

A close-up photograph of a tiger's fur, showing the characteristic orange and black stripes. The fur is the background for the entire text on the page.

LEARNING

LOVE

FROM A

TIGER

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

WITH NATURE

DANIEL CAPPER

# Learning Love from a Tiger

*Religious Experiences with Nature*

Daniel Capper



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit [www.ucpress.edu](http://www.ucpress.edu).

University of California Press  
Oakland, California

© 2016 by The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Capper, Daniel, 1962.

Title: Learning love from a tiger : religious experiences with nature / Daniel Capper.

Description: Oakland, California : University of California Press, [2016] | "2016 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015042583 (print) | LCCN 2015046714 (ebook) | ISBN 9780520290419 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780520290426 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780520964600 ()

Subjects: LCSH: Human-animal relationships—Religious aspects—Comparative studies. | Human-animal relationships—Philosophy. | Animals (Philosophy) | Animals—Religious aspects—Comparative studies. | Nature—Religious aspects—Comparative studies.

Classification: LCC BL439 .C36 2016 (print) | LCC BL439 (ebook) | DDC 202/.12—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015042583>

Manufactured in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with a commitment to support environmentally responsible and sustainable printing practices, UC Press has printed this book on Natures Natural, a fiber that contains 30% post-consumer waste and meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*).

## CONTENTS

### *List of Illustrations* vii

Introduction: Into Muir's Forest

i

1. All the Christian Birds Chanted

31

2. The Donkey Who Communed with Allah

68

3. Hindu Trees Tremble with Ecstasy

99

4. Sharing Mayan Natural Souls

142

5. Friendly Yetis

177

6. Enlightened Buddhist Stones

206

Epilogue: The Mountain Peaks Leaped and Danced

241

*Notes* 257

*Bibliography* 275

*Index* 291

# Introduction

## *Into Muir's Forest*

The snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada shimmered in the California sunrise as John Muir arose from his wilderness bed of oak leaves. Because he was helping to drive a flock of more than two thousand sheep up Yosemite Creek Valley to their summer highland pastures, Muir usually slept under the stars, or “sky lilies,” as he affectionately called them. After finishing a simple breakfast of tea, sugar, and bread, he quickly packed up his few possessions and was ready for a long day of climbing. The sheep moved at only one mile per hour, leaving Muir with plenty of time to investigate, sketch, and collect from the multitude of plants, animals, and geologic formations within his pristine mountain habitat. Unshackled from the urban-human social realities that he found so alienating, and freely communing with his forest environment, for the first time in his forty-one years the nature-loving Muir felt truly himself.

Born in Scotland on April 21, 1838, Muir immigrated with his family to Wisconsin when he was eleven. Eastern settlers had only recently come to Wisconsin, and Muir as a boy adored the wilderness setting into which he had been thrust. He went on to study botany and geology at the University of Wisconsin, but the upheavals caused by the Civil War led to his becoming a successful machinist and inventor. Then an

industrial accident left him temporarily blind. At that time he feared above all not being able to see a flower again, and his desire to become a nature explorer like his hero, Alexander von Humboldt, burned hotter than ever. Thus, after he recovered his eyesight, he surprised even himself by quitting his job and enacting a plan to undertake a thousand-mile botanical “saunter” through the wilds stretching from Louisville, Kentucky, to Florida.

What Muir called his “floral pilgrimage” began on September 1, 1867, and he purposefully traveled by “the wildest, leafiest, and least trodden way” that he could manage. Over the next few weeks he would enter the first real mountains that he had ever seen; visit Savannah, Georgia, to resupply; and contract malaria in northern Florida. From Florida in January 1868 he sojourned to Cuba to find a ship to take him to South America in order to explore Amazonian foliage. But finding no transport to South America available, instead he traveled to San Francisco in March 1868 in order to explore the natural world at Yosemite, which had also been calling him.<sup>1</sup>

Muir was no ordinary lover of nature (by which, of course, I mean nonhuman nature). In addition to the scientific side of his personality, he was a nature mystic who experienced the natural world as God in the flesh. He approached nature first and foremost spiritually, with the impassioned intellectual aspect of the experience coming along with the spiritual. For him, encountering nature meant directly embracing the sacred, or the awesome, fascinating, and numinous; supernatural reality that the theologian Rudolf Otto described. Throughout his life Muir ecstatically bathed in holiness through his profound, unbounded immersion in the natural world. As he wrote in his journal, “I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”<sup>2</sup>

Even as a child he spoke not of flowers but of “flower people,” and as a young man he explained that alligators were not Satan’s handiwork, as was sometimes believed, but rather were beautiful expressions of God’s noble intentions. But he failed to find his true personal religion until he

moved to Yosemite. Awed by the overwhelming size and ethereal beauty of his surroundings, Muir felt a strong sense of interconnection with his environment in general as well as with innumerable individual natural beings that his sharp eye spied. Part of this feeling of interconnection was fueled by his ongoing studies in botany and geology, to be sure, but part of it arose from a special spiritual sensibility that had always been part of his makeup.<sup>3</sup>

In Yosemite he worshipped effortlessly: since “everything turns into religion, all the world seems a church and the mountains altars.” With trees and boulders as his spiritual colleagues, he said that Yosemite “is by far the grandest of all the special temples of nature I was ever permitted to enter.” Muir’s natural world was suffused with the presence of divinity, so that hares served as his priests and cool mountain streams offered sacramental wine. Embracing yet exceeding the common idea that the natural world provides a beautiful example of God’s handiwork, for Muir nature didn’t just point to a deity; nature *was* the deity. He said: “Nature like a fluid seems to drench and steep us throughout, as the whole sky and the rocks and flowers are drenched with spiritual life—with God.” Mountains had “spiritual power,” the sky had “goodness,” and the majestic sequoia was a divine “King.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus always in church, so to speak, Muir also had alpine scripture to read. Finding the “divine manuscript” of nature to be richer than the many books that he had laboriously memorized from the Bible, Muir spoke to his dear friend Jeanne Carr of “glorious lessons of sky and plain and mountain, which no mortal power can ever speak.” A comforting lesson came in Bonaventure Cemetery, in Savannah, where John learned from live-oak teachers not to fear death. Other lessons involved nature’s tough love, including a frightening experience in a storm on Brady Glacier in Alaska with his dog pal Stickeen, an experience that led Muir to exclaim that nature “gains her ends with dogs as well as with men, making us do as she likes, shoving and pulling us along her ways, however rough, all but killing us at times in getting her lessons driven hard home.” Still, for Muir, nature, “so replete with



divine truth,” was a better teacher of spirituality than any Sunday-school parson or professor of theology.<sup>5</sup>

But for Muir it was not enough simply to attend this church of nature or to ponder these bucolic spiritual teachings intellectually. Like many mystics before him, Muir by temperament was driven to experience this sacredness as completely as he could. Exhibiting the classic mystical theme of an experience of holy unity, he said of a moving experience in Yosemite: “You cannot feel yourself out-of-doors; plains, sky, and mountains ray beauty which you feel. You bathe in these spirit-beams, turning round and round, as if warming at a campfire. Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate existence: you blend with the landscape and become part and parcel of nature.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, Muir’s mysticism was quite expansive, including sacred experiences not just of living beings but also of supposedly inanimate things like rivers and stones. In *My First Summer in the Sierras* he wrote: “The happy plants and all our fellow animal creatures great and small, and even the rocks, seemed to be shouting, ‘Awake, awake, rejoice, rejoice, come love us and join in our song. Come! Come!’ ... Everything seems equally divine—one smooth, pure, wild glow of Heaven’s love, never to be blotted or blurred by anything past or to come.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus Muir was not just a scientific naturalist, as he is sometimes described; he was also an active worshipper of what he considered the divinity of the natural world. Like other inspired mystics, he wanted to share his religion, where bears were ministers and mountains were monks. Of fulfilling his self-appointed task to “preach Nature like an apostle,” he said: “Heaven knows that John [the] Baptist was not more eager to get all his fellow sinners into the Jordan than I to baptize all of mine in the beauty of God’s mountains.” Yet Muir built no church nor started any religious movement. Instead he channeled his spiritual energies into the late-nineteenth-century conservation movement. To this end he published a number of scientific pieces in newspapers and periodicals, was a motive force in the establishment not just of Yosemite but of the entire National Park system in the United States, and helped



Figure 1. Muir Woods National Monument is named for John Muir. (Photo: Author.)

to found the Sierra Club, thus becoming the greatest American naturalist living in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Today his voice continues to influence and energize scientists, environmental activists, and lovers of nature alike.<sup>8</sup>

Muir embraced nature mysticism, which is the direct experience of sacredness in and through nature, and his lasting impact cannot be clearly understood apart from this. Muir's nature mysticism calls our attention to the manifold ways in which nonhuman nature, humans, and religions interact. These myriad interactions are not surprising, given that the religions of the world inform us about who we are as individuals and as a species, and so do our interactions with natural beings, although this latter movement is not always recognized.

Every human interacts with natural entities, as is easy to see with rural folks surrounded by many animals, plants, minerals, and water.

But even urbanites dwelling in the most developed cities interact with natural forms, since city residents on a daily basis will contact pets, other domestic animals, birds, insects, fish, bodies of water, and natural beings used for food. To be human is to coexist with natural beings, so that they shape how we understand ourselves, others, the world in which we live, and how we approach religious questions regarding meaning and proper living. As the philosopher Mary Midgley said: “Had we no other animate life-form than our own, we should have been utterly mysterious to ourselves as a species. And that would have made it immensely harder for us to understand ourselves as individuals, too.” Because we share a planetary habitat with natural beings, they strongly color how we approach life, including religious life, and for *Homo sapiens* this has always been true.<sup>9</sup>

The environmental scientist Paul Shepard argues eloquently that interactions with animals directly resulted in our humanness. He tells us that “the hunt made us human,” as hunting and the eating of meat resulted in larger human brains, the development of cognitive and symbolic powers, and the necessity for human social organization. These aspects of our humanness led in part to the development of human language and religion. Cultural forms then emerged both as praises of nature and as reactions to natural dangers. Using animals as our mirrors, we defined our goals and reflected upon our achievements and shortcomings. Of the influence of dogs alone, David Gordon White tells us that they “no doubt played a significant role in the rise of *Homo sapiens* to dominance over our planet, in the human transformation of environment into world. . . . We cannot overestimate the importance of this relationship to the ‘humanization’ of the human species.” Human beings would not be the same today without animals.<sup>10</sup>

It is not just natural beings like dogs who influence humans, as humans obviously have reciprocal strong impacts on natural beings, such as can be seen in the human creation of the dog in the first place. Genetic data indicate that dogs likely were the first domesticated animals, appearing in East Asia or perhaps Africa around fifteen thousand

years ago, whereas fossil data indicate a European origin around thirty thousand years ago. Most scholars believe that hungry wolves with the lowest status in their packs would have sought food near human settlements. Such wolves likely would have been smaller, weaker, and more docile as compared with their fiercer wolf colleagues, and for these reasons they were hungry and were therefore willing to conform to human lifestyles. Because of their capacities to guard, help with the hunt, shepherd, aid transportation, and so on, over generations humans chose the wolves mildest in behavior and smallest in size (as many people still seek with dogs today), fed them, and interbred these meeker, dogs-in-the-making wolves. For their part, many of these wolves knew a good thing when they saw it—as dogs now vastly outnumber wolves—and volunteered for domestication. This artificial evolution caused such physical changes as the smaller skulls, teeth, and brains in dogs, as well as dogs' floppy ears and sickle-shaped tails. Selective genetics appears to have resulted in the submissive behavior that is greater in domestic dogs than in wolves. Furthering this human-controlled species process, the plethora of dog breeds seen today is of relatively recent occurrence, as the breeding of fancy dogs became widely fashionable only in the Victorian era and led to an explosion of new varieties. Dogs are a human development, as are all other domestic animals—as sheep and cattle, for instance, have been bred specifically to be more barrel-shaped and have lighter bones, benefiting human meat-eaters.<sup>11</sup>

Of course these mutual influences between humans and natural beings often take a religious hue, as we see with the bear. Religious regard for bears among numerous Eurasian and indigenous American peoples is so ancient that the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell describes bear ceremonialism as possibly the first form of human religion. Although bear veneration varies widely by time and place, there appear to be a few universal themes. In many places, a bear serves as the Master of Animals, the spirit leader of all animals and therefore the controller of the hunt. The anatomy and behaviors of bears sometimes so strongly resemble those of humans that sacred bears commonly

serve to specify simultaneously the boundaries between humans, animals, and the sacred. This results in elaborate bear-hunting rituals, which include apologies to the bear, ceremonial handling of the body, and special treatment for ursine body parts, so that bears color the religious forms observed by humans. Bears, too, are affected by this ritual complex, as they foremost have served as religious sacrifices through which (it is commonly but not universally believed) they are liberated from their earthly limitations and become pure spirit. In these ways bears and humans have shaped each other's lives and deaths precisely through the medium of religions.<sup>12</sup>

Humans and natural entities strongly impact each other, and religions mediate these processes. Interactions with nature and the existence of religion are human universals, so that across times and places humans and nature have encountered each other in diverse, religiously charged ways. On one hand, in various religions, natural beings may be recipients of the sacred, divine messengers, bringers of spiritual or material gifts, gods, vehicles or protectors for gods, guardian spirits, or sacred ancestors. On occasion natural beings possess spiritual insight superior to the human and function as religious teachers. Animals, plants, minerals, and water may be models for emulation, kin who share human souls, or partners in the project of existence. Real and symbolic natural beings may direct ethical mores and define virtue or vice. Conversely, sometimes flora and fauna are sacrificed, shedding their sap and blood for the religious sake of humans, whereas at other times natural beings provoke distinctions that solidify notions of humanity's separation from the rest of the natural world. Numerous researchers tell us that our relationships with nature typically are tinged with ambivalence, and this remains true with religious experiences with nature, in which natural beings appear in positive and negative forms.

Unfortunately, instances of these spiritually charged interactions between humans and nature often get overlooked in discussions of other things, perhaps because of a bias in Western culture that generally portrays religion as a human-only affair. But these interactions

leave us with two fundamental questions unanswered: Why are religious experiences with nature so diverse? And what does this diversity mean in terms of real-world outcomes for humans, animals, plants, minerals, and water? These are the central questions of this book.

What I will do is shift the discussion of religious experiences with nature from background to foreground, in order that we may better understand the essences and influences of such experiences. Because different religions shape and are shaped by a variety of approaches to the natural world, the discussion will be comparative, finding similarities and differences among several religious forms in context. By doing this, we can better understand how variations of individual religions encourage or deny certain spiritual interactions with nature while we can also better behold the reverse process, in which spiritual experiences with nature may alter the paths taken by individual religious forms.

To illustrate what I mean, take ordinary cows. Many Christians experience cows as soulless sources of food but not as religious sacrifices; Muslims may experience them both as food and as acceptable for religious sacrifices; millions of Buddhists experience them as inappropriate for both food and sacrifices; and Hindus often experience them as living symbols of a divine Mother, worthy of their own rituals, festivals, and bovine old-folks' homes. Why are these experiences of the same animal so diverse?

When we look into an answer to this question, we find that the doctrines and rituals of Christianity guide some followers into experiencing cows as provided by God for human use and therefore perfectly acceptable to kill for food. It never occurs to many Christians that they might venerate a cow instead of eating it or its milk products. On the other hand, Hindu doctrines and rituals lead to experiences of cows as our sacred mothers, so that many Hindus think of cows only in terms of nurturance and never as hamburger. In such and similar ways religions alter how we experience nature. For decades scholars like Steven Katz have argued that religions shape the experiences of their followers, and we see this dynamic with experiences of nature. Paying attention to

these processes helps us to answer the question why experiences with nature are so diverse.<sup>13</sup>

If we peek into other religious worlds, we find illustrations of this dynamic of religion's effects on experiences with nature. Take, for instance, the traditional religion of the indigenous Ojibwa group of North America, whose word *ototem* gave us the English word "totem." According to Ojibwa legend, one day long ago several powerful, god-like great beings suddenly appeared from the sea and happily assimilated into the Ojibwa people, becoming totems. Although today we can identify more than twenty-one Ojibwa totems, they are all thought to be variations of the first five: Catfish, Crane, Loon, Bear, and Marten. These totems divide Ojibwa society into smaller clans as holy badges of identity, as one is a Catfish person, Crane person, and so on, as part of one's sense of self. Totems are not chosen but inherited from one's father and ordinarily cannot be changed.

The totems themselves, although in animal form, should not be thought of strictly as physical animals, because their most important aspects are their powerful spiritual essences. Nonetheless the totem's natural characteristics help to create certain personal qualities in humans: Catfish people are expected to have fine hair and long lives; Crane people should be expert orators; Loons are premised to be regal; Bears are expected to have thick, dark hair and be ill-tempered; and Martens should be excellent providers of food.<sup>14</sup>

Ritually, traditional Ojibwa will respect taboos by not eating their totem and by choosing a marriage partner from a different totemic clan, and these practices inform the Ojibwa how to experience nature. For instance, a Catfish-clan woman likely will experience catfish, unlike other animals, as kin so sacred that they cannot be eaten. And because catfish are kin, she may not experience other Catfish-clan people as prospects for marriage but, rather, as extended-family members. Yet a Bear-clan man may have no problem experiencing catfish as a food source and Catfish people as possible spouses. So we see in Ojibwa totemism how specific religious forms encourage specific experiences

of nature, helping us to appreciate why religious experiences with nature are so diverse.

Having briefly discussed approaches to the question of why experiences with nature differ so, we should approach the question about alternative outcomes for human and nonhuman beings that arise from experiences with nature. To do this, let us consider leopards: as with all animals, mainstream Christians typically may experience leopards as soulless and religiously irrelevant; in Islam, experience generally instructs us that leopards have souls but will not go to heaven; in Buddhist Tibet, stories inform us that holy men may shape-shift into leopard form to teach disciples; and in Hindu India, sad experience shows us that leopards may be nefariously controlled by the angry ghost of their last human victim and thus need to be managed through religious ritual.

When these diverse experiences express themselves in cultural forms, ripple effects may significantly alter outcomes for leopards and humans alike. For instance, although people respond in a variety of ways, if a dangerous leopard lurks near a human settlement, it could be that a Christian grabs a gun and shoots it without a thought other than for hunting laws, whereas a Hindu may prefer having a holy man perform an exorcism. In this way alternative experiences of leopards create differential practical outcomes for leopards and humans alike, providing us with an approach to the question of what significance differences in natural religious experiences may have. Katherine Wills Perlo studied this dynamic with respect to animals, especially animals used for food; in this book I extend this perspective to include a much broader array of natural beings.<sup>15</sup>

Briefly turning to the Indian religion of Jainism provides a rich example whereby experiences with nature spark real-world outcomes like these. Based on the religious experiences of nature of the saint Mahavira, Jainism teaches that all elements of the natural world, including water and stones, possess a soul, or *jiva*. Because all tangible things have souls, the natural world forms one holy community, and humans are spiritual kin to water, stones, plants, insects, and animals.



But beings can still be distinguished in terms of having one to five senses. One-sense beings have the faculty of touch and include earth, water, fire, and air bodies, microorganisms, and plants. Notice that in the Jain universe, all these one-sense beings are technically animate, as they have souls, unlike in Western discourse. Two-sense beings add the faculty of taste and include worms, leeches, conches, and snails. The sense of smell occurs among three-sense beings, such as most insects and spiders. Vision is added at the fourth level of being, as in flies, scorpions, crickets, and bees. At the level of five-sense beings one finds hearing, as in birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, and humans. Because of reincarnation, all humans likely have been born or will be born as any of these life forms with one to five senses, leaving Jains to experience a deep tie to all forms of existence. Jains experience this kinship through empathy and respect for a broad array of life forms in terms of the dominant value of *abimsa*, or nonharm to others.

Such experiences have resulted in several cultural outcomes for the Jains, including the establishment of facilities for animal health care. Several hundred Jain animal hospitals are scattered around India, especially in the north. These facilities offer charity health care and nutritive support to a wide variety of animals. Such a facility, for example, is the Jain bird hospital in Delhi, where daily hundreds of birds are fastidiously fed, watered, cleaned, and medicated. Jains maintain similar hospitals for insects and also provide hermitages for lost, ailing, or aged cattle. The exceptional Jain experience of nonviolent kinship also results in notable cultural food rules. The flesh of commonly eaten animals, all of which are five-sensed, is avoided, and so Jains are expected to be vegetarian. Jains should also avoid agriculture, as tilling the soil may harm microorganisms; thus the earth is preserved from plows.

But, as extraordinary as Jain compassion for the natural world is, it has limits. Just like humans, animals in the Jain universe must work off their negative karma through suffering, which acts as a karmic cleanser. This means that animals in Jain hospitals are not euthanized, and in some cases this practice may be perceived as uncaring.

In these ways Jain experiences result in a variety of outcomes for humans and other beings alike. Birds, insects, and cattle enjoy enhanced health-care opportunities, although they may go without compassionate euthanization. Animals are not slaughtered for food. The earth is not tilled under Jain farm implements. And some Jains have become quite wealthy by entering the fields of finance and banking instead of traditional Indian farming.

Of course these two processes, wherein religions alter human and nonhuman experiences and these experiences alter religions, dialectically influence each other. We will see many examples of this mutual influence as we “saunter,” as Muir would say, through numerous different forms of religious experience with nature. But before we do this, it would do us good to be armed with four useful terms from the philosophy of nature. These concepts appear in a lot of environmental discourse, because they are helpful paradigms for understanding relationships between humans and nonhuman natural beings.

First, often we find humans asserting their superiority to nature in a way that environmentalists and philosophers call *anthropocentrism*. Anthropocentrism is a point of view that values the human more dearly than any other species or form and favors humans in thought and action. To demonstrate anthropocentrism, I offer the following thought experiment: Imagine that your home is engulfed in flames. You have little time and can save only either your best human friend, Jane, or Sugar, the beloved family cat who is your best animal friend, but not both. Whom do you choose to save, and why? If you choose to save Jane because she is human and Sugar is not, you have favored humanity above another species and thus have chosen anthropocentrically. Many people will make this choice.

When an anthropocentric perspective is advanced most strongly, only humans are valued intrinsically, for themselves, without concern for usefulness, and everything else is valued simply for its use to humans. Weaker versions of this perspective will value some nonhuman things for themselves, like family pets, but still insist that humans

retain substantially greater intrinsic value. Either way, with anthropocentrism the nonhuman natural world in whole or part is valued instrumentally, simply for whatever service it may provide to humans, and the typical human-to-nature relationship is one of superiority and dominance.

*Biocentrism* represents another paradigm for understanding human interactions with nature. With biocentrism, all beings considered in Western discourse to be living or animate, such as humans, animals, and plants, are valued for themselves, without concern for human use, although the worlds of minerals and water remain valued significantly less. When people say that they care for all *living* things, they express a sense of biocentrism. Biocentrism expresses a living moral community shared between humans and animals, and on occasion plants, and the typical form of relationship involves cooperation between humans, animals, and plants.

Plants often mark boundaries in biocentric perspectives. Given that humans frequently treat plants unreflectively, as lifeless objects that we may use as we please, sometimes we encounter statements of respect for all living things that, on closer inspection, reveal respect for animals but not for plants. Even among some vegetarians, who claim to be nature-friendly but in fact sometimes have a limited vision of the natural world, plants remain forgotten or rejected from value. Consider a codicil in the Statement of Faith of the Unity School of Christianity, which argues for a vegetarian lifestyle: “We believe that all life is sacred and that humans should not kill or be a party to the killing of animals for food.” Although this statement is friendly toward animals used for human food, it clearly, if implicitly, does not embrace plants within its understanding that “all life is sacred,” despite plants’ being living entities. If eating meat implicitly condones the killing of animals, this statement of the Unity School (and others like it) likewise implicitly condones the killing of plants, which is not very nature-friendly from a botanical point of view. The fact that we must eat plants to live does not change this formulation’s narrow inclusion of intrinsic value for ani-

mals that are used as food but exclusion of plants from such value, a limit that we will explore more extensively in chapter 6.<sup>16</sup>

Often, but not always, arguments for excluding plants from value ground themselves on the preciousness of animals because of their similarities with humans. Animals, having locomotion, specialized sensory organs like eyes, and central nervous systems, look more like us, and the philosopher Montaigne taught us that, for some people, “Nothing is worth anything if it does not look like us.” But however one may choose to argue the point, the commonly found limited biocentric position that asserts substantial intrinsic value for animals but not plants may better be described as *zoacentrism*, or human-and-animal-centered, as the Greek *zoa* denotes animals, both human and nonhuman. Zoacentrism is not fully biocentric in terms of finding nonuse value for *all* forms of life.<sup>17</sup>

Full biocentrism, on the other hand, regards all forms of plant life as intrinsically valuable, on par with humans and other animals. Full biocentrism potentially avoids pitfalls commonly found with zoacentrism because it more fully embraces the phrase “all living beings.” As an example, Manichaean Christians, vegetarians like members of the Unity School, differ from the latter by not justifying vegetarianism by overlooking plants. On the contrary, Manicheans practice vegetarianism because, in their perspective, plants are more pure and sacred than animals; and so if one wishes a blessing from nature, one should eat only plants. But full biocentrism like this faces difficulties of its own. Should we allow other plants to choke out the wheat crop because all plants have an equal right to live? Should we use antibiotic substances to kill bacteria, which are living things?

One more philosophical position demands mention. *Ecocentrism* is an approach to nature that values all existent things in the natural world, including inanimate things like rocks and lakes, for themselves, without concern for human use. The center of value is not just in particular entities, such as humans alone or humans and animals, but in the natural world in its entirety. Philosophically holistic, an ecocentric attitude

intrinsically values all (or almost all) natural forms, including humans, animals, plants, bodies of water, and stones big and small. Humans are still valued as part of the larger natural world but as rough peers with, rather than masters over, other forms in nature. Within ecocentric perspectives, images of relationship with the natural world tend to include notions of partnership and sometimes express a sense of human-nature kinship. In Muir's case, his valuation of rivers, stones, animals, and flowers as peers, "brothers," "friendly, fellow mountaineers," "God's people," and "so-called lifeless rocks" reflects an ecocentric philosophy.

It is of interest that ecocentric worldviews sometimes understand things like stones and lakes to be living, conscious beings, as we saw with the Jains, thus making problematic familiar words in English such as "living," "animate," or "person." For instance, a river that is a goddess is "living"; a stone with a soul literally is not "inanimate," a word derived from the Latin for "soulless"; and the sun is a "person" when reverentially addressed as "Grandfather," as many indigenous humans do. Further, although in this book I use terms like "humans," "nature," and "natural world" within the context of dominant Euro-American paradigms in order that I may connect with my presumed reader, these terms too take on different meanings within ecocentric worldviews that regard the human world and the natural world as one and the same reality. If humans truly *are* nature, then we cannot speak of humans and nature as separate realities, as is common in Western discourse.

Perhaps an analogy will help to clarify the meanings of anthropocentrism, zoocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. If we understand the natural world as a complete jigsaw puzzle, consisting of many pieces, anthropocentrism may regard humans as spectators outside of and looking down upon the puzzle. Zoocentrism may regard humans as part of a puzzle that includes animals but not plants, minerals, or water, whereas full biocentrism would include plants in this puzzle. An ecocentric view would regard humans as just one among many puzzle pieces that comprehensively include the human, animal, plant, mineral, and water realms.

We can see how these concepts help us to understand religion if we return to Muir's life. John Muir was not raised to be a nature mystic, since his father, Daniel Muir, strictly followed Calvinist Christianity before enthusiastically joining the new, at the time, denomination of Disciples of Christ. When John was a boy, his father coerced the entire Muir household into daily Bible study as well as rigid adherence to his own biblical interpretations. Daniel Muir's severe understanding of the Protestant Christian tradition included a strong transcendental element, in which the invisible God remains aloof from creation and thereby does not incarnate in earthly forms, aside from Jesus. Moreover, the Muir family's beliefs embraced a traditional reading of Genesis 1:26–28, the biblical verses in which God grants humanity “dominion” over animals and plants, as well as permission to use nature for human benefit. As with many Christians, to the Muirs nature was devoid of any religious relevance aside from, perhaps, as an example of God's magnificent handiwork for human benefit. Thus, to the rest of his family, John's talk of meeting “flower people” seemed eccentric, even crazy. For most of the Muirs, nonhuman natural forms possessed no value except as means to human ends.

Such religious attitudes toward the natural world took tangible shape at Fountain Lake, the Muir family farm in Wisconsin. Following his interpretation of the biblical view that the natural world exists for the sake of humans to use as they please, John's father, Daniel, heedlessly rode a horse literally to death, blithely shot an innocuous puppy, and nearly shot a horse simply for harassing cattle. Moreover, not only did he destroy rich forests by inefficiently clearing land for farming; within a few years he had exhausted that cleared soil by overplanting. At least in part because of his religious beliefs regarding human superiority, John's father carelessly drove his natural environment to its demise.

These actions fueled animosity within his sensitive son John, who came to hate the “dreary work” of clearing land. He had loved the family land at Fountain Lake best when it was untamed “pure wildness”

that offered “baptism in Nature’s warm heart.” In response, he mentally escaped while at home by reading travelogues of the natural worlds of South America and Africa. Later, at the University of Wisconsin, he began to revise his inherited worldview by embracing more liberal Christian views as taught to him by his mentors, Professor Ezra Carr and his botanist wife, Jeanne.<sup>18</sup>

Muir fully developed as a nature mystic only after he had left home for good as an adult. His wanderings first on the “floral pilgrimage” to Florida and later in Yosemite not only offered him constant reminders of nature’s magnificence; they also allowed him plenty of time to reconsider his beliefs and, most especially, to alter his mode of experience of nature’s sacredness. Although he had always been a spiritual partner with the natural world, it was only in the freedom from his upbringing in his late thirties that his encounter with nature as divine maximally blossomed, resulting in what he described while in Yosemite as a “conversion.” The therapists Aaron Katcher and Alan Beck tell us that “the active contemplation of the natural world” enables “the ability to reduce tension and to integrate the sense of self,” and this description fits Muir’s development. The man who invented a better sawmill and the “early-rising machine” now invented a new, heterodox, entirely personal form of nature mystical Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

His new religion diverged in significant ways from that of his childhood. Although he retained a measure of distant-God transcendence in his concept of the deity, Muir’s new god also manifested immanently by dwelling in worldly, physical forms. Muir disposed of the remote deity of his Protestant heritage in favor of a living divinity that resided in and oozed sacred energy through animals, plants, rivers, and mountains. In a decidedly un-Calvinist manner, the adult Muir was a panentheist, as he regarded nature and God as linked and overlapping yet not identical, like the rings of the logo for the Olympic Games.

As well, long gone was the sense of human superiority of his inherited form of Christianity in favor of an ecocentric philosophy. His later ecocentrism regarded humanity as just one facet of a vast, intercon-

nected natural world. Rather than anthropocentrism's projection of human superiority and dominance over nature, his nature-centered perspective embraced a wealth of natural beings as partners. Philosophically, this was a major shift.

These personal religious innovations of Muir's—an immanent God in the world and an ecocentric web of peerlike connections with nature—coalesced in his personal, noninstitutional, and Christian nature mysticism. Although he worshipped alongside redwoods and spiders, he revealed that he grounded his experiences within a Christian framework when, in a letter to his friend Professor Catherine Merrill, he wrote:

I wish you could come here and rest a year in the simple unmingled love fountains of God. You would then return to your scholars with fresh truth gathered and absorbed from pines and waters and deep singing winds, and you would find that they all sang of fountain Love just as did Jesus Christ and all of pure God manifest in whatever form.

Describing his stay in Yosemite as “revival time,” he spoke not of bathing in waterfalls but instead of being “baptized” by them. He cited Matthew 6:28 in following and encouraging others to follow Jesus's advice to “consider the lilies.” And he even implicitly compared the sequoia to Jesus in calling it “King” (of the Jews) and by saying: “The King tree and I have sworn eternal love—sworn it without ~~swearing~~, and I have taken the sacrament with Douglas squirrel, drank Sequoia wine, Sequoia blood.” Yet Muir told us that his new Christianity opposed biblical anthropocentrism:<sup>20</sup>

You say that good men are “nearer to the heart of God than are woods and fields, rocks and waters.” Such distinctions and measurements seem strange to me. Rocks and waters, etc., are words of God and so are humans. We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one Love. God does not appear, and flow out, only from narrow chinks and round bored wells here and there in favored races and places, but He flows in grand undivided currents, shoreless and boundless over creeds and forms and all kinds of civilizations and peoples and beasts, saturating all.



Muir in fact trenchantly criticized his contemporaries' sense of human superiority:<sup>21</sup>

The world, we are told, was made especially for humans—a presumption not supported by all the facts. . . . It never seems to occur to these farseeing teachers that nature's object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one [humanity].

Because of this, “No wonder the hills and groves were God's first temples, and the more they are cut down, and hewn into cathedrals and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord himself.”<sup>22</sup>

Muir's Druidlike respect for hills and groves as places of worship reflects both the naturalistic immanence and the sincere ecocentrism that fused into his revised nature mystical religiosity. He already possessed the ascetic habits of a monk, as he lived simply and hardily, and he traveled light. With these habits he combined a meditator's concentrated attention upon what he considered holy. Always an opponent of hunting, he also voluntarily adopted the value of nonharm, which is so common among mystics. For instance, he once visited the Grand Canyon with members of the nascent National Forestry Commission, a forerunner to the United States Forest Service, and during the tour one commissioner, Gifford Pinchot, wished to kill a large tarantula. Muir restrained him, saying: “It has as much right there as we.”<sup>23</sup>

The conjunction of these forces resulted in a series of profound mystical experiences for Muir of nature as incarnate divinity. As he wrote in *My First Summer in the Sierras*: “More and more, in a place like this, we feel ourselves part of wild nature, kin to everything.” Muir supported this ecocentric sense of kinship biblically, by highlighting that all natural forms, including stones and water, are the differently clothed sons and daughters of the same creator. He claimed: “The very stones seem talkative, sympathetic, brotherly. No wonder when we consider that we all have the same father and mother.”<sup>24</sup>

But to Muir, natural beings were not just kin; they were sacred kin in the process of constant revelation of their holiness, “pulsing with the heartbeats of God.” As he put it: “All the wilderness seems to be full of tricks and plans to drive and draw us up into God’s light.” Experiencing this vibrant, sacred kinship led him to a spiritual communion with the totality of his natural surroundings. In his journal Muir wrote: “The trees, the mountains are not near or far; they are made one, unseparate, unclothed, open to the divine soul, dissolved in the mysterious incomparable spirit of holy light!”<sup>25</sup>

These mystical stirrings were highly emotional for Muir, as he once “shouted and gesticulated in a wild burst of ecstasy” at a gorgeous vista across the Sierras. On another occasion, contemplation of the holy beauty of his surroundings caused him to spring to his feet and shout: “Heaven and earth! Rock is not light, not heavy, but is transparent and unfathomable as the sky itself. Every pore gushes, glows like a thought with immortal life.” In Muir’s nature religion, a true encounter with nature demands a direct, numinous, whole-being experience of the divinity of the entire natural world. The philosopher of mysticism W. T. Stace showed us that one of the hallmarks of nature mysticism is strong emotion, whether it be bursting joy, placid serenity, or some other affect, and we see this emotional power in Muir’s religiosity.<sup>26</sup>

It was this heterodox Christian nature mysticism that drove Muir for the rest of his life as a prolific author about nature, founder of the Sierra Club, and advocate for the national park system in the United States, as these influential conservation activities were an outgrowth of his effort to “preach Nature.” As such, Muir’s life teaches us several lessons. To begin with, Muir’s spirituality highlights the process in which religions shape experiences with nature. From the time as a child when he used the Bible to learn to read and until his last day, Muir remained a self-identifying Christian, if a heretical one compared with the mainstream. If he wished as an adult to abandon the Christianity of his childhood, he could have approached nature purely technically and scientifically, without a spiritual side, as so many other biologists have

done; yet this was not his path. Perhaps he learned indigenous natural mysticism from one of his many Native American acquaintances, but Muir, to my knowledge, never expressed himself in this way. Instead Muir described experiences that were Christian upon occurrence and Christian in later interpretation, even if it was a Christianity somewhat of his own devising. Thus Muir arguably experienced two types of Christianity, the Protestant version in which he was raised and the heterodox nature mystical variety that he developed within himself. The natural world in which the adult Muir was so completely immersed was a Christian natural world, a physical embodiment of the Christian God. His religious upbringing powerfully shaped how he perceived nature, and it helps to explain why he had the experiences that he did.

If we peer at the outcomes of Muir's experiences with nature, we recognize that his childhood religious experiences, informed as they were by notions of human superiority, would have made a poor platform for his later conservation efforts. It is logically incoherent to argue that nature exists solely for the sake of humans and simultaneously maintain that national parks should exist to preserve trees for their own sake. Even if, as it seems, Muir always had the seed of a mystic within him, if he had obediently maintained the religion of his childhood, he might not now be recognized as a great naturalist. Instead he developed his own unique and very personal form of Christian belief and practice oriented toward sacred animals, plants, minerals, and water, and the resulting passion fueled a vigorous life spent in defense of the wilderness. In Muir's case, different experiences of Christianity and nature created alternative outcomes. Thus if we inquire about the meaning of his religious experiences with nature for humans and nonhumans, we need look no further than the National Park System of the United States.

Over the rest of this book I tease out other examples of the dialectical processes in which religions help to determine experiences with nature while experiences with nature alter the shapes of religions. It is of course impossible in one book to account for more than a small

fraction of religious experiences with nature, so I select paradigmatic examples to serve as representative case treatments, with each religious world contributing a distinctive model of human relationship with nature, such as enlightened limited partnership, mother and child-, or tempered human dominion.

No religion in this study—or, presumably, anywhere—presents us with one, simple way of experiencing the natural world. The anthropologist Brian Morris claims that “all human societies have diverse, multifaceted, and often contradictory attitudes toward the natural world”; and religions are no different in their assorted and sometimes conflicting experiences with nature. In their attitudes toward nature, religious worlds are like stained-glass windows, as they consist of separate pieces embodying many disparate hues, yet expressive patterns still may be discerned. Because of this, all the models that I explore are inherently tensive and ambiguous, such as animals are worthy of love but not of a meaningful place in religion, humans are separate from but deeply interwoven with nature, or humans favor themselves but remain peer friends with natural beings.<sup>27</sup>

For example, chapter 1, “All the Christian Birds Chanted,” visits an innovative Christian pet blessing ceremony in order to go beyond the marginal heterodoxy of John Muir and more fully explore religious experiences with nature in the Christian tradition. Looked at historically, Christians have long loved animals, as the church portrays some animals as friends of saints, frowns upon the practice of animal sacrifice, and documents sporadic occasions when animals practice religion. But it is also generally true that in Christianity animals, like all other natural beings, stand inferior to humans, who alone have salvific souls and exercise dominion over the natural world. In the end we discover that Christianity, while embodying many different outlooks, provides a model in which animals have been worthy of sometimes-lavish love but not worthy of salvation or an authentic place at the communion table. However, pet blessing ceremonies like those described provide a contemporary grassroots challenge to this historical legacy.

In chapter 2, “The Donkey Who Communed with Allah,” I probe experiences with nature in the Islamic world. Historically Islam inherited strong attitudes of human superiority to the natural world from Judaism, Christianity, and Greek philosophy. Nonetheless, Islam’s approaches to the natural world differ from those of its Abrahamic cousin religions, as many animals fare better under Islam due to Quranic injunctions, theological innovations, and cultural traditions. Islam inspires a measure of spiritual respect for natural beings, because they form communities as do human beings, sometimes possess souls, may rarely serve as religious guides, and even more rarely have mystical experiences of their own. At the same time, humans remain firmly superior to the rest of the natural world. Islam thus leaves us with noblesse oblige as our primary model of relationship with the natural world, wherein superior humans must care gently and well for inferior animals.

In an alternative to this Abrahamic religious situation, chapter 3, “Hindu Trees Tremble with Ecstasy,” ethnographically explores the roles of sacred rivers, plants, and cows in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, one sect of the Hindu tradition. Fieldwork at a Hindu ashram reveals devotees who spiritually reverence cattle as holy mothers through rituals, dietary practices, and the establishment and operation of a large no-kill cattle sanctuary. These Hindus also reverence Tulsi, the holy basil plant, as a mother goddess in both belief and ritual. India’s sacred rivers enhance this sense of the Divine Mother, as they are thought to be living, watery incarnations of benevolent mother goddesses. Therefore in this chapter we find powerful mother-child images of human relationship with sacred nature. But we also find limits to the veneration of nature as our mother, such as the need to control dangerous snakes.

In chapter 4, “Sharing Mayan Natural Souls,” we investigate the traditional world of the contemporary Maya of Central America. From ancient times Mayan religions have insisted on a religious obligation of reciprocal sacred action among humans, many natural beings, and gods. Through this ethic, the Maya live within a deep network of inter-

relationships with sacred nature yet remain distinctly human. In a variety of ways, including the sharing of souls with animals, shamanic transformations into jaguar form, and agricultural nature mysticism in the cornfield, the Maya world leaves us with a model of relationship in which humans remain discrete from but closely interwoven with the nonhuman natural world, and human fulfillment occurs in terms not of overcoming nature as an individual but of entering nature more deeply.

Chapter 5, “Friendly Yetis,” presents a picture of a sacred human-animal hybrid in the form of the legendary yeti. Setting aside questions regarding the material existence of yetis, in examining Tibetan folk beliefs we find that yetis are thought to exist in a vaguely defined realm between human and animal and thus have simultaneous human and animal characteristics. When yetis are at their most human, they are gentle beings who may practice religion or pose as nice friends. When they are mostly animal, it is because they are holy incarnations of local mountain gods, charged with keeping order by enforcing the mountain gods’ will. Yeti folklore thus imparts to us experiences in which sacredness appears as both human and animal at once, with varying results, thus highlighting the essential ambivalence with which humans approach natural forms.

In chapter 6, “Enlightened Buddhist Stones,” we return to the expansive vision of John Muir but in a dramatically different package. Intensive fieldwork at a Vietnamese Buddhist monastery uncovers doctrines in which humans recognize their deep interconnections with the natural world, broadly conceived, as part of the path to the goal of nirvana. Living among stones considered to be Buddhas, the monks and nuns adopt nonviolent and environmentally friendly lifestyles and forms of practice. They learn spiritual lessons from trees, tigers, snakes, storms, and a variety of other natural entities. While some other chapters in this book focus by necessity mainly on animals, this chapter teaches us that stones and water can be enlightened, too. But with the help of practices from the Cheyenne First Nations group, we also learn about some of the limitations of such a broad spiritual regard for the natural world.

As we travel through two Abrahamic religions, two Asian high religions, and two geographically disparate folk traditions, we will find experiences with nature that may be unfamiliar to Westerners, who are not used to worshipping lakes or receiving spiritual teachings from trees. For instance, in the Christian Acts of Peter, a dog raises its front paws in the air and uses human speech to preach. But such experiences, which exhibit a sense of partnership with nature, are valuable for their unfamiliarity, because they teach us new ways of looking at the world. These varying and interesting experiences often show genuine concern for natural beings who are considered companions, gurus, or divinities and reveal a touching sense of human partnership not just with animals but also with flowers, lakes, and mountains. Also, since many of these stories really are more about humans than about natural beings, they betray operative human attitudes toward the natural world, and we can learn much by studying these attitudes. As the historian Keith Thomas has said: “For all the defects of imaginative literature as a historical source, there is nothing to surpass it as a guide to the thoughts and feelings of at least the more articulate sections of the population.” Thus, if we look behind the foreign or magical elements of some stories, we just may find some useful hardheaded advice. Indeed, we will find that in some of these stories elements emerge that accord with contemporary scientific research. Or, as the Chinese classic *The Journey to the West* puts it: “When creatures can speak human language, they generally tell the truth.”<sup>28</sup>

Along with these moments of genuine partnership with nature, in each religion we also will find attitudes of human superiority of some type, since religion frequently aids and abets the myth of human superiority. Among the many variable religious forms that we will study, human-centered attitudes appear constantly, although they are manifested in varying ways. This seems unsurprising, since members of many species show favoritism to their own kind. But along with the universality of human-centeredness, we will see that each religious form distinctively includes alternative animal- or environment-friendly

elements, just as a quilt blends individual patches. In the milieu of Abrahamic religions anthropocentrism predominates, but in other religious worlds sometimes biocentric and ecocentric perspectives occupy center stage, with anthropocentrism somewhat marginalized, as we have already seen with the eccentric Muir and will see again among Hindus, Maya, Buddhists, and Himalayan residents.

Because the religions in this study all embrace in some way the myth of human superiority, we discover a grim conclusion: just as humans frequently treat their conspecifics with selfishness and arrogance and even feel noble in doing so, so do we often treat animals and other natural beings with selfishness and arrogance, especially since they cannot complain in a language that we understand well. Since we have not yet extinguished human-on-human slavery, we may be saddened but not surprised when humans treat natural ones like slaves as well.

Senses of human superiority may lead us to do terrible things to natural beings even when we claim to love them. Pet-parrot caregivers often love their birds, but parrots are now endangered in their home jungles, not just because of habitat loss but also because of the trade in pet birds. Cases of animal hoarding are familiar, where an attitude of the animals' needing human care leads people to adopt more pets than they can properly nurture. Exotic animals like tigers are collected because we need to save tigers, only to have caregivers discover that managing a tiger in the back yard is more difficult than they expected. Further, numerous studies have shown that we often approach pets as substitutes for other humans, leading us to psychologically exploit animals while we claim to be loving them. From this, we often treat pet animals as humans, when instead animal experts tell us we should respect them as dogs, cats, or other creatures with their own species-specific existential affairs and concerns. Moreover, to preserve our treasured pets and livestock we fence our homes and roads, thus inhibiting members of many different species from freely seeking food, water, and mates as they organically would. Personally, as a so-called



animal lover I have two pet dogs in my back yard, but they kill every rabbit, squirrel, gopher, and gecko that enters the yard; the rabbits involved may not consider my pet keeping fully to reflect love of animals—should rabbits, in their own ways, actually ponder such things. Thus there seems to be substance to the groan of George Bernard Shaw that precious animals sometimes “bear more than their natural burden of human love.” As it is with love toward our fellow humans, perhaps we would do better if we were to pay more attention to developing unselfishness in our love toward others and spend less time insisting on how much we love.<sup>29</sup>

The philosopher Mary Midgley claims that a sense of superiority to other species is normal for all beings. The cat that enjoys slowly taunting its prey before killing it appears to be expressing an experience of dominance, for just one example. But this provokes questions: Can cats, or any other species, really claim to be superior? Just as humans consider themselves superior for their intelligence, may not eagles be considered the superior species because humans cannot match their ability to fly? May dolphins be considered superior beings for the way that they swim? In the end, are not all standards of superiority simply in the eye of the beholder? The philosopher Montaigne posed the issue this way: “When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?” Or, as Xenophanes put it, in the sixth century B.C.E.:<sup>30</sup>

But if cattle (or horses) or lions had hands,  
 And were able to draw with their hands and do works as humans do,  
 Horses would draw the forms of gods like horses,  
 And cows like cows, and figure their bodies  
 The same as they themselves have.

Therefore we may do well to reconsider the myth of human superiority, which portrays humanity as qualitatively better than all nonhuman natural beings. Throughout history many reasons have been put forward for humanity’s superiority: intellect, possession of emotions,

ability to make tools, ability to reason, ability to create art, ability to suffer, possession of organized social groups, possession of culture, language ability, ability to think for the future, and ability to act morally, among others. All these standards have been debunked in their qualitative formulations in recent years by scientists who study animal behavior, thus scientifically eliminating many arguments in favor of the myth of human superiority. Previously perceived barriers between humans and nonhuman nature have been shown to be differences of degree, not of kind, or not to exist at all. Instead, animal-behavior specialists such as Donald Griffin, Franz de Waal, and Marc Bekoff increasingly stress the continuity with rather than the divergence of humans and other animals in terms of reason, emotion, and behavior. In this book we study these perspectives from religious points of view and question the myth of human superiority in terms of another marker of supposed human superiority: the ability to practice religion. This study presents numerous stories in which animals are said to engage in religion, and especially in the epilogue I explore the question of how we may understand such tales.

Whether humans are superior to natural beings or not, it remains true that only if we understand both experienced human superiority to nature and partnership with nature can we understand who we are, where we have been, and where we are going if we wish to positively, beneficially, and authentically experience the natural world. Examining religious experiences with nature highlights how we may have gotten ourselves in trouble with the natural world but also how we may get out of trouble. Learning more about the natural world aids our understanding of other beings in our environment on their own terms, and this knowledge can then be parlayed into relationships with our neighbors in the nonhuman universe that are mutually constructive to a greater degree.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. John Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, ed. Tim Flinders (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2013), 35. For the sake of increasing accessibility general readers, my citations in this book do not follow strict scholarly methods, instead reflecting a citation method that is common to books for nonscholarly audiences. Citations to in-line sources are found collected in footnotes at the ends of the paragraphs in which they are relevant. For reasons of book design, reference notes for block quotations are found immediately preceding those texts, outside the block text itself.

2. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 107.

3. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 30, 43–44.

4. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 50, 54, 79.

5. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 51; John Muir, *John Muir: Nature Writings*, ed. William Cronon (New York: The Library of America, 1997), 558; Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

6. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 52.

7. John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras* (New York: Random House, 2003), 90.

8. Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 113.

9. Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 18.

10. Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), 9; Eugenia Shanklin, "Sustenance and Symbol: Anthropological Studies of Domesticated Animals," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985), 375, doi: 10.1146/annurev.an.14.100185.002111; David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12–13.
11. Jeffrey Cohn, "How Wild Wolves Became Domestic Dogs," *BioScience* 47:11 (1997): 726, doi: 10.2307/1313093; Adam R. Boyko et al., "Complex Population Structure in African Village Dogs and Its Implications for Inferring Dog Domestication History," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 106:33 (2009), 13903–8, doi: 10.1073/pnas.0902129106; O. Thalmann et al., "Complete Mitochondrial Genomes of Ancient Canids Suggest a European Origin of Domestic Dogs," *Science* 342:6160 (2013), 871–74, doi: 10.1126/science.1243650; Harriet Ritvo, "Pride and Pedigree: The Evolution of the Victorian Dog Fancy," *Victorian Studies* 29:2 (1986), 227–53.
12. A. Irving Hallowell, "Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere," *American Anthropologist* 28:1 (1926), doi: 10.1525/aa.1926.28.1.02a00020; Lydia T. Black, "Bear in Human Imagination and in Ritual," *Ursus* 10 (1998), 343–47.
13. Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
14. William Warren, *History of the Ojibway People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1984), 41–53.
15. Katherine Wills Perlo, *Kinship and Killing: The Animal in World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
16. Jeremy Rapport, "Eating for Unity: Vegetarianism in the Early Unity School of Christianity," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 9:2 (2009), 35.
17. Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 51.
18. Wilkins, 16, 77, 79; Muir, *John Muir: Nature Writings*, 109; Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 95.
19. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 54; Aaron Honori Katcher and Alan M. Beck, "Health and Caring for Living Things," in *Animals and People Sharing the World*, ed. Andrew N. Rowan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 69.
20. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 83, 90–91.
21. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 45–46.

22. Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, 197.
23. Wilkins, 195.
24. Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, 319, 326.
25. Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, 331; Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 88.
26. Muir, *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 61, 89; W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Jeremy P. Tharcher, 1987), 78–81.
27. Brian Morris, *Animals and Ancestors: An Ethnography* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 34.
28. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 296, 298; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 16; Arthur Waley, trans., *Monkey* (New York: The John Day Company, 1943), 277.
29. Quoted in James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 32.
30. Montaigne, 17. The quotation from Xenophanes: Laura Hobgood-Oster, *Holy Dogs and Asses: Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 13.

#### I. ALL THE CHRISTIAN BIRDS CHANTED

1. All biblical quotations are from National Council of Churches of Christ in America, *Bible: Revised Standard Version*, accessed 2014, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/r/rsv/browse.html>.
2. Frederick Starr, “Popular Celebrations in Mexico,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 9:34 (1896), 168; Laura Hobgood-Oster, *Holy Dogs and Asses: Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 107.
3. Hobgood-Oster, 4, 6.
4. Heimo Hohneck, “Animal Mummies and the Worship of Animals in Ancient Egypt,” in *Mummies of the World*, ed. Alfried Wiczorek and Wilfried Rosendahl (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 94; H. te Velde, “A Few Remarks upon the Religious Significance of Animals in Ancient Egypt,” *Numen* 27:1 (1980): 81; Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
5. te Velde, 80; Eric A. Powell, “Messengers to the Gods,” *Archaeology* 67:2 (2014), 49.
6. Roberta Kalechofsky, “Hierarchy, Kinship, and Responsibility: The Jewish Relationship to the Animal World,” in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals*