatever may be most important however vaguely at first it may be sensed. Such a faith magnifies intelligent understanding. It also opens the way to all supreme fulfillments of life.

(Wieman 1945a: 270–271)

Wieman also wrote the essay “Naturalism and Theology,” for *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (Wieman 1945b). In it, he notes,

The most marked development in the newer naturalism is the growing recognition that there are many levels and orders in nature. Values, ideals, personality, community, the sense of beauty, tragedy, heroism, religion and God are as readily acknowledged and upheld by some forms of the newer naturalism as the quantum theory and the physics of relativity ... Naturalism is based upon a certain method of inquiry ... Knowledge is achieved by discovering how events (happenings) are related to one another, or how they might possibly be related ... But when happening or event is analyzed it is seen to be necessarily temporal and spatial, whatever else it may also be. Therefore naturalism holds that all actual reality is necessarily temporal and spatial ... Nature is precisely the totality of all that is temporal and spatial together with whatever possibilities the temporal and spatial process may carry ... Therefore anything that we can ever experience must be some quality, form or movement pertaining to temporal and spatial reality. Since nature includes all temporal and spatial reality together with its possibilities, all that we can ever experience must be nature. This is the view of naturalism.

(Wieman 1945b: 518–519)

In this quotation, Wieman speaks of “the most marked development of the newer naturalism.” He had used the phrase “new(er) naturalism” previously, especially in the book he co-authored with Walter Marshall Horton, *The Growth of Religion* (Wieman and Horton 1938; hereafter this work is referred to as Wieman 1938, and pages listed will be from his part of the book). *The Growth of Religion* was a very important project for Wieman, because in it he confronted the established and rapidly growing influence in America of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, as well as many American theologians who came to be identified as Neo-orthodox.

Wieman’s opening chapter in *The Growth of Religion*, “New Growths in Religions” (Wieman 1938: 247–272), is a discussion of what he considered at the time to be five significant areas of religious activity: Literalism and Traditional Supernaturalism; Humanism; the New Supernaturalism; Theistic Naturalism; and the New Naturalism and the New Supernaturalism Compared. This “new supernaturalism” is what Wieman understood Barth and Brunner to be espousing in their classes and writings, and what their American sympathizers were supporting. In this chapter, Wieman loosely uses “theistic naturalism” and the “new naturalism” interchangeably. In a contrast between theistic naturalism and the new supernaturalism, Wieman observed,

Theistic naturalism is the exact opposite of the new supernaturalism in respect to the use of reason and the empirical method. It asserts that all we know is mere guesswork unless it meets the tests of rationality and observation ... We know only by acting, but action gives us knowledge only when we are able to predict in some measure what the outcome of the action will be. First we act under physiological propulsion. In time we learn, by observation, to know what the outcomes of action will be when it is carried out according to certain patterns under certain conditions. When we reach that stage we have knowledge; and knowledge gained in this way is the only knowledge there is.

(Wieman 1938: 258)

In Wieman’s chapter, “Forms of Religious Apprehension” (Wieman 1938: 420–448), he explains how he thinks the new supernaturalist would answer the question, “How do we know?”

especially with regard to the knowledge of God. The following is Wieman's imagined question to the new supernaturalist and his imagined answer to the question.

How, then, can we know this supreme God? By revelation and faith, by intuition and myth. God reveals himself directly to the heart and mind of the individual. Since reason falls into self-contradiction when it seeks to find the way to God, and since it cannot portray the nature of God, the human mind must make use of myth. When God is revealed to us we can set forth his being by means of myth, and there is no other way of doing it, since the abstract categories of reason fail us. How this is done we do not know. But the individual who receives this revelation and accepts it in faith, knows. He knows God. He cannot, by rational procedure, tell you what God is nor how he knows. But the knowledge is his. God and he are in living relation to one another. There is vital connection.

(Wieman 1938: 429)

One could judge these latter assessments by Wieman as being mild but definitely partisan. One can understand that Wieman's philosophy of religion is naturalistically based: the religious object of faith, traditionally called "God," is that Something which is a part of nature and functions within nature; human knowledge grows out of the interchange of the human rational mind with the processes, events, qualities, and relations of other natural actualities exemplified by and within the same bounds of time and space that exemplify human life. Wieman's new naturalism is in direct opposition to the theology of Barth and his sympathizers.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, in America at least, the prevailing idea about the relationship between God and His world was immanence. God had not only created the world but He was also continually present in the world, providing guidance to His followers for their best lives and avoiding sin and evil. In 1884, Alexander V.G. Allen (1841–1908) published *The Continuity Of Christian Thought: A Study Of Modern Theology In The Light Of Its History*. This book was something like the handbook on the immanence of God. It went through 11 editions by 1895, and was still being published well into the 1920s. Allen was more concerned with the nature and character of God and His beneficial relationship with His followers than he was with making political or sociological statements about the human condition. However, the contemporaneous political and sociological assessments of the inevitable and continuous progress for the betterment of humanity by the continued expansions westward in the territories of the United States and its expansion of transportation upon land and sea, the founding of factories for the production of needed goods and services, the expansion of farming that lessened America's need for the dependence on costly trade with other countries, and the reestablishment of the Union in the aftermath of the Civil War, all could easily be judged to be a part of the work of God by His immanence in the world, and especially in the United States. Allen's book could easily have been turned to for "spiritual guidance" in this new era of bountiful production and consumption.

In 1918 Karl Barth, a Swiss pastor, published his *Der Römerbrief*. This book changed the Western theological worldview back to one in which God was transcendent, "wholly other" in relation to the world and humanity. An English translation of the 1928 sixth edition of *Der Römerbrief* was published in 1933 with the title, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Barth 1933). The following is a classic statement by Barth regarding this return of God's transcendence:

The Gospel is not a religious message to inform mankind of their divinity or to tell them how they may become divine. The Gospel proclaims a God *utterly distinct* from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are, as men, incapable of knowing

Him, and because they have no right to claim anything from Him. The Gospel is not one thing in the midst of other things, to be directly apprehended and comprehended. The Gospel is the Word of the Primal Origin of all things, the Word which, since it is ever new, must ever be received with renewed fear and trembling. The Gospel is therefore not an event, nor an experience, nor an emotion—however delicate! Rather, it is the clear and objective perception of what eye hath not seen nor ear heard. Moreover, what it demands of men is more than notice, or understanding, or sympathy. It demands participation, comprehension, co-operation; for it is the communication which presumes faith in the living God, and which creates that which it presumes.

(Barth 1933: 28; my emphasis)

This is the Neo-orthodoxy (the New Supernaturalism) that had hegemony in Western Christian thought from the 1920s till the announcement of the “death of God” in 1965.

The historical and theological significance of *The Source of Human Good*

The hegemony of Neo-orthodoxy in the United States (and of Barthianism in Europe) was one of the causes (with varying dimensions of conscious and unconscious motives and intentions on the part of Wieman) which inclined Wieman to write the content of *The Source of Human Good* the way he did. There were certain assumptions and declared statements of ultimate reality by the Neo-orthodox that Wieman, as a naturalist, thought it necessary to speak against and declare what he understood to be the misdirection and harmful tendencies of Neo-orthodoxy and its deprecation of reason in theological thought.

By consensus, *The Source of Human Good* is the book with which Wieman is most identified. This book comes the closest of all those Wieman wrote to being a “metaphysics” in the classic sense of that word. Wieman speaks directly to his “metaphysics” in two places in the book (Wieman 1946: 190–196; 298ff).

If people were to read *The Source of Human Good* and reach a point where they think they understand what Wieman had to say about “God” and his use of the new phrase “creative event,” which he introduced at this time (Wieman 1946: 56ff), and then put the book aside, they would leave undiscovered most of the book and its significance for the American theological scene in 1946. Not unlike Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” Wieman’s *The Source of Human Good* has an overarching focus that lies “hidden in plain view,” but has rarely been elaborated on by any of his commentators who have mentioned it.

Before we turn to Wieman’s overarching focus of *The Source of Human Good*, let us look at how he established his methodology of inquiry and his underlying assumptions. In Chapter 1, “The Way Good Increases” (Wieman 1946: 3–26), Wieman compares and contrasts six philosophies of value used by various schools in seeking to achieve the greatest good in human life. Of the six possible approaches to value, Wieman says,

The sixth interpretation, in which value is identified with the total complex context, is the one that we shall develop in the pages that follow. As we have said, we take it not because it alone is true ... Both in practical action and in intellectual inquiry, we can do more with value when we take it this way ... Hence it is deliberately designed from the beginning for utility. But this usefulness must be demonstrated. That is largely what this book tries to do.

(Wieman 1946: 6)

Immediately, Wieman elaborates on his philosophical assumptions for using the “contextualist” theory of value for his methodology. Under the heading “Naturalism,” Wieman continues:

This reply to the question “What is value?” is the answer of *the newer naturalism*, a movement or development in contemporary thought taking to, but to be sharply distinguished from, the older naturalism. It asserts that there is nothing in reality assessable to the human mind more basic than events and their qualities and relations ... No knowable cause or explanation for anything that happens can reach deeper than events and their structure and qualities ... We shall have no recourse to any “transcendental grounds, orders, causes or purposes” beyond events, their qualities, and relations. Naturalism bases this claim on thorough analysis of the method by which any knowledge whatsoever can be obtained.

(Wieman 1946: 6–7; my emphasis)

Wieman titled Chapter 2 of *The Source of Human Good* “The Human Predicament.” This chapter reads as if it were written by an existentialist, sitting on the left bank of the Seine while quaffing an espresso. In the opening paragraph, Wieman introduces his overarching focus that only a few interested in his thought have ever dealt with and none extensively: “Three features (to be indicated below) intrinsic to man’s way of apprehending value render life perilous, *with the rising power of technology*” (Wieman 1946: 27; my emphasis).

Wieman saw the human predicament in 1946 as that of the dilemma of power, the power that comes from science and its technology. In essence, humanity has always had a science and its technology, as in when the first humans discovered how to chip stones and began making bows and arrows. As humanity evolved, a science and its technology were fashioned in relation to how humans strove to satisfy their desires and needs. In 1946, the dilemma had reached a crisis that could no longer be ignored or avoided. With the coming of the atom bomb, Wieman recognized that the *power* of science and its technology had forced a radical shift away from the human control of power to the constant threat of scientific and technological power as the potential destroyer of human life. Wieman asserts, “This peril can be escaped by redirecting human endeavor from service of good already created to service of the generating source of all good” (Wieman 1946: 27).

The “three features intrinsic to man’s way of apprehending value render life perilous, with the rising power of technology” are (1) “the limited range of human appreciation,” (2) the fact that humans are dominated by the sense of self-concern, self-centeredness, (3) and the resistance of humans to change “in the structure of appreciative consciousness” (Wieman 1946: 28). In the past when science and its technological power was limited to human lifting, pushing, running, riding horses, driving chariots and wagons, and building huge catapulting machines, the total threat to the of the human race was limited to small areas undergoing some sort of immediate turmoil. Wieman writes,

Today modern technology has changed all that. Newly generated distinctions of good and evil peculiar to the new situation often carry the issues of life and death, because the power we wield today involves us with groups and cultures alien to our own, accelerates change, and deepens the levels at which it occurs.

(Wieman 1946: 28–29)

Wieman saw the nature of the human predicament in 1946 as being in dire straits. He sensed what the governments had to offer for the resolution of the situation where the potential

destructive power was in the hands of humans whose political guiding principles by and large were based on laws, rules, and regulations that had not been revised and updated since from before World War I. He also knew from his position as a theologian in the tradition of Western Christianity, and as one who attempted to keep pace with what other theologians and leading spokespersons of the Christian denominations were saying and doing, that, in general, Western Christianity was not taking seriously the challenge of science and its technology in the new era of atomic power. In fact, Wieman generalized the lack of an adequate response to this new threat and declared,

The great religions ... have developed an ideology peculiarly fitted to the need of man in the days of his weakness ... Science must be directed to searching out the conditions demanded by the source of human good so that this creative power may produce the values of life for all; and technology must be applied to setting up those conditions which science discovers to be required ... But the creative source of human good is not now interpreted in such a way that science and technology can be applied to its service. The great religions portray it [the creative source of human good] as being the shaper of events, or the overruled of them, or somehow generating them, but not itself a structure of events ... Therefore, unless we can find the source of human good in the form of an order of events, we are doomed, if our analysis of the human predicament is correct. (Wieman 1946: 30, 31)

One doctrine of the Neo-orthodox Christianity of America in 1946 was that God is not “the form of an order events” but rather a God beyond human reason, not to be found naturally in time and space, and known only through a unique revelation originating at the pleasure of this transcendent God. “Knowledge of Him” could be received only as a supernatural gift from God. In telling exasperation, Wieman summarizes the difference between his rational-empirical inquiry and the non-rational and speculative theology of the Neo-orthodox: “This is not the problem of ‘reconciling science and religion’ ... That problem is twaddle compared to this. We are here discussing, not logical inconsistency, but life and death” (Wieman 1946: 31). He continues in this vein, saying, “We are here declaring is that the position [Neo-orthodoxy], held by so many today, is fatal to man in the days of his power” (Wieman 1946: 33).

The *Source of Human Good* has to be read in light of the threat of the power of the atomic age being unchallenged by governments and theologies structured on principles and doctrines of exclusiveness and transcendence. Given the nation states that have nuclear capabilities today, although there are only “a few,” the primary ethical, moral, and theological principles of each of these nations are predicated on a worldview that is under the control of some transcendent being (God), which is radically transcendent above the affairs of humans. One can only wonder how the world would have been different if Wieman’s perspective had gained more traction in the same affairs.

Wieman on religious naturalism

In 1971, in response to my question about his philosophical development, Wieman wrote:

MY PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

You refer to my present thought as that of naturalism. I am not happy with that characterization. When the term was first applied to my philosophy by Harold Bosley it was primarily negative by intent, meaning opposed to supernaturalism. Of course

I am opposed to supernaturalism; but I think my work has been primarily affirmative than negative, constructive rather than destructive.

On the other hand, when the word “naturalism” has been given its most conventional meaning, it has referred to the total process of nature below the human level. For this reason the humanists do not call themselves naturalists. They are as much opposed to supernaturalism as I but they are equally insistent on the sharp distinction between human existence and the total subhuman process of nature. In consequence they call themselves humanists and not naturalists. Their religious commitment is given to ideals beyond all process of time and space and therefore beyond all nature.

There is still another meaning of “naturalism,” different from all the above and also different from my own philosophy. It is that philosophy of religion which merges human life into the total cosmic process and interprets this cosmic process as dominated and directed by a cosmic mind. The Whiteheadian philosophies are of this sort represented by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, Schubert Ogden, John Cobb and others. My own philosophy of religion is clearly distinguished from these.

On the other hand I am a naturalist in the sense (1) that I am opposed to supernaturalism, (2) that I am opposed to humanism because creativity is not merely an ideal but involves processes of nature and is a temporal and spatial, chemical and biological, psychological and social and historical process; (3) but this process of creativity distinguishing human existence is not a cosmic process, does not include all the diverse forms of process occurring in nature, yet is a process occurring in space and time with its own distinctive form of chemical, biological, psychological, social and historical process. This human form of process is a distinctively different process from the many other forms of process found throughout nature. If the word “naturalism” should obscure this difference it would be misleading when applied to my philosophy.

I suppose the conclusion is that I am a naturalist but since “naturalism” has all these other meanings different from the meaning it has when applied to my philosophy, the word does not adequately distinguish my philosophy from others.

I do not mean to repudiate the label. I do not know of a better name unless it be the religious philosophy of “Creativity.” It might be called “Creative Naturalism” to distinguish it from other forms of naturalism and other theories about creativity. On the other hand, “empirical” philosophy of religion might be the best name to distinguish this interpretation of religion; but when one says that, he is immediately confronted with the many meanings of “empirical.”

(Wieman 1971)

Conclusion

I have tried to show throughout this essay that Henry Nelson Wieman had some far-reaching insights early in his career concerning the nature of human existence and the place of humans in their world and cultures. I hope I have shown that regardless of how many ways in which Wieman categorized, conceptualized, and symbolized these insights, he remained consistent in pursuing his insights about creativity, interpersonal interchange, and securing the means and conditions for humans to achieve the greatest quality of life across barriers of conflict and animosity. He committed his life to the principles of the ideal of the self-correcting methodology of science, and his worldview was structured on and guided by the assumptions of naturalism

and empiricism. Wieman's position was never popular with traditional religious laity and officials, and he was never one to join the latest theological fad; a number of them came and passed away during his lifetime.

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Further reading

One scholar to whom Wieman turned over the years for insights into the relationships between the body and the world is C. Judson Herrick, anatomist and neurologist, who wrote *An Introduction to Neurology* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1915) (Wieman cites this book in *The Organization of Interests*); *Brains of Rats and Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927) (Wieman cites this book in *The Wrestle of Religion With Truth*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927); and *The Thinking Machine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929). Two other scholars who corroborate Wieman's insights that faith is structured in our bodies (or is biologically embodied) are: Joseph Haroutunian, "Toward a Piety of Faith," in Philip J. Hefner (ed.) *The Scope of Grace, Essays in Honor of Joseph Sittler* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964); and Philip J. Hefner, "Towards a New Doctrine of Man: The Relationship of Man and Nature," in Bernard E. Meland (ed.) *The Future of Empirical Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). Some readers may be interested to read the six other essays Wieman wrote for V. Ferm (ed.), *An Encyclopedia of Religion*. They are: Christ, the living; God, modern conceptions of; Myth; Prayer; Symbol and Symbolism; and Worship.