The Atheistic Religious Naturalism of Goodenough, Crosby and Rue

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Religion without God?

Atheistic religion can be a challenging concept; the very idea can trigger cognitive dissonance born of culturally-constructed definitions of religion. This is primarily true in the West, where popular conceptions of religion focus on belief in and worship of god.[1] Frequent examples of non-theistic religion include particular perspectives within Buddhism and Hinduism, however there are also such perspectives within the Abrahamic religions. For example, Lloyd Geering describes an atheistic approach to Christianity in his book *Christianity Without God*,[2] and non-theism is represented within Reconstructionist Judaism.[3]

This paper describes an emerging religious perspective best characterised as *atheistic religious naturalism*, but more frequently called simply *religious naturalism*.[4] I am including the qualifier *atheistic* to distinguish this perspective from those that retain some notion of god – whether theistic, paganistic, pantheistic or panentheistic – while at times being included under the banner of religious naturalism. Donald Crosby, Ursula Goodenough and Loyal Rue are

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[1] Paul J. Griffiths, "Nontheistic Conceptions of the Divine" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright. Oxford Scholarship Online, April 2005.
Also, Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 139. Goodenough notes that some people argue non-theistic religions are really *philosophies* rather than religions.

[2] Lloyd Geering, *Christianity Without God* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2002), 136. Geering argues that Christianity must become non-theistic in order for people to be fully free and responsible.

[3] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism Today: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 95.

[4] Michael Hogue, *The Promise of Religious Naturalism* (Plymouth**:** Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 32. Hogue uses the phrase "atheistic religious naturalism" in reference to Donald Crosby's perspective. This phrase currently yields about 10 results on Google, including Hogue's.

atheistic religious naturalists, and I will be using their writings to describe and consider this perspective.

1.2 My intentions and the structure of this paper

My purpose is to *paint a picture* of atheistic religious naturalism, as represented in the writings of Goodenough, Crosby and Rue. I have chosen to focus on these three thinkers because I believe their writings complement each other and collectively bring into focus a comprehensive image of atheistic religious naturalism as an emerging movement. They each have differing roles to play in the balance of the paper. Crosby is somewhat of a *theologian* or *philosopher* for atheistic religious naturalism; in Section 2, I draw upon his writings to consider *nature* in a religious context, to identify values to be found in nature, and to consider why nature is an appropriate object of religious concern. Rue serves as an *anthropologist*; he provides a model of religion with which one can analyse any religious tradition. In Section 3, I describe his model and how it relates to atheistic religious naturalism. One of the functions of a religion, according to Rue, is to clarify *how things are* and *what things matter*, and in Section 4 I draw upon all three thinkers to discuss these themes from a religious naturalist perspective. Goodenough is the *professional scientist* of the three; she contributes a biological perspective on the story of the universe, often called the *epic of evolution*. At the same time, Goodenough is a *religious architect*; like Crosby, she is blatantly working on *religiopoiesis* – the creation of religion. Lastly, in Section 5, I summarise key objections and challenges to atheistic religious naturalism, describe areas for future research and offer brief conclusions and personal reflections in response to the overall discussion.

1.3 Introducing Goodenough, Crosby and Rue

Ursula Goodenough is the author of a popular textbook on genetics.[5] Her father was first a Methodist preacher and then a professor of the history of religion.[6] He embodied both a declared atheism and a form of religious devotion, and so his daughter had a living model for this seeming paradox. She notes how, after her scientific and academic career was established, she undertook a similar journey to her father: trying to understand why people are religious, what it means to be religious, and also wondering why she was *not* religious.[7] Goodenough's *The Sacred Depths of Nature* is perhaps the most widely cited book on religious naturalism. In the opening of this book, she credits Loyal Rue for her developing knowledge of theology and philosophy, and the idea that scientists should speak out on religious matters.[8] As of September 2013, Goodenough is Professor of Biology at Washington University in St. Louis.

Donald Crosby grew up in the bible-belt of the USA where, for him, religion was "pervasive, dogmatic and real."[9] After high-school he entered ministerial studies and notes how "[a] universe without God was inconceivable to me at the time." After seminary, he became the pastor of a small church in Delaware, but a few years later he decided he would rather teach religion. His Ph.D. studies exposed him to a much wider range of secular ideas. "The study of Western philosophy and world religions opened up numerous fresh options for reflection, impelling me first to reassess my belief in the Incarnation and Trinity

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[5] Ursula Goodenough, *Genetics* (Philadelphia: Saunders College Publishing, 1984).
[6] Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) ix.
[7] Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, x.
[8] Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, xi.
[9] Donald A. Crosby, *A Religion of Nature (*Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 3.

and later my belief in God."[10] Crosby says that his outlook is atheistic,[11] and considers his "religion of nature" a category of religious naturalism.[12] Crosby outlines his religious naturalism in his books *A Religion of Nature* and *Living with Ambiguity*. He is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Colorado State University.

Loyal Rue writes, "I grew up in a home where religious life was taken very seriously, and where the assumption that religion was all about God was never challenged."[13] His father was a Lutheran pastor, and his family "was a marinade of Lutheran piety." After his father died, his family was very poor and relied on the church for support; religious life was, therefore, "not a weekly outing for my family – it was daily, hourly, and deadly serious."[14] Rue declares he is an atheist (he prefers the term non-theist) and a religious naturalist.[15] He insists, however, that atheism does not preclude being religious.[16] Regarding his attitude toward Christianity, Rue quotes Woody Allen: "If Jesus came back today and saw what was being done in his name he'd never stop throwing up."[17] Rue admits being pessimistic about the future; he believes that the earth is headed toward a global, ecological holocaust toward the end of the 21st century, and that in the aftermath, religious naturalism will have greater appeal than supernaturalist religions because it will focus on environmental protection

[10] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature*, 5-7.
[11] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature*, 12.
[12] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature*, 172 (see footnote 14).
[13] Loyal Rue, *Religion Is Not About God: How Spiritual Traditions Nurture our Biological Nature and What to Expect When They Fail* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), vii.
[14] Loyal Rue, *Nature is Enough* (Albany: State University of New York, 2011),131-132.
[15] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 135.
[16] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 135.
[17] Loyal Rue, "Religious Naturalism – Where does it Lead?" *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 415. The quote is from Allen's film *Hannah and Her Sisters*.

and sustainability.[18] Leslie Marsh comments that "Rue is a rare bird in academic philosophy, someone who is interested in the big questions without resorting to philosophical or religious obscurity."[19] Rue is Professor Emeritus of Religion and Philosophy at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, USA.

In the balance of this introduction, I progress toward a description of atheistic religious naturalism by defining naturalism and the general category of religious naturalism.

1.4 What is Naturalism?

Prior to analysing the notion of *religious naturalism*, we must first consider the concept of *naturalism*, in general. Naturalism is an imprecise term in philosophy that can be applied to ontological, epistemological and causal perspectives. Ontologically, naturalism defines *nature* as *everything that exists*, where nature is identified with *reality*, and where *the supernatural* is assumed *not* to exist.[20] Epistemologically, naturalism claims that the sciences yield knowledge, and that religious revelation does not. Arthur Danto emphasises the *causal* sense of naturalism whereby anything in nature is susceptible to scientific explanation.[21] Michael Hogue adds that "the relevant contrast to natural is not artificial or human-made, but super- or supranaturalistic."[22]

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[18] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where does it Lead?*, 420.
[19] Leslie Marsh, "Taking the Super Out of the Supernatural," *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 355.
[20] David Papineau, "Naturalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), [http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/naturalism] See also: Tenets of Naturalism, http://www.naturalism.org/tenetsof.htm.
[21] Arthur C. Danto: "Naturalism," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967, 448), quoted in Jerome A. Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 2.
[22] Michael Hogue, *The Promise of Religious Naturalism* (Plymouth**:** Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 52.

Rem Edwards offers the following tenets as family resemblances for a naturalistic worldview:

> (1) that only the world of nature is real;
> (2) that nature is necessary in the sense of requiring no sufficient reason beyond itself to account either for its origin or ontological ground;
> (3) that nature as a whole may be understood without appeal to any kind of intelligence or purposive agent; and
> (4) that all causes are natural causes so that every natural event is itself a product of other natural causes[23]

Finally, Loyal Rue summarises his notion of naturalism as follows:

> Naturalists seek to justify their stance on grounds that humans are wholly embedded within Nature and therefore have no access to extra-natural realities, which naturalism regards as oxymoronic monstrosities. One violates the principle of naturalism by positing transcendent realities that stand juxtaposed to Nature. Familiar dualisms such as nature-culture, nature-history, nature-spirit, or nature-God, are therefore rejected by naturalists.[24]

In summary, naturalism is a belief or world-view that nature (or the universe) is everything and is governed by laws rather than purposes. The most frequently-cited philosophical argument *against* naturalism is Alvin Plantinga's *Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*, which argues that naturalism and contemporary evolutionary theory are at odds with each other.[25]

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[23] Hardwick attributes this list to Rem Edwards in *Events of Grace* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5-6. Hardwick references: Rem Edwards, *Reason and Religion: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanivich, 1972), 133-141. The list is quoted Jerome A. Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative* (State University of New York Press, 2009), 2.

[24] Rue, *Religion Is Not About God,* 363.

[25] Alvin Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated," Online Article, *Calvin College Website*. http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/naturalism_defeated.pdf [See also: Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford University Press, 1993)].

1.5 Varieties of Religious Naturalism

The above definitions of naturalism have implications for traditional theism such that any discussion of naturalism quickly becomes a discussion about religion. For example, if only the world of nature is real, then anything presumed to be outside of nature is not real, e.g., god, heaven, hell, etc. Further, if all causes are natural causes, there are no miracles or divine interventions. Indeed, for many theists and atheists alike, if naturalism is correct then theism is incorrect. Science and religion, given *this* perspective, are irreconcilable.[26] However, ideas that resolve this conflict are as old as science, and one way of describing *religious* naturalism is any religious position that reconciles with science.[27] Jerome Stone credits Spinoza with being the first major religious naturalist[28] -- based in part on his use of the phrase "God or nature" (*Deus sive natura*).[29] Stone summarises Spinoza's conceptions of god as "the totality of the universe considered religiously."[30]

Religious naturalism, as a modern intellectual movement, emerged in the early 20th century, where *religion without supernaturalism* was firmly part of theological scholarship at the Chicago School of Divinity and the phrase *religious naturalism* was commonly used.[31] Here, a *process theology* emerged which identified god with the creative processes of the universe.[32] Supernaturalism and religious authority were deemed untenable as they

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[26] David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 11.
[27] Sami Pihlström, "A Pragmatic Critique of Three Kinds of Religious Naturalism," *Method & Theory In The Study Of Religion* 17, no. 3 (September 2005): 177.
[28] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 10.
[29] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 18.
[30] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 6.
[31] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 12.
[32] Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Beyond Supernaturalism: Mordecai Kaplan and the Turn to Religious Naturalism," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 81.

seemed to oppose, respectively, the scientific understanding and democratic values of the times. For example, within Judaism, Mordecai Kaplan removed anything supernatural and revelatory from his theology, resulting ultimately in the establishment of *Reconstructionist Judaism*.[33] Stone notes that the term "religious naturalism" was popular through the 1940's, after which its use faded until the late 1980's, which is why Stone subtitled his book "the rebirth of a forgotten alternative."[34]

Donald Crosby offers several categories or variations of religious naturalism, including: (1) *religion of nature*, to which he adheres, and which I will describe in depth in this paper; (2) *naturalistic theism*; (3) *religious humanism*; and (4) a 'minimalist' form that he associates with Jerome Stone.[35] Meanwhile, Stone categorises religious naturalists into three groups according to their conception of god, including: (1) "those who conceive of God as the creative process within the Universe"; (2) "those who think of God as the totality of the universe considered religiously" (e.g., Spinoza); and (3) "those who do not speak of God yet still can be called religious." Stone includes in this last group Crosby and Goodenough.[36]

In the next section I begin describing Crosby and Goodenough's *atheistic* religious naturalism; here, for comparison, it is helpful to consider a *theistic*

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[33] Davaney, *Beyond Supernaturalism*, 81.
[34] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 12.
[35] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 172 (see footnote 4).
[36] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 6. Stone identified adherents of each variety as follows. (1) those who conceive of God as the creative process within the Universe: Shailer Mathews, Henry Nelson Wieman, Ralph Wendell Burhoe, Karl Peters, (perhaps) William Dean; (2) those who think of God as the totality of the universe considered religiously: Spiznoza, Samuel Alexander, George Burman Foster, Frederick May Eliot, The latter Bernard Loomer; and (3) those who do not speak of God yet still can be called religious: Ursula Goodenough, Donald Crosby, Willem Drees, Jerome Stone.

religious naturalism, as represented by David Griffin; he proposes a reconciliation of religion and science that is both theistic and naturalistic.[37] Griffin manages this by first differentiating between *minimal* and *maximal* notions of scientific naturalism, and then claiming that a minimal naturalism leaves room for theism. For Griffin, a *minimal* naturalism requires only the rejection of supernatural forces and entities, while a *maximal* naturalism yields a world without meaning:

> Understood maximally, by contrast, scientific naturalism is equated with sensationism, atheism, materialism, determinism, and reductionism. Thus construed, scientific naturalism rules out not only supernatural interventions, as just defined, but also much more, such as human freedom, variable divine influence in the world, and any ultimate meaning to life. If scientific naturalism is understood in this maximal sense, those who say that it rules out a significantly religious world-view are right. If, however, science is understood only to require naturalism in the minimal sense, the quest for a worldview that is fully religious while being fully naturalistic may not be quixotic.[38]

Griffin proposes that both scientific naturalism and supernaturalism, as commonly understood, are exaggerations, that the minimal sense of naturalism is true, and that "a divine reality exerts variable influence in the world," although without interrupting "the causal powers and principles of the world."[39] My purpose in relating Griffin's position is to demonstrate that religious naturalism is not always atheistic; some thinkers manage to blend theism and naturalism. Neither is religious naturalism always focused on *nature* (Although, as I will describe, Goodenough, Crosby and Rue each have a strong nature focus.) As if to make this point, Hardwick offers a perspective on

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[37] Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, xvi.
[38] Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, 11-12.
[39] Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, 12.

religious naturalism that finds religious content neither in god nor in nature, but rather, in the very idea of *value*.

> My strategy has been explicitly to turn away from grounding a religious naturalism referentially in nature. My summary statement for this is to say that God – or the sacred, if you will – is not to be found in the ontological inventory of what exists…I do not seek religious content in the ontology. In contrast, taking faith or religion as an existential self-understanding, I am free to locate religious content in value, not ontology. I thus develop what I call a *valuational theism*.[40]

In stark contrast, Goodenough and Crosby use the phrase religious naturalism to mean their perspective on nature and life as the focus of religious concern. In *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, Goodenough uses the phrase religious naturalism to mean an approach that includes "an accessible account of our scientific understanding of Nature… [that] can call forth appealing and abiding religious responses."[41] She later suggests that *spiritual naturalism* may have been a more appropriate label.

> I tell of our scientific understandings of who we are and how we got here, and I respond with such sensibilities as belonging, communion, gratitude, humility, assent, and awe. It follows that we might as well speak of theological naturalism and (awkwardly) moral naturalism or (less awkwardly) ethical naturalism, the term used by Larry Arnhart (1998). Such distinctions may be useful in discourse, but I would suggest that they not be belabored and that all of us voicing religious responses in a naturalistic framework, be they theological, spiritual, or moral, feel comfortable using the term *religious naturalism* to describe the overall project.[42]

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[40] Charley Hardwick, "Religious Naturalism Today," *Zygon* 38, no. 1 (March 2003): 113-114.
[41] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, xvii.
[42] Ursula Goodenough, "Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality," *Zygon* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 101-102.

As illustrated in Stone's approach to categorising religious naturalists, such thinkers differ in their use of traditional religious language and, in particular, in their use of god-talk. Goodenough uses the word god freely – somewhat casually – while clearly not referring to a personal god; Crosby has removed god entirely from his language, and Rue has also given up on the concept of god.[43]

We have seen thus far that religious naturalism is a broad umbrella category for a wide range of perspectives, including theistic and non-theistic, and that nature or the environment need not be its particular focus. Stone attempts a summary general definition:

> …[T]he type of naturalism which affirms a set of beliefs and attitudes that there are religious aspects of this world which can be appreciated within a naturalistic framework. There are some events or processes in our experience that elicit responses that can appropriately be called religious. These experiences and responses are similar enough to those nurtured by the paradigm cases of religion that they may be called religious without stretching the word beyond recognition.[44]

2.0 What is atheistic religious naturalism?

How does one conceive a religious perspective without gods or the supernatural? One solution, shared by Crosby and Goodenough, is to see *nature* as the focus of religious concern, rather than gods. In this section, I draw upon Crosby and Goodenough to describe atheistic religious naturalism. Crosby provides a metaphysics of nature and offers a new religion which he calls a *religion of nature* or *naturism*.[45] Goodenough focuses on religious and

[43] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 135.
[44] Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 1.
[45] The term naturism, perhaps unfortunately, is a term popularly used to mean social nudity. See: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/422093/nudism

emotional responses to her understanding of nature. We will see how their approaches are radically different, and yet lead to similar conclusions. Crosby and Goodenough provide, in effect, case studies for how people with either theological or scientific backgrounds can find their way to atheistic religious naturalism.

2.1 Crosby's metaphysics of nature

For Crosby, nature is too complex to be approached by science alone. He credits William James, John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead for recognising the need for the broadest set of methodologies and modes of experience to consider our claims and theories.[46] We cannot, he argues, experience nature as a whole – we experience it as fragments – and therefore we must conceptualise nature through "models, analogies, metaphors, and theories."[47] We must allow for *degrees* of objectivity, rather than believing that science – i.e., direct realism – is the one path toward understanding.[48] For Crosby, both extremes of *direct realism* and *radical constructivism* fail individually, and so our epistemology must allow for both.[49] Put another way, both *experienced* nature and *conceptualised* nature are required.[50] Poets and painters, Crosby argues, help us to understand nature, along with physicists and biologists.[51]

> The fact that some modes of experience are more distinct and replicable and others are more vague and elusive does not in itself mean that the former are more objective or crucial for inquiry, especially if our search is

[46] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 49-50.
[47] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 25.
[48] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 49.
[49] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 23.
[50] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 25.
[51] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 48.

> for an understanding of all of the important aspects of our experience of nature.[52]

Crosby acknowledges that such an open approach is open also to patent nonsense, while too restrictive an approach will tend toward the closed, dead end of logical positivism.[53] For Crosby, the metaphysics of nature does not rely solely on the natural sciences, but all types of experience, including, "…recollection, anticipation, consummation, continuity, change, emotion, imagination, valuation, judgement, intention, and choice,"[54] All areas of human investigation are required, for example: "aesthetic, moral, religious, psychological, historical, social, economic, technological…"[55]

So, what *is* nature? Descriptions and characterisations of nature are distributed throughout Crosby's writing; the following are exemplary. For starters, nature is "all the reality there is…"[56] Crosby distinguishes between 1) the relatively stable, current epoch – which, following Spinoza, he calls *nature natured* (natura naturata), and 2) the whole, necessary process of nature, including a succession of epochs, which he calls *nature naturing* (natura naturans).[57] Nature, then, is not simply the universe as we experience it or as we might conceive of it at present, but also:

> …the endless process of creation and destruction that mark the present universe and have been and will continue to be operative in universes of

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[52] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 49.
[53] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 50.
[54] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 5-7.
[55] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 52.
[56] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 69.
[57] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 6-7. Also see: Nadler, Steven, "Baruch Spinoza", *Online Article,* in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/spinoza/>.

> the past and future, if we think there is reason to believe, as I do, that there have been and will be such. [58]

Nature is also a complex blend of a) things and relations, and b) consistent pattern and radical change. On things and relations, Crosby differentiates between *internal relations* – essential for being what a thing is, such as a son relates to his mother – and *external relations*, which are not essential in the same way. The mother does not relate to her son by a *necessary* relation to her being, yet the relationship is clearly essential for defining her as a mother.[59] Both kinds of relations are required, Crosby suggests, because without both, nature would be either entirely static or entirely changing within any consistent patterns.

Crosby's metaphysics of nature flows from the paradoxical blend of *consistent pattern* and *relentless change*; this blend yields pairs of opposites, including "continuity and novelty, creation and destruction, order and disorder, oneness and manyness." [60] It also yields "predictable orderliness together with stubborn distinctiveness, diversity, and individuality, as well as ongoing spontaneity, innovation and change."[61] Change yields *creativity* and – Crosby's most emphasised characteristic – *novelty*.[62] Such change, through chance and novelty, means that *everything* – the very order of the world – changes. "[T]he only thing that is truly everlasting about nature is the unrelentingness of change."[63] For Crosby, novelty and unpredictability must be considered part of evolution.[64] Nature's radical change yields nature's *ultimacy*, as there is nothing enduring

[58] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 96,
[59] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 30-31.
[60] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 22.
[61] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 70.
[62] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 32.
[63] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 34.
[64] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 41.

outside nature's flux of change.[65] Crosby sees such radical novelty and change as a form of transcendence, meaning that novelty transcends causal continuity, and that the future is therefore open and not fully determined by cause and effect. Novelty, for Crosby, is "every bit as fundamental to the reality of time as is causal continuity." [66] He argues that, without such novelty, one moment could not be distinguished from the previous moment, and that "[t]he present would be swallowed up into the past and cease to be the present in any meaningful sense of the term."[67]

Free will. Crosby's conception of nature as unpredictable leads to his conviction that human life includes *free will*.[68] He claims that causal processes are *necessary but not sufficient* to explain our ability to choose, and that our choices are not – even in principle – fully predictable.[69] And if we *did* live in a fully determined world, freedom would not be possible.[70] He sees the truth of free will as supported by our perceived moral responsibility and our feelings of free action and thought. Without such freedom "[t]he concepts of moral responsibility and theoretical inquiry would be damaged beyond repair."[71] If we did not have free will, we would be "at the mercy of our impulses, prejudices, and desires, unable to distinguish what we might deeply want to be true, or are strongly

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[65] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 41.
[66] Donald A. Crosby, "Transcendence and immanence in a religion of nature," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2003): 248.
[67] Donald A. Crosby, "Transcendence and immanence in a religion of nature," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2003): 248-249.
[68] This is not to imply, however, that Crosby first determined his metaphysics of nature, and then determined that, if his conception is accurate, free will must be true. There is of course the possibility that he began with a belief in free will, and that his evolving conception of nature was 'steered' by this belief. The alignment might have been a self-fulfilling, forgone conclusion.
[69] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 28.
[70] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 28.
[71] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 28.

impelled to regard as true, from what is true."[72] Moreover, if determinism was indeed true, we would have no way to know this truth; all of our debates on the issue would be a matter of "pitting of one predetermined set of ideas against another."[73] Crosby concludes that, if he lacked freedom, he could not write his book.[74]

Crosby summarises his conception of nature as follows:

> For the religious naturalist, if anything exists necessarily, it is the natural world itself. It gives rise to, sustains, and explains all else that exists. No appeal need be made to anything beyond or above the inexhaustible, self-sufficient splendour and providingness of the world itself. Nature in some shape or form is all there is now, ever has been, or ever shall be. It spawns and supports all its living creatures, including human beings. For the religious naturalist, nature or some aspect of nature is also the ultimate source of value and meaning for human life. It or an aspect of it is therefore the appropriate focus of religious faith and dedication.[75]

2.2 Naturism: Crosby's religion of nature

Crosby's religion of nature follows from his metaphysics of nature. Crosby describes his religion of nature as a faith *without* many traditional elements of faith: without gods, without the supernatural, without revelation, without an afterlife of bliss, without purpose, without design.[76] Since nature is metaphysically ultimate, it is the ultimate source of value and meaning, and is therefore "the appropriate focus of religious faith and dedication." [77] "Nature can be viewed religiously as "unambiguously right or good… [a]nd viewed

[72] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 29.
[73] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 29.
[74] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 29.
[75] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 2-3.
[76] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* x.
[77] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 2-3.

religiously, it is unambiguously right or good. Nature is therefore entitled, in these respects, to be the focus of religious faith."[78]

Crosby calls his version of religious naturalism *naturism* to differentiate it from other forms which retain some form of deity, and in his writings he is explicit that no form of god is part of his religion.[79]

> Thus, I am neither a monotheist, a polytheist, a pantheist, a panentheist, nor an animist, and yet I claim profound religious value and meaning for the immanent, self-contained powers of nature – admittedly impersonal though they may be – that produce, suffuse, and sustain us and all other forms of being.[80]

> For me, nature is sacred but not divine.[81]

Crosby summarises his choice of nature over god:

> Nature is every bit as mysterious and wonderful as traditional concepts of God, and perhaps far more so in that it is not the outcome of deliberate purpose or design but of self-contained, incredibly self-transcending creative processes."[82]

Crosby shapes his religion of nature first by attributing a set of values to nature, and then by demonstrating that nature fulfils all of the functions required of an object of religious concern. Here I will summarise both of these approaches.

Values in Nature. Crosby clusters one set of values around *life* in general, these include: life itself, biological species, the conditions necessary for the

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[78] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 48.
[79] Donald Crosby, "Naturism as a form of religious naturalism," *Zygon* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 117-120.
[80] Crosby, *Transcendence and Immanence in a Religion of Nature*, 245.
[81] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 63.
[82] Crosby, *Transcendence and immanence in a religion of nature*, 253.

maintenance of diverse life forms, the biosphere as a whole, diversity of life forms, and creativity.[83] These values are founded on the observation that life affirms life, that all organisms strive to live, and that, therefore, life is a value. Particular species strive to procreate, and progeny are clearly valued by their parents. Therefore, the ecological conditions for such living and procreating must also be valued, as must the entire biosphere, since all ecosystems are interdependent. Diversity is a value because, like ecosystems, life forms are interdependent with other life forms; for example, animals require plants for oxygen, and other plants and animals to eat. Crosby includes creativity in this cluster of values because the novelty generated through the mutation of genes yields the diversity of life. Fundamentally, for Crosby, life is the source of value – without life-forms, there would be no values:

> Organisms can be said to make assessment of value and disvalue in their ongoing lives, some of which are borne out in their experiences and other of which are not. Usually these assessments are unconscious and instinctive, but they still must meet such tests as compatibility with patterns of the past or suitability for new circumstances. Living beings, then, are preconditions for values, since in order for values to exist, there must be valuers or assessors of value. Living beings are of incontrovertible importance and value, because they are the necessary basis for the existence of all other values. If anything else is to be of value, life must be of value.[84]

In addition to the above life-oriented values, Crosby adds *splendour* (e.g., vastness, complexity, and beauty)[85], *practical value* (e.g., provision of food and shelter)[86] and *moral value*. All of the values mentioned, he notes, point toward

[83] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 78-85.
[84] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 81.
[85] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 82.
[86] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 83.

nature's moral value, since "they imply urgent obligation on the part of humans to recognize, respect, and seek to preserve them."[87]

Crosby's final value attributed to nature is *religious* value, which he establishes by demonstrating that nature fulfils "role-functional categories" of any object of religious concern. These categories include: uniqueness, primacy, pervasiveness, rightness, permanence, and hiddenness.[88] Crosby considers each of these from a personal perspective (i.e., how each impacts individual religious people), and from a cosmic perspective (i.e., how each relates to the entire cosmos). Crosby stresses that these are *functions* and not *attributes* of religious objects. In other words, these are functions that gods perform – not characteristics of particular gods; of course, in this case, he is applying these fuctions to nature.

Uniqueness refers to way in which the religious person would know of nothing else like this object; it would be radically different than everything else.[89] This, Crosby claims, applies to nature, which can serve as a focus of "piety and reverence."[90] *Primacy* refers to what is most important – of greatest interest or concern. Cosmically, it serves as the "root principle" from which everything depends.[91] For Crosby, this refers to the ultimacy of nature which "does not require anything beyond itself in order to exist."[92] *Pervasiveness* refers to the way in which nature touches every aspect of the person's life; cosmically, this means that nature "establishes a bond between the deepest levels of the self and what is believed to be the core of reality."[93] Crosby believes that nature satisfies

[87] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 84.
[88] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 118.
[89] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 119.
[90] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 127.
[91] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 119.
[92] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 122.
[93] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 119.

this function as the source and sustainer of everything.[94] *Rightness* means that the goal of human existence is defined by nature, and that nature is responsive to strivings. Also, nature is the standard of goodness.[95] For Crosby, faith in nature includes recognition of the harmony from which we arise and on which we depend.[96] *Permanence* refers to the way nature is either everlasting or timeless.[97] *Hiddenness* refers to "mystery and awe" and to the ways in which causality and chance mysteriously yield human freedom.[98] For individuals, this mystery is inexhaustible.[99]

For Crosby, the *values* previously outlined and the *functions* which nature fulfils – the same functions as fulfilled by the gods of traditional religions – sum to yield nature as a worthy object of religious focus. However, nature is also fundamentally ambiguous. Given that nature is all change, creativity and newness, the old is being replaced as the new emerges.[100] Therefore, along with creativity comes destruction. In this way, "reality and ambiguity go necessarily together."[101] This ambiguity yields pairs of "profound oppositions", including:

> …creation and destruction, order and disorder, stability and change, causality and chance, plurality and unity, beauty and ugliness, the fixity of the past and the openness of the future, continuity and freedom, evolutionary emergence and evolutionary extinction, life and death, disease and health, satiety and starvation, pleasure and pain, and moral goodness and evil.[102]

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[94] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 122.
[95] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 119-120.
[96] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 122.
[97] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 120.
[98] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 120-121.
[99] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature,* 125.
[100] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 27.
[101] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 27.
[102] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 24.

Therefore, Crosby concludes, nature contains *moral* evil, as it must. [103] However, he insists that nature is perfectly good in the *religious* sense of the term, and therefore deserving of our reverence and devotion.[104] Distinguishing between these two senses of evil allows him to claim that his religion of nature is not challenged by the problem of evil as are some religious traditions. Natural processes contain moral evils, but nature, as a whole is perfectly good.[105]

Cosby's metaphysics of nature connects the characteristics of novelty, creativity and unpredictability with *feelings* and *convictions* which he claims are part of a religious outlook.[106] For example, given nature's ongoing evolutionary change, we can *hope* for a better future; given free will, we can live with a *purpose* of (and responsibility for) creating a better future; and given the profound role of chance, we can feel *compassion* for others, and *gratitude* for "transcendent events of grace" in our lives.[107]

Crosby offers reasons why it is appropriate to place one's religious faith in nature. Among these are his contention that, "we owe everything we are and have to nature." [108] We are fully embedded in nature, and all of our capabilities, our cultures, and our histories come from nature and are supported by nature. "Should we not, therefore, reverence it and meditate upon its gifts with intense religious gratitude and fervor?"[109] "We are at home here;" [110] there is no other place, no supernatural dimension, nothing outside of nature. In contrast with

[103] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 6.
[104] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 43.
[105] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 52-53.
[106] Crosby, *Transcendence and Immanence*, 255-256.
[107] Crosby, *Transcendence and Immanence*, 255-256.
[108] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 50.
[109] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 48.
[110] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 51.

other objects of religious concern, we do not need to struggle to prove the existence of nature.[111] Finally, Crosby argues for a new perspective on salvation:

> …nature can be saving for those attuned to its presence and influence. It has the power to inspire, enhance, and renew our lives. We are natural beings in the deepest recesses of our bodies and spirits, and learning how to live in accordance with that fact provides us with both profound challenge and profound hope.[112]

What exactly does it *mean*, though, to have such faith? Crosby defines such faith as: conceiving of one's life within nature as something of momentous value and importance, using all of the resources and capacities of one's being.[113] Such faith means being open to *events of grace* in one's life, "transformative gifts which we can humbly accept and for which we can give hearty thanks."[114] These events provide opportunities for reflection and growth. Crosby offers examples of such triggering experiences:

> …a casual meeting with someone that unexpectedly turns into a lifelong and deeply meaningful relationship. Or a teacher might have said something early in one's life, perhaps only in passing, that opened up new possibilities and set one's life on a new course…a passage in a book that points the way to new, enriching ways of thinking and acting, sometimes in respects quite difference from those intended or envisioned by the book's author… being forgiven…the sight of a cardinal at the feeder in the back yard, a sight that we may have enjoyed in the past but that on this occasion is suddenly full of ecstatic joy and meaning.[115]

Faith in nature also entails engaging in what Crosby calls a *religious search* "for values and modes of awareness that can provide basis, orientation, and

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[111] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 54.
[112] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 56,
[113] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 45.
[114] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 59.
[115] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 80-81.

direction for the whole course of our lives."[116] Such values and modes include: "issues of birth and death, meaning and despair, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, joy and sorrow, hope and frustration, forgiveness and guilt, honor and shame."[117] The quest is also for a sense of attunement, responsibility and purpose, and seeks answers to fundamental questions:

> By what or whom have we come into being, and by what or whom are we most profoundly guided and sustained? What, at the most fundamental level of our lives, should we live for and aspire toward? Who are we, and what ought we to become? How can our lives be most creatively and fruitfully directed and transformed? What is to be valued above all else in the living or our lives?[118]

The result of this search and this faith in nature can include lifting us "out of moods of hopelessness and futility, encouraging us to continue to have confidence that moral progress is possible and that our moral strivings continue to be worthwhile."[119]

In summary, *naturism* is Crosby's proposed religion of nature; his metaphysics of nature – including the paradoxical combination of consistency and radical change – yields a view of nature that includes religious values, a religious sense of ultimacy, and his case for nature as a appropriate object of religious concern. For Crosby, nature is a *more appropriate* object of religious focus than a personal god.

2.3 Goodenough's Religious Response to Nature

[116] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 82.
[117] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 83.
[118] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 83.
[119] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 85.

Goodenough, like Crosby, is an atheistic (she uses the term *non-theistic*) religious naturalist[120] – she does not believe in gods or supernatural entities, and nature as a whole, including all of life, is her focus of religious concern. "Most religious traditions ask us to bow and tremble in deference to the Divine, to walk humbly with thy God. Religious naturalism asks that we locate such feelings of deference somewhere within the Earthly whole."[121] However, her approach to religiosity contrasts strikingly with Crosby's. Firstly, while Crosby takes pains to conceptualise nature – analytically and philosophically – Goodenough focuses on her personal, and often emotional, *response* to nature. In Goodenough's *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, each chapter describes aspects of the universe – from origins of the Earth, and of life, to awareness, emotions and sexuality – and each chapter closes with *reflections* where Goodenough describes her feelings in response to the knowledge just considered. Secondly, while Crosby stays far away from god-talk, Goodenough is quite comfortable weaving traditional religious ideas and language and with her thoughts and feelings. At the time of writing *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, she says she had been attending the Trinity Presbyterian Church for twelve years, "singing in the choir, reciting the liturgy and prayers, hearing the sermons, participating in the ritual."[122] She even includes several hymns throughout her book, but she reminds the reader "…I pulse with the spirit, if not the words…"[123]

> When I sing the hymns of faith in Jesus' love, I am drawn by their intimacy, their allure, their poetry. But in the end, such faith is simply not available to me. I can't do it. I lack the resources to render my capacity to love and my need to be loved to supernatural Beings. And so

[120] Ursula Goodenough, "Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality," *Zygon* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 101-102.
[121] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 87.
[122] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, xi.
[123] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 13.

> I have no choice but to pour these capacities and needs into earthly relationships, fragile and mortal and difficult as they often are.[124]

Goodenough questions the meaningfulness of creating a conflict between theism and non-theism:

> The choice has been presented to us as saved *versus* damned, holy *versus* heathen. But when I talk to thoughtful theists, I encounter not a polarity but a spectrum. Belief and faith in supernatural Being(s), when deeply wrought, are as intensely personal and individual and dynamic as our earthly relationships. They add another dimension, another opportunity for relationship, to be sure. But those of us incapable of embracing that dimension remain flooded with opportunities to open ourselves to human relationship and hence to fill our lives with the religious experience of love.[125]

Goodenough's *The Sacred Depths of Nature* steps through the *epic of evolution* – the story of the universe from the big bang to the present – with an emphasis on cellular biology, her particular field. She loosely defines religious naturalism as the religious *response* to this epic[126] and admits that this book contains very little theology.[127] Rather, she closes each chapter with a reflection that relates an emotional response to the aspects of the universe she just considered. Among these reflections are found the following themes: a *covenant with mystery*, *awe and reverence*, *acceptance and assent*, and a concluding *credo of continuation*.

Covenant with mystery. For Goodenough, religious naturalism is an alternative and antidote to nihilistic despair. She opens *The Sacred Depths of Nature* with a story from her adolescence, when she responded with terror to her awakening

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[124] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 139-140.
[125] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 140.
[126] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 174.
[127] Ursula Goodenough, "Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality," *Zygon* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 101-102.

understanding of the brute facts of cosmology as communicated by her scientific education, e.g., that stars all die, the sun among them, and that the Earth will die as well, "spewing its bits and pieces out into the frigid nothingness of curved spacetime." [128]

> The night sky was ruined. I would never be able to look at it again. I wept into my pillow, the long slow tears of adolescent despair. And when I later encountered the famous quote from the physicist Steven Weinberg – "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless" – I wallowed in its poignant nihilism. A bleak emptiness overtook me whenever I thought about what was really going on our in the cosmos or deep in the atom. So I did my best not to think about such things.[129]

Goodenough suggests that, upon first encounter, the scientific version will inspire thoughts of "alienation, anomie, and nihilism…"[130] Upon further reflection, however, she believes one can defeat lurking nihilism, as she did: by realising that one need not look for "a point."[131] Instead, she sees *Mystery*:

- The Mystery of why there is anything at all, rather than nothing.
- The Mystery of where the laws of physics came from.
- The Mystery of why the universe seems so strange.[132]

This is Goodenough's *covenant* with mystery. *Naming* this mystery God, she argues, spoils the mystery.[133] "To assign attributes to Mystery is to disenchant it, to take away its luminance."[134]

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[128] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 10.
[129] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 10.
[130] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, xvii.
[131] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 11.
[132] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 11.
[133] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 11.
[134] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 12.

Awe and Reverence. Reverence, for Goodenough, is the response to perceiving the sacred.[135] "We are called to revere the whole enterprise of planetary existence, the whole and all of its myriad parts as they catalyse and secrete and replicate and mutate and evolve."[136] She describes in detail the cellular machinery that we call life – the workings of proteins, enzymes and signal transduction cascading. Understanding these complexities yields, for Goodenough, the same sense of awe and reverence that she feels from watching the moon rise or standing before a Mayan temple -- "Same rush, same rapture."[137]

Acceptance and Assent. Key to Goodenough's religious perspective is acceptance of the way things are. Everyone, she claims, can experience an *existential shudder* in response to their understanding of the universe, and which can leave us "wishing that the foundations of life were something other than just so much biochemistry and biophysics."[138] Instead of disappointment and resentfulness, Goodenough calls upon *assent*, which she describes as "the age-old religious response to self-pity, as in "Why, Lord? Why This? Why ME? and then, Thy Will Be Done."[139] Here, Goodenough also displays her particular form of synergy with traditional religious language.

> As a religious naturalist I say "What Is, Is" with the same bowing of the head, the same bending of the knee. Which then allows me to say "Blessed Be to What Is" with thanksgiving. To give assent is to understand, incorporate, and then let go. With the letting go comes that deep sigh we call relief, and relief allows the joy-of-being-alive-at-all to come tumbling forth again.[140]

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[135] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 170.
[136] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 170.
[137] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 46.
[138] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 46.
[139] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 47.
[140] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 47.

Credo of Continuation. Goodenough summarises her faith as a combination of apprehension and understanding – *life* is what matters, *continuing* life.

> And so I profess my Faith. For me, the existence of all this complexity and awareness and intent and beauty, and my ability to apprehend it, serves as the ultimate value. The continuation of life reaches around, grabs its own tail, and forms a sacred circle that requires no further justification, no Creator, no superordinate meaning of meaning, no purpose other than that the continuation continue until the sun collapses or the final meteor collides. I confess a credo of continuation."[141]

Responses to Nihilism. It may be argued that without meaning and purpose there is nihilistic despair. As Haught puts the matter, if naturalism is true, the universe's ultimate end is "the pit of nothingness."[142] Adding to Goodenough's *covenant with mystery*, Rue and Crosby also counter nihilism, though in differing ways which I will briefly describe here.

For Crosby, nihilism is the despair in response to the *absence of the infinite*;[143] that is, in response to considering that there is no infinite being like God; no infinite goodness that wins over evil; no infinite, blissful afterlife in heaven; no moral absolutes – no absolutes at all. A nihilist, as defined by Crosby, believes these are *essential*, but *missing*.[144]

> They have come to the sad conclusion that finitude is the whole story of the universe and of human life within the universe. Since this is true, they then draw the further conclusion that the universe is without point, purpose, or meaning, and that human life is absurd…There is no basis for hope. There is no protection against the ravages of evil. There is no

[141] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 171.
[142] John Haught, "Is Nature Enough? No." *Zygon* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 773.
[143] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity*, 93.
[144] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity*, 93.

> refuge from ambiguity. There is no providential care over the world to give meaning to suffering.[145]

While Goodenough argues that no *point of it all* is required, Crosby counters nihilism by arguing that *infinites and absolutes* are not required in order for there to be importance, value and meaning for human life.[146] Instead, a religion of nature "rejoices in the abundant resources and goods nature provides for the living of our lives."[147] In other words, you can't always get what you want, but you get what you need. At the same time, however, Crosby says we must acknowledge the existence of natural evil and danger. "Finitude and vulnerability go necessarily together: vulnerability to natural calamities, dangers, and accidents and to dark, perverse, and destructive inclinations and actions of human beings."[148]

Rue notes that there will always be nihilists, because "there are no objective means by which to discern natural values,"[149] and because some people may always find nature utterly inconceivable without God. Religious naturalists, Rue notes, will tend to reject nihilism for the same reason they reject theism: because they both devalue nature. More fundamentally, Rue believes they are both – and will be proven to be – *maladaptive*.[150] In summary, for Goodenough, Crosby and Rue, one ought to enjoy the mystery and abundance of nature, as this is a better (more adaptive) alternative to nihilism – and theism.

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[145] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 93.
[146] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 105.
[147] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 105.
[148] Crosby, *Living With Ambiguity,* 105.
[149] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 367.
[150] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 367. Rue, as mentioned, believes that we are headed toward a global, ecological apocalypse, and he believes that religious naturalism will emerge as adaptive to such an environment.

2.4 Religious Naturalism and Emergence

The concept of emergence is essential for many thinkers trying to conceive of nature. Emergence attempts to describe, at varying levels of detail, how evolution has yielded, for example, human consciousness within a naturalistic framework. Goodenough, Crosby and Rue all comment on emergence. Here I will note how they relate emergence to meaning, purpose, miracles and gratitude.

Goodenough describes emergence as "something-more-from-nothing-but."[151] Water is a frequently used to illustrate; while it is composed of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, its properties cannot be explained through a detailed description of those atoms, nor through a description of individual water molecules.[152]

> …ice displays buoyancy, crystalline organization, and hardness; water displays surface tension and viscosity. None of these properties is displayed by individual water molecules; what matter are dynamical regularities in the ways in which large numbers of these molecules interact with one another.[153]

Emergence is not restricted to the traits of molecules, but is similarly used to describe the evolution of life and humanity. Emergence is best understood through its contrast with ontological reductionism, which suggests that complex phenomena can be explained by explaining their parts, i.e., that the whole is *nothing more* than the sum of its parts.[154] Rue's illustration of

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[151] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 30.
[152] Ursula Goodenough and Terrence Deacon, "The Sacred Emergence of Nature," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2006), 854.
[153] Goodenough and Deacon, *The Sacred Emergence of Nature*, 856.
[154] Loyal Rue, "Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity," *Zygon* 42, no. 4 (December, 2007): 831.

reductionism is Margaret Thatcher's comment that "societies do not exist, only households exist."[155] From the perspective of emergence, in contrast, the larger phenomenon must be considered as real as its parts, given that new traits arise. Crosby quotes Charles Lowney who emphasises this point:

> There really is no call to think that a phenomenon, experienced at a higher level of interaction, is less real than phenomena at a lower level, just as there is no call to say that hydrogen and oxygen atoms are real but water is simply an illusion. If I can drown in it, it's real enough for me.[156]

Rue contrasts competing notions of matter to demonstrate how one's view of parts and wholes can lead to different views of emergent possibilities. A *grunge* theory of matter sees matter as uninteresting bits that need sophisticated laws to make them interesting. In contrast, an *exalted* theory is of matter suggests that matter *provides* the laws, is broadly capable of complexity and interaction, and provides for the spontaneous emergence of new properties.[157] "When absolutely new properties of matter show up, we may say that absolutely new laws of nature also show up. Nature makes things up as it goes along, and this includes making up new laws."[158] Taking this a step further, Rue offers a variation on the concept of a miracle:

> By *miracle* I do not mean an event that violates the laws of nature at the behest of a supernatural agent. I mean some logically possible event—call it *X*—that is so outrageously improbable that we cannot imagine how it could ever happen. That is, we are ignorant of any properties of matter that would allow *X* to occur… A miracle is an event so

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[155] Rue, *Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity*, 831.
[156] Charles Lowney, "Authenticity and the Reconciliation of Modernity," *The Pluralist* 4 (Spring 2009): 39, quoted in Donald A. Crosby, "Emergentism, Perspectivism, and Divine Pathos," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* Volume 31, Number 3 (September 2010), 199.
[157] Rue, *Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity*, 831.
[158] Rue, *Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity*, 831.

> improbable that we cannot fathom it, and we cannot fathom it because we don't know of any properties that might allow it.[159]

Goodenough concurs, and applies a similar notion or miracle to the emergence of life, which she sees as "more magical that traditional miracles."[160]

> I take the concept of miracle and use it not as a manifestation of divine intervention but as the astonishing property of emergence. Life does generate something-more-from-nothing-but, over an over again, and each emergence, even though fully explainable by chemistry, is nonetheless miraculous. [161]

Crosby's notion of creativity and novelty, discussed previously, expresses a similar idea – that even the laws of nature are susceptible to the inherent change that is the ongoing flux of nature; this is part of Crosby's notion of nature as ultimate and as a worthy religious object.

For Rue, emergence is tightly connected to meaning and purpose in life; he believes that one must have an end or goal (a *telos*) which is one's purpose, and that "if there's no end, if there's no purpose, there is no meaning."[162] Rue outlines three options for the meaning of life: 1) a *telos* where meaning is built into the fabric of the universe; 2) *telos as illusion* "cooked up by fanciful theologians and romantic existentialists"; and 3) *telos as an emergent property of matter*. Rue favours this last option, although he finds the notion of emergent meaning particularly weird:

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[159] Rue, *Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity*, 831-832.
[160] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 28.
[161] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 30.
[162] Loyal Rue, "Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity," *Zygon* 42, no. 4 (December, 2007): 833-834.

> Imagine that: a universe with no *telos*, no purpose, no agenda – a universe that just inadvertently made possible the spontaneous emergence of purpose. What is that? Irony? Paradox? Whatever it is, it's weird, because it implies that if there is any genuinely purposeful behaviour in the universe, it serves absolutely no purpose. An emergent theory of meaning implies that the existence of meaning is itself totally void of meaning.… What if it is the case that there was absolutely no purpose behind the emergence of purpose?"[163]

For Rue, emergence can be seen as a way to reconcile (or perhaps better, relate) positions in the history of Western philosophy, those being: 1) *Essentialism*: a teleology where meaning, values and purpose are woven into the fabric of the universe (he also calls this *inherentism*); 2) *Inventionism:* where meaning, values and purpose are in the mind (a.k.a., relativism, perspectivism, constructivism),[164] and 3) *Strong reductionism*: where any discussion of purpose necessarily reduces to neurophysiology, which reduces to chemistry and then to physics.[165]

Rue suggests that prior to the evolution of living systems, everything happened without meaning,[166] but then, with the emergence of living systems, teleological causality emerged.[167] For Rue, teleology is "a radically new and irreducibly real phenomenon in the natural world."[168] While there is no *telos* woven into the universe, there are real purpose-related strategies used by *living systems*.[169] Crosby agrees that consciousness and purposiveness are emergent rather than primordial. Once complex life emerged, "purposive activity follows as a matter

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[163] Rue, *Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity*, 833-834.
[164] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 33.
[165] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 55-56.
[166] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 54.
[167] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 53.
[168] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 79.
[169] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 75.

of course… they have the purposes of their many daily pursuits and endeavors."[170]

Goodenough relates emergence to our capacity for *gratitude*, which she calls "the most important facet of the spiritual life"[171]

> A universe that 'spawns because it is' generates our capacity to spawn because we are, inviting us to wrap our arms and minds and hearts around this astonishing whole to which we owe our lives and of which we are a part, and gasp our stammering gratitude.[172]

For both Rue and Goodenough, the story of emergence as told in the *epic of evolution*, yields a sense of gratitude. Goodenough stresses the perfection of our home – not that our lives are perfect, but that life and the earth are perfect for each other.

> This is how the religious naturalist thinks of our human advent on Earth. We arrived but a moment ago, and found it to be perfect for us in every way. And then we came to understand that it is perfect because we arose from it and are part of it. Hosannah! Not in the highest, but right here, right now, this. When such gratitude flows from our beings, it matters little whether we offer it to God…or to Mystery or Coyote or Cosmic Evolution or Mother Earth."[173]

Meanwhile, Rue's gratitude is tied to the unlikelihood being here, and connects this feeling to religiosity.

> That I could have the life I do, at the end of all this interplay of chance and necessity, is just too much to fathom. If I listen, and if I reflect, I cannot remain still. Gratitude abounds. …Gratitude is, of course, a deficit

[170] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 96.
[171] Goodenough, *The Sacred Emergence of Nature,* 868.
[172] Goodenough, *The Sacred Emergence of Nature,* 868.
[173] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 168-169.

> state, it needs repair. And here the gods were born. …If the ultimate value is the continuation of life, then it makes perfect sense to repay our gratitude for the evolutionary past by endowing the future. Everybody's story spawns not an ancestor cult, but a descendant cult.[174]

2.5 The story so far: What is Atheistic Religious Naturalism?

Atheistic religious naturalism, as per Crosby and Goodenough, seems easy to conceive; it is a religious perspective that focuses on nature – on the entire, ongoing, ever-changing universe – as the impersonal focus of religious concern. One can, like Crosby, dwell analytically and philosophically on the characteristics and functions of nature, and like Goodenough, dwell on the emotions and motivations in response to nature. Religious naturalists are engaged in an ongoing conversation over what their perspectives mean and how they relate. There remain many challenges in labelling, conceptions, definitions, etc. Loyal Rue offers an analogy with early Christian debates over the identification of Jesus with God. "That was not a simple matter either."[175] Perhaps the single unifying agreement among religious naturalists is the belief in *naturalism*; at its simplest, religious naturalism is merely "a deliberately naturalistic engagement with religion and religiosity."[176] This leaves tremendous room for variation, including – the focus of this paper – an *atheistic* religious naturalism, without any beliefs or practices related to gods or the supernatural.

So, what exactly is *religious* about atheistic religious naturalism? According to the offerings of Goodenough and Crosby that we just examined, it is *religious* to

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[174] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 88-89.
[175] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 418.
[176] Hogue, *The Promise of Religious Naturalism*, 85.

consider nature the source of everything, as *that which is*, and to be moved to a variety of conclusions, emotions and behaviours. For Rue, religious naturalism is religious because he takes nature "to hear" and affirms "the mystery and sanctity of creation.[177] Also for Rue, as we examine next, atheistic religious naturalism is religious when it fulfils the various functions that we associate with religions in general.

3.0 Rue's model of religion

In the previous section, I outlined how an atheistic religious naturalism can be described, based primarily on the writings of Goodenough and Crosby. According to Rue, one of the common functions of *any* religion is to clarify two issues: *how things are* (i.e., cosmology), and *which things matter* (i.e., morality).[178] Rue provides a general theory of religion in the form of a framework of structures and strategies that communicate and reinforce these issues and the connections between them. In this section I summarise Rue's model, briefly compare his theory to other theories and theorists, and then capture the implications of his model for religious naturalism. One key implication is that atheistic religious naturalism *needs a story* – a core narrative, myth and root metaphor.

3.1 The Structure of Religious Traditions

Of the religious naturalists that I am focusing on, Rue is unique in that he approaches religion functionally and anthropologically, proposing a model that represents the common structure of any religion, e.g., the major religious

[177] Rue, *Nature is Enough,* 135.
[178] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxvi.

traditions. Interestingly, Rue does not systematically map religious naturalism to his own model, and I consider this in my concluding chapter as a topic for future research. Here, I summarise Rue's model of religion, in order to highlight the foundational role of the "integrative core narrative" which he claims sits at the centre of all religious traditions.

We begin with Rue's definition of religion, which is functional and evolutionary – that is, ultimately explained in terms of reproductive fitness:

> Religion, then, is that which binds together, that which ties a community into a coherent bundle or unity, that which gives identity to a culture…. Religion is a cultural mechanism that achieves a sense of solidarity between separate kinship groups. Kinship groups tend to hold together by virtue of biological mechanisms, but larger, transkin groups must construct extragenetic, symbolic ties that bind.[179]

> [R]eligious traditions are primarily about manipulating aspects of our universal human nature for the sake of achieving the twin teloi of personal wholeness and social coherence, thereby to maximize the odds favouring human reproductive fitness[180]

Given this functional view of religion, Rue contends that all religious traditions have a common structure which includes a narrative core and several ancillary strategies.[181] The narrative combines and relates cosmological ideas (*how things are*) with moral ideas (*which things matter*).[182] Surrounding this narrative core are five "ancillary strategies": Intellectual, Aesthetic, Experiential, Ritual and Institutional. These strategies (which I describe later in this section) are designed, Rue claims, to replicate the content of the narrative core in the minds

[179]Loyal Rue, "Refining Myth and Religion," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 316.
[180] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 122.
[181] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 125.
[182] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 126.

of the traditions members.[183] Rue presents this model twice: once in *Everybody's Story* (2000) and again in *Religion is Not About God* (2005). Interestingly, in the first of these Rue refers to *cultural* traditions rather than religious traditions. Other than this, the description remains the same. In *Religion is Not About God*, he uses the term *religio-cultural tradition* when introducing his model,[184] and the index entry for *cultural tradition* simply notes, "*See* religious traditions."[185] We can conclude that, from Rue's perspective, there is no fundamental difference between a cultural tradition and a religious tradition.

3.2 Core Narrative: Story, Myth and Root Metaphor.

The core narrative – a story or myth – sits at the centre of all cultural traditions and includes *cosmological ideas*, such as a description of the universe, how it came to be, and distinguishing real from unreal; and *moral ideas*, such as how to behave, notions of wisdom and, in summary, what matters.[186] The function of the core narrative, for Rue, is to provide the material from which individuals can acquire and assimilate a tradition's worldview, including values and standards; "…in short, they acquire new resources for solidarity and cooperation."[187]

> Narrative accounts of how things ultimately are and which things ultimately matter found expression in the various symbolic vocabularies of ancient myths, art, religions, and philosophies, where their influence was to structure the intellectual and moral lives of individuals.[188]

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[183] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 126.
[184] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 126.
[185] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 383.
[186] Rue, *Religious is Not About God*, 126.
[187] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxviii.
[188] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxix.

For Rue, the narrative captures the wisdom of the tradition by integrating ideas about reality and value.[189] "[F]acts and values are interwoven into a seamless series of connected events, in precisely the way that cognitive and emotional events are integrated in the life of an individual."[190]

Rue suggests that the power and fundamental nature of story should not be underestimated; stories are where we find meaning, "where we find the symbolic means by which humans have always acquired their most fundamental visions of personal and social reality."[191]

> We legitimate institutions and values in their name, we wage wars in their defence, we judge ourselves and others by their standards, we take pains that our children will learn them well, we draw inspiration from their examples, we construct our hopes and fears under their influence, and so on. It would not be extreme to say that we negotiate our way through life by the guidance of our stories.[192]

The fundamental premise of *Everybody's Story* is that changing how we use story may be essential for "enhancing solidarity and cooperation."[193] Rue offers the following analogy: "[I]f we can picture what the brain does for an individual organism then we shall have a way to think about what story does for a cultural tradition."[194] To further emphasise his point, he notes that without stories, "humans would soon default to the psychological and social circumstances of the great apes."[195]

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[189] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxvi.
[190] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxvi.
[191] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxiv.
[192] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxv.
[193] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxv.
[194] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxvi.
[195] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxvii.

It is important, here, to consider the relationship between *story* and *mythology*. For that, I begin with Doty's comprehensive definition of mythology:

> A mythological corpus consists of (1) a usually complex network of myths that are (2) culturally important (3) imaginal (4) stories, conveying by means of (5) metaphoric and symbolic diction, (6) graphic imagery, and (7) emotional conviction and participation, (8) the primal, foundational accounts (9) of aspects of the real, experienced world and (10) humankind's role and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may (11) convey the political and moral values of a culture and (12) provide systems of interpreting (13 individual experiences within a universal perspective, which may include (14) the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as (15) aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in (16) rituals, ceremonies and dramas, and (17) they may provide material for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy.[196]

Doty's view of mythology is certainly not the popular view, and Rue wants to rescue to term from both its popular and pejorative meaning – something specifically untrue or relating to supernatural characters or events. Rue offers, his alternative definition:

> We shall mean by *myth* a story of comprehensive scope that concerns itself with cosmic or geologic origins or with the origins, nature, or destiny of life. Myth would then mean a "big picture" kind of story that is told for the purpose of giving human beings an orientation in the cosmos – an account of where human life fits into the comprehensive scope of things….some myths are wild and fantastic and fully of beings and doings that are well beyond the limits of plausible science, but this does not mean that all myths are of necessity wild and fantastic. By our definition, a myth could be literally true and thoroughly naturalistic.[197]

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[196] William G. Doty, *Mythography : the study of myths and rituals* (University of Alabama Press, c1986), 11.

[197] Loyal Rue, "Refining Myth and Religion," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 315-316.

Rue offers a simplified and functional relationship between mythology and religion:

> Religion is any mechanism that holds together a variety of kinship groups to form a larger, transkin alliance. It could be something as inefficient as a police state, or as transient as a common enemy, or it could be a shared myth about common origins, nature, and destiny. In all of the stable, coherent cultures we know anything about, the religious mechanism amounts to a shared myth.[198]

Morris Freilich offers a functional definition of myth that aligns closely with Rue's functional requirement: "Myths must regularly and effectively transform the smart (that which seems to be effective, efficient and spatially useful) into the proper (that which becomes convention, a rule followed for its own sake)."[199] This fits well with an evolutionary view of myth, i.e., conceiving myth as an adaptive survival mechanism for the species. Goodenough claims similarly that a compelling myth is high in fitness.[200]

Rue notes that myths are designed to have emotional appeal, i.e., to generate responses that appeal to emotional systems.

> These emotions arise from encounters with the myth, culminating in predispositions to act. When we are moved as the story intends, then nothing makes more sense than to respond as the story bids us. The myth compels individuals to reconstruct their attitudes, goal hierarchies, and self-esteem linkages in the light of these responses.[201]

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[198] Rue, *Redefining Myth and Religion*, 317.
[199] Morris Freilich (175:209) quoted in William Doty, *Mythography : the study of myths and rituals*, 67-68.
[200] Ursula Goodenough, "What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 322.
[201] Rue, *Religion is Not About God*, 173.

A key component of the core narrative is the *root metaphor* – a literary and conceptual device that integrates cosmology and ethics in a compelling way, and justifies the integration.[202] The genius of myth, Rue claims, "lies in its effectiveness to condition the appraisal process", but its *effectiveness* is connected to a realist interpretation of the root metaphor. [203] Rue defines such realism as "a cognitive predisposition that decisively affects the appraisal process."[204] The "deepest possible crisis" will occur in a religion if the realism of its root metaphor is challenged.[205] He believes that the traditional religions could not function without realism; not that religious non-realists cannot be found, but that they are marginal.[206] Rue argues, for example, that Judaism "cannot work" unless one believes in a personal God; pious Jews, he believes, must be theological realists.[207] In short, a root metaphor is essential for a viable myth. [208]

> When the root metaphor of a mythic tradition is ingested, one apprehends that ultimate facts and ultimate values have the same sources. In mythic insight, the ultimate explanation is also the ultimate validation. The root metaphor renders the real sacred and the sacred real.[209]

By way of examples, Rue offers the following key metaphors for the various religious traditions.

Judaism God-as-person.[210]

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[202] Hogue, *The Promise of Religious Naturalism*, 95-96.
[203] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 172
[204] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 172
[205] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 130.
[206] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 131.
[207] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 172
[208] Rue, "Religious Naturalism--Where does it Lead?," *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 421.
[209] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 127.
[210] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 171.

Christianity	God incarnate.[211]
Islam	God's final prophecy[212]
Hinduism	Dharma and many paths[213]
Buddhism	Dharma and self-emancipation[214]

To summarise, a root metaphor is the foundation of a mythical tradition, and myths are the building blocks of the narrative core of a religio-cultural tradition. The core narrative is the story that weaves these elements together to yield a consensus vision of *how things are* and *which things matter* – that is, the cosmology and morality of the tradition. To reinforce this consensus world-view, and replicate it within the traditions members, a range of ancillary strategies are employed.

3.3 Ancillary strategies

In Rue's model, surrounding the core narrative are five strategies designed to facilitate the replication of the key narrative messages and key behaviours throughout the adherent population.[215] Rue calls them "myth supporting strategies[216] and labels them: Intellectual, Institutional, Ritual, Experiential and Aesthetic.[217] Rue argues that it is through these combined means – core narrative and ancillary strategies – that religiosity is nurtured in individual adherents. Given this common requirement, he argues that all mature religious

[211] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 197.
[212] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 228.
[213] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 256.
[214] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 281.
[215] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 126.
[216] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 94.
[217] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 126.

traditions will have these common structures.[218] Here is a brief summary of each strategy:

Intellectual Strategies. Rue claims that myths challenge us through their obscurity and therefore require interpretation – "mythos (story) is typically augmented by *logos* (rational discourse)."[219] Intellectual strategies are those that assist in such interpretation, i.e., that help clarify the meaning of the myth. Rue segments the intellectual dimension into *metaphysics* (which he also calls theology) and *normative ethics*: "the former to clarify what the myth says about reality and the latter to make explicit its moral imperatives."[220] Rue suggests that some religions focus more on metaphysics, such as Christianity's focus on belief, while others focus more on ethics, such as Islam's focus on a morally just society. Regardless on the emphasis, the intellectual strategy serves to clarify and justify the cosmology and morality of the narrative core, including periodic reinterpretation over time in response to changing ideas.[221] For example, Rue claims that theologians today are faced with a creeping non-realism that has been accumulating over the past century; their challenge is now to persuade members that the God-as-person metaphor is still plausible.[222]

Experiential Strategies. Rue describes a religious experience as an extraordinary experience that is "directly linked to one's integrated sense of ultimate reality and value", that is, one that has a direct connection with the meaning of a myth.[223] He categorises religious experiences as mystical, numinous and

[218] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 126.
[219] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 129.
[220] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 129.
[221] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 130.
[222] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 131.
[223] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 132-133.

visionary.[224] Mystical experience refers to alternate states of consciousness in which the self and the universe feel as one; numinous experiences fills the subject with feelings of love and peace, and with the presence of a transcendent power; visionary or prophetic experiences include the reception of a message or vision, "from an irresistible transcendent source," typically while one is in an alternative state of consciousness.[225] Functionally, religious experiences serve to strengthen the plausibility and relevance of the myth.[226]

Ritual strategies. Rue defines ritual as "any repeatable unit of behaviour, the performance of which engages individuals or groups in the meanings of a religious myth or is conducive to a religious experience."[227] Synonymous with *practice*, rituals may include "prayers, pilgrimages, fasting, feasting, hymn singing, chanting, kneeling, magic, worshipping, wedding or funeral ceremonies, sacred dances, and the like."[228] Functionally, myths support a tradition's narrative by educating participants in the story, enlivening the myth through dramatic presentation and reinforcing the self-understanding that comes with individuals *owning* the myth – i.e., feeling it as deeply connect to their lives.[229]

> We come close to the mark if we view ritual as some sort of performance that will effectively harmonize, synchronize, align, reconcile, or in some fashion attune humans to what is ultimately real …[R]itual may be understood as practical wisdom, that is, *doing something*, performing some act that is believed to bring us into closer step with the ultimately real. A rite is for setting things aright.[230]

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[224] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 131-134.
[225] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 133.
[226] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 134.
[227] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 134.
[228] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 134-135.
[229] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 136.
[230] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 135.

Aesthetic Strategies. Rue notes that there is extensive overlap between ritual and aesthetic strategies, since rituals often use objects of art, such as contemplating an image. He describes a religio-aesthetic experience as that of apprehending ultimate meaning through perception. "In such experiences, ordinary sight becomes mythic insight."[231] Artists symbolically embed emotions in their art such that these emotions are triggered in the perceiver.[232] Rue suggests that artists draw upon and exploit a common emotional vocabulary. Snakes, for example, play a significant role in mythologies, commanding awe and respect, whether positive or negative.[233] Our species, then, has evolved a common neural vocabulary connecting perception, emotion and behaviour, and this is the vocabulary exploited – whether consciously or not – by master artists. Demonstrating how this works, Rue describes likely emotional responses within devout Christians in response to Christian imagery:

> *Affection* is elicited by images of the infant Jesus, mother and child, the caring shepherd; *sympathy* is aroused by the image of a helpless and innocent man suffering on a cross at the hands of merciless authorities; *gratitude* is called forth by the reminder that Jesus' death was a selfless act undertaken for the sake of others; *guilt* is instilled by the insinuation that it is we who deserve the punishments of the cross; *resentment* or *moral outrage* is aroused against those, like Judas, who betray the altruistic Jesus. By such imagery the emotional effectors are set to work in motivating a life of service to Christian values.[234]

[231] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 137.
[232] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 138.
[233] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 138-139. Rue mentions how even vervet monkeys have particular warning signs for snakes.
[234] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 87.

Through the emotions they prompt, aesthetic strategies intensify and reify the myth, and thereby also, the community's notion of reality and value. "Art revitalizes the power of myth."[235]

Institutional Strategies. According the Rue, institutions are established to make orderly decisions impacting the myth, to determine how institutional behaviours and policies are used to transmit the myth to future generations, to resolve conflicts in myth interpretation, to regulate ritual, and to regulate symbols and art.[236] Through these regulatory activities, institutions protect the myth from the dissipation that can result from the emergence of aberrant forms or from ill-qualified officiates – both of which can generate uncertainty and anxiety.[237] Types of institutional structures include monarchical and hierarchical (e.g., Roman Catholic); formal and democratic (e.g., Calvinist); informal and egalitarian, (e.g., Quaker); leaders selected from social class (e.g., Hinduism); and for some, the spontaneous rising of charismatic leaders.[238]

Functionally, these ancillary strategies serve the purpose of reinforcing the core narrative and the root metaphor; they support the indoctrination of these ideas throughout the adherent population and reinforce desired behaviours. Rue summarises their impact as follows:

> …when the mythic vision is interpreted plausibly, when it is performed ritually, when it is objectified aesthetically, when it is regulated and administered socially, and when it is validated by subjective experience – when these things happen, a pattern of piety will emerge as a dominant factor in modulating background moods and attitudes, and in guiding

[235] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 141.
[236] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 142.
[237] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 142.
[238] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 141-142.

perceptual, appraisal, and coping events from moment to moment in the lives of individuals.[239]

3.4 Theoretically situating Rue's Model

Here I briefly situate Rue's approach to religion in comparison with other theories and theorists, drawing upon distinctions offered by Daniel Pals;[240] these include, 1) general theories versus 'particularistic' approaches to religion, 2) functionalism versus substantive approaches, 3) reductionist versus non-reductionist approaches, and 4) claims that religion is an evolutionary adaptation versus evolutionary spandrel. I then identify similarities between Rue's model and language used by Geertz, Whaling and Smart.

General vs. Particularist. A general theory of religion is one that views all religions as variations with common themes or structures.[241] Pals refers to Eliade and Evans-Pritchard as generalists; they were both hopeful of finding universal religious themes, such as "the human response to the sacred as expressed in certain enduring images and symbols shared by religious people of all times and places."[242] In contrast, Pals offers Geertz as a "declared and passionate particularist" who believes any theory of universal forms is a mirage;[243] religions are too complex to be usefully generalised. Rue claims that his is a general theory: all religions can be understood through the ways they utilise an integrative core narrative and a common set of strategies to reinforce

[239] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 162.
[240] Daniel Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion,* 2nd Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.).
[241] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 2.
[242] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 284.
[243] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 284.

"how things are" and "which things matter", and to strive for psychological wholeness and social coherence.[244]

Functionalist versus substantive. Pals distinguishes between functional/ explanatory and substantive/interpretive definitions of religion. A functionalist approach defines religion in terms of what it accomplishes, such as claiming that religion "brings a sense of comfort or well-being to an individual or provides support for a group."[245] Functionalism suggests that social structure and psychological pressures are the cause of religions behaviours – not the ideas and beliefs in the minds of the adherents.[246] For example, for Durkheim, religion functions to "control private passions for the good of the whole",[247] while for Malinowski, religions prevent societal decay into chaos.[248] In contrast, a substantive definition of religion focuses on the beliefs and ideas that guide and inspire adherents, and the intentions and emotions felt by them.[249] Substantialist approaches look for commonalities, such as Spiro's example of "culturally postulated superhuman beings" as religion's defining feature.[250] Kunin and Miles-Watson note that definitions of religion often have aspects of more than one of these approaches, i.e., functionalist, substantialist and, they include, *essentialist*.[251] While substantialism seeks the common aspects of religion, essentialism seeks what is common about humans that leads to

[244] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 9.
[245] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 13.
[246] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 13-14.
[247] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 296.
[248] Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion.* 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 276.
[249] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 13-14.
[250] Seth Daniel Kunin and Jonathan Miles-Watson. *Theories of Religion: A Reader* (Rutgers University Press, 2006), 4.
[251] Kunin and Miles-Watson. *Theories of Religion*, 3.

religion; for example, for Otto, it is the experience of the holy, and for Freud, the Oedipal complex.[252]

Rue's theory is clearly functionalist; he emphasises what religion does or accomplishes in the culture – fostering psychological wholeness and social coherence, and thus promotes fitness and reproductive success:

> The general function of religious traditions is to educate the emotions of individuals so that they will think, feel, and act in ways that are conducive to their personal and collective well-being. This general function may be seen in the way the supporting strategies bear upon aspects of human nature, and in doing so they engage individuals in the meanings of the myth. The strategies work together to bias the various neural systems that are responsible for mediating behaviour. In particular, the supporting strategies are designed to engage the so-called social emotions in ways that enhance social cooperation.[253]

At the same time, Rue can been seen as a substantialist in that his is a model of common elements, i.e., an integrative core narrative and a set of ancillary strategies. Finally, Rue can be even be seen as an essentialist, in that he is ultimately thinking in terms of evolutionary biology, psychology and anthropology. While we cannot strictly identify Rue with a particular approach to religion, we can analyse his approach using these conceptual notions of functionalist, substantialist and essentialist approaches to religion.

Reductionist versus anti-reductionist. Reductionism claims that a phenomenon can be explained in terms of a simpler or lower level phenomenon. For Pals, reductionists include the functionalists, e.g., Freud, Durkheim and Marx, whom

[252] Kunin and Miles-Watson. *Theories of Religion*, 3.
[253] Rue, Nature is Enough, 94.

he also refers to as *irrationalists*; they considered religious thought irrational and therefore in particular need of explanation.

> The motive of the reductionist approach is apparent. Since in the modern scientific world, religion cannot be considered either a rational form of belief or a normal type of behaviour, we must appeal to something subconscious or irrational to explain why it still persists. For Freud, that "something" is obsessional neurosis; for Marx, it is economic injustice; and for Durkheim, it is society's compelling demands on the individual.[254]

In contrast, Pals offers Weber, Eliade and Evans-Pritchard as *anti*-reductionists; for them, there is nothing irrational at all about religion, which they see as coherent, orderly, and comprising indispensable systems of meaning.[255] Rue's approach is, by his own admission, ontologically reductionistic; he believes that any fact at all can be situated as either physical, biological, psychological or cultural – or a combination of these.[256] Rue also declares a specific "principle of reduction" behind *Religion is Not About God*: religious symbols influence mental objects, which in turn influence appraisal and coping, which therefore modify behaviour. These behaviours influence the ability to achieve personal wholeness and social coherence, and therefore modify reproductive fitness.[257]

Evolutionary adaptation versus spandrel. Evolutionary theories of religion can be divided into two categories. In the first category are those that see religion as a by-product of evolution (referred to as a spandrel) without adaptive function, "an evolved trait without useful function – an evolutionary left-over."[258] This

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[254] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 309.
[255] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 309.
[256] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 14-15.
[257] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 123.
[258] Joseph Bulbulia, "Religion as evolutionary cascade," In *Contemporary Theories of Religion*, ed. Michael Strausburg (London: Routledge, 2009), 159-160.

view is represented by Pascal Boyer and Richard Dawkins, among others. The second category includes those (e.g., David Sloan Wilson and Rue) that see religion "as a product of biological and cultural evolution with immense adaptive value for group survival."[259] According to Rue's principle of reduction, religions provide survival advantage, like other adaptations. Hubert Seiwert notes that Rue's theory is indeed opposite to Dawkins; while they both use evolutionary theory and cognitive psychology for their arguments, Rue sees religion as a positive way forward, and Dawkins sees religion as a major obstacle to well-being.[260]

Rue and Geertz. Having situated Rue's thinking within the general landscape of religious theories and theorists, we can now consider particular similarities. Firstly, Rue's emphasis on how religions provided cultural reinforcement for "how things are" (cosmology) and "which things matter" (morality) is nearly identical to Geertz's view that religion captures and communicates *world-view* and *ethics*.

> …sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's *ethos*—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their *world view*—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order. In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.[261] (emphasis added)

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[259] Hubert Seiwert, "Theory of religion as myth," In *Contemporary Theories of Religion*, ed. Michael Strausburg (London: Routledge, 2009), 224.
[260] Seiwert, "Theory of religion as myth,"224-225.
[261] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a cultural system" In: *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, Geertz, Clifford, pp.87-125. (Fontana Press, 1993), 89-90.

Compare this also with Rue's definition of wisdom: "…a way of thinking that puts the odds in our favor. Wisdom is the intellectual and moral wherewithal to live in harmony with reality."[262] The language is almost identical.

While Rue does not cite particular sources for his taxonomy of ancillary strategies, a similar breakdown of functional elements can be found in Frank Whaling's *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1988) and Ninian Smart's *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996), published a few years prior to Rue's *Everybody's Story* (2000). Both of these outline components nearly identical to Rue's. Here is an aligned comparison of their typologies:

Rue's Model	**Frank Whaling's Elements of Religion[263]**	**Ninian Smart's Dimensions of Religion[264]**
Core Narrative	Scripture	Narrative and Mythic
Ritual	Ritual	Ritual
Experiential	Spirituality	Experiential and Emotional
Institutional	Religious Community	Social and Institutional
Intellectual	Concepts	Doctrinal and Philosophical
Aesthetic	Aesthetics	Material
	Ethics	Ethical and Legal

[262] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvi.
[263] Frank Whaling, A Brief History of the Study of Religion, *DISKUS* Vol. 7 (2006). http://www.basr.ac.uk/diskus/diskus7/whaling.htm. See: N Smart's model summarised on pages 16-17 in N. Smart, The Religious Experience of Mankind, 1969; F Whaling's model summarised in F Whaling, 'Contemporary Approaches...', op. cit., pp. 270-72.
[264] Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (University of California Press, 1996): 10-11.

3.5 Implication of Rue's Model for Religious Naturalism

How exactly does Rue's model relate to religious naturalism? Goodenough notes that the Axial traditions faired well previously because they were "optimised for two traits, their compelling myths and their appealing rewards,"[265] both of which are undermined by a lack of realist belief. The traditional narratives are recognised by modern minds as – using Rue's term – *contingent caricatures*, and therefore implausible.[266] As a result, Rue argues, the core narratives of the Axial age have "played themselves out" and decline in religious observance will likely continue.[267]

In addition, Rue claims that these traditions are ill-suited to helping us address modern, global problems – such as the need to protect the biosphere – because they stress "cosmological dualism and individual salvation", *neither of which emphasise care for the environment*.[268] When the supernatural matters more than the natural, the natural is undervalued. Alternatively, a monistic approach, where nature = the universe = reality = everything, is more likely to encourage care for the one reality within which we are embedded. Here is a comparison between the Axial traditions' notion of cosmology and salvation, and Rue's notion of a new Axial age.

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[265] Ursula Goodenough, "What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 323.
[266] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, L.
[267] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xlviii.
[268] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, L-Li.

	Old Axial Tradition	New Axial Tradition
Cosmology	**Dualistic**: the supernatural and the natural; *what matters* is to be found in the supernatural realm.	**Monistic**: nature = universe = reality. We are here within the one thing that exists; *what matters* then, is nature.
Salvation	**Individual:** We are saved by individually behaving in accordance with what God wants of us.	**Global:** We are saved, as a community and species, by doing what is in the best interests of maintaining the health of the biosphere.

Radical change becomes possible, Rue notes, when the existing ancillary strategies become ineffective due to an implausible narrative. Such a situation is evidenced, Rue believes, by breakdowns in solidarity, military attempts to reassert authority and new voices offering a range of alternative stories.[269]

Religious naturalism, Rue argues, is for *our* time, just as the Axial religions were for *their* time. Those traditions provided a number of key features which religious naturalism will now need to provide, including: a sense of intellectual and moral failure, a new vision of cosmic order, an emphasis on individual morality and an emphasis on universal solidarity and cooperation.[270] The major religious traditions no longer do this, and cannot help us address the global problems that we face; and as things get worse, plausibility will decline further.[271] The only way the traditions could avoid this, Rue notes, would be to

[269] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xl-xlii.
[270] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xliv.
[271] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 91.

modify themselves to be "consistent with evolutionary cosmology and ecocentric morality."[272] As they are, however, Axial stories do what they were intended to do – integrate the cosmology and morality of *their* times. For example, Crosby offers a brief analysis of the "binding of Isaac" story in Genesis, noting how this story communicates that we ought to blindly follow God's demands, even if they require the unthinkable. For Crosby, this goes strongly against modern notions of reasoning and judging based our own moral intuitions.[273]

A New Story

For Rue and Goodenough, the key implication of the previous discussion is: *we need a new story*.[274] Rue argues that a "genuine global culture" is necessary due to the problems facing the planet and all of humanity, including, for example, pollution and food, water and energy scarcity. And a global culture requires a global story, rather than particular stories for particular cultures.

> [W]e must articulate a common story, a narrative of origins, nature and destiny that can give us a shared orientation in nature and history. So whence comes the story that can begin to unify the globe? Not from Islam, not from Judaism, not from Christianity. As universal as these traditions may claim to be, they are, in a sense, provincial because the scope of their reflection encompasses a mere few thousand years of history, beginning in the Middle East. These traditions tell somebody's story. We are asking, Whence come the elements for everybody's story?[275]

Goodenough agrees, noting that a global myth is required to celebrate both geodiversity and biodiversity. She believes that an *earth cult* religion is well-

[272] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 92. Compare to Campbell, getting unstuck from metaphors.
[273] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 84.
[274] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 53; also, Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 174.
[275] Loyal Rue, "Refining Myth and Religion," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 318-319.

suited to such a mission when compared with *ancestor cults* (ancestor reverence) and *sky cults* (creator worship and a focus on the afterlife).[276] She defines earth cults as those which include a focus on fertility, harvest and seasons[277] – earthly issues and activities. Goodenough believes that science can make a significant and needed contribution to the needed stories – that an earth cult *needs* the earth sciences.[278]

> The earth is inhabited not just by its mountains and streams, its algae and antelopes. It is also inhabited by human history, by our memes, our ancestor cults, and our sky cults. These are the creations of our brains, themselves wondrous collections of cells and molecules. Therefore, an earth cult celebrates not only geodiversity and biodiversity but also mythic diversity. To the extent that an earth cult makes no claim, has no need to supplant other systems of faith or tradition, it has the unique potential to create a collective global myth and hence to serve as a global religion.[279]

Leslie Marsh, in response to Rue, notes that if indeed the religious traditions have "undervalued, sidelined, or even alienated humanity from the natural world," then, "…a morally relevant response calls for a new mythic vision that is coextensive with naturalism. In effect, a religious naturalism can be the only response."[280]

What kind of story or mythic vision is required? What would the integrated narrative core look like for atheistic religious naturalism? In the next section, I will survey the various elements and characteristics of this new story, according to Goodenough, Crosby and Rue.

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[276] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 322.
[277] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 324.
[278] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 328.
[279] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 328.
[280] Leslie Marsh, "Taking the Super Out of the Supernatural," *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 351.

4.0 Elements of a Core Narrative for Atheistic Religious Naturalism

In the previous section, I described how Loyal Rue's model of religion has, at its centre, a core narrative that integrates a community's notions of *how things are* and *which things* matter, i.e., ultimate reality and values. Religious naturalists agree that a new narrative is required, and that this is at least partially satisfied by what is often called the *epic of evolution* – the story of the evolution of the universe.[281] Goodenough and Rue both comment on phases of this story. They believe that science provides our best knowledge of *how things are* and so the details can be explored in various scientific textbooks. My intent is not to describe the epic in detail, but to describe an atheistic religious naturalist perspective on the story. Following the discussion of the epic, I describe their approaches to *which things matter* by summarising prescriptions they offer.

4.1 How things are: the Epic of Evolution

For Rue, the *epic of evolution* is his starting point for developing his model for religion. The epic is the story that starts with the beginning of the universe and ends with the emergence of humans and human history – in effect, from the beginning until now. Rue's brief definition of the Epic is, in itself, one concise version of the epic:

> The epic of evolution is the sprawling interdisciplinary narrative of evolutionary events that brought our universe from its ultimate origin to

[281] Rue dedicates a chapter to this topic in *Religion is Not About God*, and much of an entire book in his *Everybody's Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution.* Goodenough, in *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, gives this name to the story of the universe. Numerous writers have written on this same topic using a variety of names, including *The Great Story*, *The Cosmic Walk*, *The Universe Story* and others.

> its present state of astonishing diversity and organisation. In the course of these epic events matter was distilled out of radiant energy, segregated into galaxies, collapsed into stars, fused into atoms, swirled into planets, spliced into molecules, captured into cells, mutated into species, comprised into ecosystems, provoked into thought, and cajoled into cultures. All of this (and much more) is what matter has done as systems upon systems of organisation have emerged over fifteen billion years of creative natural history.[282]

All versions of the history of everything, and in particular brief summaries, are necessarily going to be, using Rue's term, *contingent caricatures* of reality. He suggests that the best we can do, in scientific narratives for example, is to minimise the caricature.[283] Eric Chaisson's *Epic of Evolution* is an example of a more rigorously scientific version; he divides the story of the universe into seven epochs: particle, galactic, stellar, planetary, chemical, biological and cultural.[284] Meanwhile, a description more integrative of science and the mythological (i.e., the religious) is emphasised in the definition of the epic in Taylor's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*:

> …the 14 billion year narrative of cosmic, planetary, life, and cultural evolution—told in sacred ways. Not only does it bridge mainstream science and a diversity of religious traditions; if skillfully told, it makes the science story memorable and deeply meaningful, while enriching one's religious faith or secular outlook.[285]

The *epic of evolution* is therefore an ultimate story – potentially including everything that can be told, since it is the story, literally, of everything. Hefner makes explicit the connection between ultimate stories and mythology:

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[282] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xii.
[283] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 36-37.
[284] Eric Chaisson, *Epic of Evolution* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2006).
[285] Bron Taylor, "Epic of Evolution," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. Vol. 1, 2006.

> Stories of ultimacy are, finally, mythic stories. The evolutionary epic is not science; it is scientifically informed myth. We must be clear about this. For more than four millennia, humans have never ceased speaking in the face of those realities that are too large, too deep, and too unfathomable for their minds and spirits to encompass. They have given testimony to their experience of ultimacy, wrestling with mystery, freedom, grace, failure, and suffering, to the point where their own life was threatened with death. Their testimony comes to us in the only forms that are capable of expressing the inexpressible, speaking the unspeakable: metaphor, analogy, poetry, art, music, and all forms of myth.[286]

Goodenough similarly relates science and myth, and concludes that the *Epic of Evolution* is a story well-suited to religious naturalism.

> Humans need stories – grand, compelling stories – that help to orient us in our lives and in the cosmos. The Epic of Evolution is such a story, beautifully suited to anchor our search for planetary consensus, telling us of our nature, our place, our context. Moreover, responses to this story – what we are calling religious naturalism – can yield deep and abiding spiritual experiences. And then, after that, we need other stories as well, human-centered stories, a mythos that embodies our ideals and our passions. This mythos comes to us, often in experiences called revelation, from the sages and the artists of past and present times.[287]

Goodenough argues that religious naturalism – a global earth cult – needs a *canon*, "the equivalent of the Bible or the Koran," and that the earth sciences can be such a text:

> Religions have always provided the moral basis, the justifications, for political systems, and a global earth cult would aspire to no less. But it needs a text, a canon—the equivalent of the Bible or the Koran. The earth sciences could be such a text, a starting point for making such decisions, a basis preferable to the authority of custom. Such a canon would not dictate what choices are made—these would still have to be worked out

[286] P. Hefner, "The Evolutionary Epic," *Zygon* 44: 3–8 (2009): 4-5.
[287] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 174.

> by humans, on the basis of what is in the end deemed most fair and most feasible. But the scientific texts would help to identify what is fair and feasible, in a vocabulary that speaks of the entire biosphere and not just of a particular tradition. If scientists and nonscientists were to collectively take up the project of developing such a canon, it would be a most exciting enterprise indeed.[288]

Rue agrees that modern science should provide the narrative for everybody's story.[289] Moreover, Rue is arguing for *a new wisdom tradition* – i.e., a new religion – one that (as he defines wisdom) helps us live harmoniously with reality. The narrative should provide the resources – the knowledge of *how things are* and the arguments for *which things matter* that help us to address current global imperatives.[290] This cannot be, however, a single story; Rue notes that such narratives must include many voices.

> It is a shared, disciplined, debated thing – never final, never orthodox, never completely true. But it is our best chance to behold an enduring promise. Everybody's story needs many voices and many versions, but if it is to be everybody's story then those venturing to tell it must stand out there, at some distance remove, where the earth can be seen whole.[291]

For Rue, such a story for religious naturalism must include an integrated vision of cosmology and morality, and the cosmology component should be based on *evolutionary* cosmology – covering the big bang through to our current environment crisis.[292] And at its centre, this story needs a compelling root metaphor, "that can infuse the cosmos with value."[293] Rue stops short of proposing a particular root metaphor for religious naturalism.

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[288] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 328.
[289] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, Lv.
[290] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, Liii.
[291] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 81-82.
[292] Rue, *Religion is Not About God*, 363.
[293] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 414.

Rue argues that these new stories – and the new wisdom tradition in which they are embedded – should support his notion of a new axial age.

> Our calling is no less than to achieve for our time what these ancient traditions did for theirs, that is, to transform social and psychological realities in ways that effectively redress the global problematique. To do this we must find the courage to be no less radical in our storytelling than were the Axiel prophets and poets. Their achievement is our source of courage and hope for a new Axial Age.[294]

This notion of the *epic as myth* echoes Crosby's contention that any description of nature will be partial, and that our descriptions require the work of poets and painters as well as scientists. The many versions of the epic therefore should include a broad spectrum, from rigorously scientific – with a focus on scientific language – to more broadly metaphorical and mythological, in the broadest sense of that term. Core narratives for religious naturalism will need to be both scientifically accurate *and* mythological in the sense of providing access to deep layers of meaning. What might this look like? Goodenough's *The Sacred Depths of Nature* may be considered such an example, as it includes both scientifically rigorous description and religious reflections. Goodenough is strongly pluralistic in her view of the epic and believes that the scientific component – while important, and from her perspective, *true* – needs to be augmented with culturally meaningful stories.

> I don't think it makes sense to say that one cultural tradition is "allowed" to keep its creation myth because it is earth-friendly and another can't because it isn't – not to mention the obvious difficulties inherent in dictating such proscriptions in the first place. It seems far simpler to go ahead and say that the Epic is a fantastic myth, that it happens to be true in terms of the material universe, that other myths are true in terms of

[294] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xlvii.

> their cultural meaning, and that there's absolutely no problem with holding more than one story, just as there's no problem with viewing the sunset in terms of planetary rotation and spectra and nuclear fusions one moment and as visual splendour the next.[295]

Human Nature, Human Culture, and the Evolution of Religion

The *Epic* does not stop with the emergence of *homo sapiens* – it continues with our best understanding of human nature and, in particular, human emotions. Rue claims that human nature amounts to striving for *personal wholeness* and *social coherence*, and that these goals represent the distinctively human way of seeking the ultimate telos of reproductive fitness.[296]

Human nature, as such, emerged with large social groups about forty-fifty thousand years ago[297] – that is, the formation of such groups led to a transformation of human nature.[298]

> Suddenly, human existence – both personal and collective – became problematic in ways that were previously inconceivable. Questioning the meaning of life, once utterly unthinkable, now became inevitable, but it also became an essential part of the human strategies for pursuing personal wholeness and social coherence. To have explicit *concepts* for these goals – to have a sense of the self as a moral agent and a sense of one's group as a transcendent entity – changed everything about the way humans perceived possibilities for a full and responsible existence. Seeking personal wholeness and social coherence would now take the form of a *project*.[299]

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[295] Ursula Goodenough, "Board Forum: How Grand a Narrative," *Online Article* (Epic of Evolution Society, 1999), 9. (http://thegreatstory.org/HowGrand.pdf)
[296] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 65.
[297] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 67.
[298] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 74.
[299] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 74.

Rue outlines the history of human culture, describing how humans likely started in family groups, and how members were (as we are today) genetically predisposed to help each other.[300] Family groups coalesced into tribal groups, which required means of reinforcing the solidarity and cooperation that came naturally to kin-groups.[301] *Cultural-symbolic means* evolved to support these behaviours, including stories and rituals that described the common history and common behaviours of the tribe.[302] Speculatively, these cultural means were adaptive; they helped the tribe survive and thrive.[303] Rue believes this ability to make the transition from kin-groups to tribal communities was "perhaps the most decisive event in the history of our species" – a transition clearly differentiates us from the great apes.[304] In Rue's terms, these tribes wised-up to the means of promoting cooperative behaviour. *The sum of these cultural-symbolic means is what we call religion.*

> By introducing a variety of symbols, rituals, and concepts it became possible to manipulate individuals into cooperating more freely with others. A new set of external emotional triggers was put into place, thereby overriding the influence of tacit signals. The result of these new cultural means was to redefine the boundaries of social reality, such that those who could be symbolically identified as belonging to the tribe were regarded as kinfolk, and were thus deserving of one's cooperation. In other words, symbolic markers have the power to create a virtual kinship, which is just as effective as the real thing. Among the decisive markers were body ornaments (e.g., scarring, tattooing), verbal greetings and gestures, distinctive styles of dress, and the like. In addition, there were communal events that served to reinforce the bonds between constituent family groups.[305]

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[300] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxiv-xxvi.
[301] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxvii.
[302] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxvii.
[303] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxvii.
[304] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxviii.
[305] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxvii.

Rue stresses the role of emotions in human life, the way they impact behaviour and they way they modify over time. In particular, Rue outlines our key motivators: *curiosity*, *hedonic*, and *social*. Curiosity motivators prompt action in response to novel experiences; hedonic motivators steer us toward physical pleasures and attractions; and social motivators are triggered by social cues.[306] Among social motivators is the *self-esteem* motivator, which Rue believes is key to aligning individual behaviours with community-prescribed behaviours and goals.

> When the self-monitoring process turns up evidence of shortcomings the individual becomes emotionally aroused by a sense of deficient self-worth, and this deficit seeks repair through behaviours designed to merit attributions of positive self-worth. [307]

Rue summarises his argument relating human nature, emotions and religious strategies as follows:

- There is a human nature.
- Human nature includes a wide range of emotional predispositions.
- Emotional predispositions are open to manipulation by symbolic means, and thus may also be viewed as *aesthetic* predispositions.
- Every religious tradition exploits this aesthetic vocabulary in service to its narrative core – that is, to express, transmit, and revitalize the myth.[308]

Rue's discussion of the evolution of human culture is, at the same time, his discussion of the evolution of religion. Any story of the universe and humanity will need to tell the story of how religion evolved. As noted previously, Rue believes that, as kin-groups began interacting to form tribal alliances, methods

[306] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 65-68.
[307] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 69-70, 78-79.
[308] Rue, *Religion is Not About God*, 139.

were required to establish social cohesion.[309] Narrative strategies would have been used:

> Storytellers were especially important, for they could narrate events of the past in a way that objectified the common ancestry of all members of the group. They might even foretell events of the future, and in so doing they could formulate and legitimate shared goals and aspirations. [310]

These narratives would, over time, be supported and reinforced by the range of strategies outlined in Rue's model.[311] Religious naturalism's use of the *epic of evolution* would be well served by explicitly discussing the evolution of religion, since this becomes the justification for treating religion functionally – as the range of techniques used to relate and reinforce *how things are* with *which things matter*. Essentially, Rue's discussion of *human nature*, *human culture* and the *evolution of religion* are one and the same discussion.

Ecology: Our current state and the global problematique

The *Epic*, in theory, ends with our best understanding of the current state of humanity and our planet. Following Gerald Barney, Rue refers to the sum of our global economic and environmental resource challenges as the *global problematique*.[312] Among the challenges, according to Rue, include, "Global warming, ozone depletion, the extinction of species, soil erosion, toxic waste, air and water pollution, mineral and fossil fuel depletion, poverty, crime, injustice, terrorism, exploitation…"[313] Rue claims that human population and human resource consumption is out of balance, and that, combined with human-

[309] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 144-164.
[310] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxviii.
[311] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxix.
[312] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvii.
[313] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvii.

oriented environmental damage, we are heading toward an ecological apocalypse.[314]

> We know the problem: exceeding the Earth's carrying capacity. We know the urgency: red alert, no time to lose. We know the causes of the problem: excessive human population and excessive material consumption. We know the general solution: reduce human impact to sustainable levels of population and consumption. We know on what the general solution depends: changes in social, political and economic goals and policies. We know the fundamental forces that can drive such changes: values, attitudes, goal hierarchies, self-esteem links. And finally, we know how to manipulate these fundamental forces: a full-court press on behaviour mediation systems, utilizing the ancillary strategies of a morally relevant mythic tradition."[315]

In other words, Rue is saying that religion – albeit atheistic religion – is needed to save us.

Rue outlines the options that humans have used across our species' history when similar imbalances have occurred. These include: *sit back* (do nothing and let starvation and disease take their course), *hunker down* (consume less), *kill off* (reduce the population via war, infanticide), *spread out* (move some of the population), and finally, *wise-up* – which is the focus of Rue's writing and, as will be described, the ultimate purpose of religious naturalism.[316]

So far in this section, I have outline elements of the *epic of evolution* that relate to a religious naturalistic world-view. This story ends with where we are today; we are on the leading edge of the story, the parts not yet written. Given Rue's outline, we know our situation, we know how we evolved, we know our nature (i.e., human nature), and we know our options. The question now is: what

[314] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvii.
[315] Rue, *Religion is Not About God,* 352.
[316] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxi-xxiii.

ought we do? A new narrative for religious naturalism will require *calls to action* that paint a compelling picture of *how things are*. Rue expresses a combination of pessimism over our current state and optimism over the promise of a revised world-view.

> These are the best of times and the worst of times. The worst of times because the world is becoming confused and dangerous as the cultural means for solidarity and cooperation slip away. But these are also the best of times because in these chaotic circumstances there appears a chance for a new world order to ascend, to be called forth by a compelling vision of how things really are and which things really matter.[317]

Rue notes that there is nothing in the epic that necessarily precludes theism, but he claims that theism is not essential to the story. He suspects theistic versions will emerge as well as non-theistic.

> Those who take the theistic option will have at their disposal a range of images that may be used to arouse motivational systems. But I have confidence that everybody's story, unadorned by theological imagery, has the potential to arouse us to serve its imperatives. Let us see. [318]

To close this section on the Epic, here is one more version, in the form of a very brief poem by Gary Drescher:

> *Lucid in the sky*
> Inexorably
> The star convolves
> until, recognizing itself,
> it marvels thus [319]

[317] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xl-xlii.
[318] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 87.
[319] Gary Drescher, *Good and Real (*Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 330-332.

4.2 Which things matter: Global Ethics in Religious Naturalism

As Rue emphasises in his model of religion, a religion's core narrative and supporting ancillary strategies are intended to clarify and reinforce *how things are* and *what things matter*. This section will focus on the latter – on the morality of religious naturalism. The discussion is presented in three sections: *eco-morality*, *human social ethics*, and *religiopoiesis*.

First, however, it is worth briefly considering, from a philosophical standpoint, the so-called "is-ought" problem, which asks how one can yield evaluative (ought) conclusions from factual (non-evaluative, or "is") premises. My purpose is not to rigorously evaluate whether the moral prescriptions of religious naturalists are philosophically justifiable – that is outside the scope of this paper; however, since these naturalists take a scientific approach to reality, one is entitled to look for scientifically reasonable alignments between *how things are*, *which things matter* – and, what we ought to do about it.

Is & Ought.

The challenge of logically connecting facts and values is often called the *is/ought* problem. Philosophical discussions regarding this challenge regularly refer to Hume's offering on the subject in his Treatise:

> In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as the *ought* or *ought not*, expresses some new relation

> or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.[320]

Here is Searle's simplified and modern form:

> There is a class of statements of fact which is logically distinct from a class of statements of value. No set of statements of fact by themselves entails any statement of value. Put in more contemporary terminology, no set of *descriptive* statements can entail and *evaluative* statement without the addition of at least one evaluative premise. To believe otherwise is to commit what has been called the naturalistic fallacy.[321]

In other words, one cannot logically begin with statements of fact and conclude with statements of value. As an example: *Jumping off the cliff will result in your death. Therefore, you should not jump off the cliff.* This is a violation of the naturalistic fallacy. For the conclusion to work, logically, one requires an intermediate premise related to value, such as: Falling to one's death is bad. This begs the question: *is* falling to one's death bad? This premise cannot be judged true or false outside of one's opinion or consensus. Of course, at the same time, there is no practical problem in daily living to commit the fallacy as described.

Attempts have been made to bridge the gap between facts and values; here is Searle's "promise" example:

> (1) Jones uttered the words, 'I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars.'
>
> (2) Jones promised to pay Smith five dollars.

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[320] David Hume, Treatise 3.1.1, quoted in Geoffrey Hunter, "Hume on Is and Ought," *Philosophy* Vol. 37, No. 140 (Apr., 1962): 148.

[321] John R. Searle, "How to derive 'ought' from 'is'," in *The is-ought question : a collection of papers on the central problem in moral philosophy*, ed. W. D. Hudson, (London: Macmillan, 1969), 120.

(3) Jones placed himself under (undertook) an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

(4) Jones is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

(5) Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars.[322]

Searle contends that there is an entire category of such illustrations where institutions are involved. Examples he mentions include: promises, baseball, marriage, money. For example, if you are tagged out in baseball (description), you *ought* to leave the field.[323] So, acting within institutions (set of rules) can bridge is and ought. Also, goal-setting can do this. Jones says 'I will be at work by 9am.' Therefore, he *ought* to catch the required bus.

How does the *is*/*ought* problem relate to religious naturalism? Rue makes the case that, while he agrees with the soundness of citing the naturalistic fallacy, he believes there is one exception: *viability is an objective moral standard*.[324] Rue argues that 1) living beings have evolved to survive, and 2) humans in particular evolved to evaluate options for acting, and that, therefore, 3) this evaluative capacity must therefore be considered a value in itself – an exception to the naturalistic fallacy. Viability "is the one value that commands all others."[325]

What statements of value are made by atheistic religious naturalists, and what prescriptions do they propose? As discussed in Section 2, Goodenough, Crosby and Rue have all determined that life is good and should be protected – not necessarily individual lives, but the biosphere as a whole. Goodenough calls

[322] Searle, *How to derive 'ought' from 'is'*, 21.
[323] Searle, *How to derive 'ought' from 'is'*, 132-133.
[324] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 62.
[325] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 62.

this her "credo of continuation." This is the foundation of an environmental ethic to be found in their writings.

Goodenough on what matters

For Goodenough, morality is founded on her *credo of continuation* -- which she claims needs no further justification – and is summarised as that which helps communities and the individual members *flourish*, meaning, to be "well adapted to the particular environmental circumstances in which one find oneself, to be healthy and resilient and resourceful." In short, *flourishing is good*.

> A flourishing bacterium or tree or mouse can be said to be a good bacterium or tree or mouse. A good willow maximizes the potential for willowness in all its manifestations: bark quality, disease resistance, pollen production, and so on…. Social animals like ourselves … remain self-interested, but we also cooperate in various vital activities such as food acquisition and protection from predators. Therefore, the mandate is both to flourish as an individual and to flourish in community. A good wolf is a flourishing animal and a member of a flourishing pack; he is genetically scripted both to take care of his own needs and to cooperate with others in the hunt.[326]

To flourish, humans bring to bear six *moral capacities*: strategic reciprocity, humaneness, fair-mindedness, courage, reverence, and mindfulness.[327] Goodenough argues that these have been acquired across our evolutionary history, evolving in tandem with our increasing capacity in symbolic and abstract thought. Opposing these capacities are six *moral susceptibilities*: greed, hubris, self-absorption, fearfulness, xenophobia, and prejudice.[328] Goodenough suggests that these arise when stresses drive individuals away from

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[326] Ursula Goodenough, "Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality," *Zygon* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 103-104.
[327] Goodenough, *Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality,* 105-108.
[328] Goodenough, *Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality,* 109.

community-positive behaviours and toward "self-centred survival patterns."[329] Goodenough's moral prescription, then, is to foster the required capacities for flourishing through *moral education*, which she claims is the best method for "stacking the decks of our psyches" so that the capacities win over the susceptibilities. Religious naturalism, she notes, makes this feasible.[330]

> Nor is the project defeated by the naturalistic fallacy: our "is" is that we are social animals; our "ought" is that we be good social animals. Importantly, religious naturalists are not constrained to describing and celebrating moral concepts in the context of evolutionary biology alone. The moral capacities and susceptibilities of which I speak are, needless to say, embedded in the stories and rituals of all the major traditions—indeed, their universality is yet another testimonial to their centrality to human nature—and there are many ways to convey the rich meanings of these traditions to ourselves and our children in naturalistic contexts. [331]

In order to combat those stresses that yield moral susceptibilities, Goodenough argues that we need to address the conditions that lead to those stresses; we need "to ameliorate the conditions wherein humans are physically or emotionally impoverished, threatened, defeated, abused, humiliated, lonely, and insecure."[332] To address these, Goodenough believes we need a new planetary ethic that focuses on "climate, ethnic cleansing, fossil fuels, habitat preservation, human rights, hunger, infectious disease, nuclear weapons, oceans, ozone layer, pollution, population."[333] She believes that such a planetary ethic requires *a common religious orientation*, without which, "…we basically don't know where to begin, nor do we know what to say or how to listen, nor are we motivated to respond."[334]

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[329] Goodenough, *Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality,* 103-105.
[330] Goodenough, *Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality,* 103-105.
[331] Goodenough, *Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality,*103-105.
[332] Goodenough, *Religious naturalism and naturalizing morality,*103-105.
[333] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, xv.
[334] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, xv.

Goodenough feels a personal, moral obligation to participate in an *earth cult* that reinforces behaviours aligned with flourishing and in recognition of humanity as custodians of the planet.[335] This obligation is underpinned by the notion (not a proposition) that the Earth may hold the *only* life in the universe – that humans may be "the only ones who understand the meaning of the word meaning."[336] Here, Goodenough finds a foundation for *caring*. "As soon as there is caring, and an obligation to care, then we have the foundation of a moral system. The moral fabric of an earth cult is to care."[337]

Finally, Goodenough stresses the need to speak out – for scientists in particular to communicate with non-scientists "about the beauty of what we know, about the beauty of cells and molecules, indeed, about their mythic potential." She notes that when she first started doing this, she felt "completely ridiculous and not a little terrified," but that it had then become part of her life – and part of her religion. For Goodenough, religious naturalism requires evangelizing. "To the extent that I've become an earth-cult evangelist, I feel like I'm earning my keep."[338]

Rue on what matters

Rue agrees with Goodenough that the starting point is to live in harmony with reality; he calls this requirement "the most important human insight of all time."[339] "To live in harmony with reality is to have a fighting chance. But if we live at odds with reality then the odds are that we shall be prematurely swept

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[335] Ursula Goodenough, "What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 326.
[336] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 326.
[337] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 326.
[338] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 329-330.
[339] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvi.

or worn into oblivion."[340] This insight, for Rue, works as a definition for *wisdom.* "Wisdom *just is* a way of thinking that puts the odds in our favor. Wisdom is the intellectual and moral wherewithal to live in harmony with reality."[341] Wisdom dictates, therefore, that we respond to *how things are* – i.e., recognising the global problematique and its causes – primarily overpopulation and overconsumption.[342] We need to select an appropriate option from those available: sit back, hunker down, kill off, spread out – and wise up, which is Rue's choice for us.[343]

> The wise-up option opposes the denial of the sit-back option, the folly of the spread out option, the desperation of the kill-off option, and the austerity of the hunker down option. It takes seriously the limits of natural systems and seeks the social and psychological means by which our species may live sustainably within them.[344]

Hunker down fails, ultimately, because if it *feels* like sacrifice, it will not be sustainable. True hunker-down, Rue notes, is too ascetic.[345] The wise-up option requires a fundamental transformation of values such that our self-esteem is attached to constructive, eco-friendly behaviours and detached from destructive ones, like those that foster excessive consumption.[346]

> Wising up in response to the global problematique calls us to decouple self-esteem from destructive behaviours, and instead to link the achievement of self-esteem to behaviours that enhance the integrity of natural and social systems. This calls for a transformation of values at a

[340] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvi.
[341] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xvi.
[342] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxii – xxxiii.
[343] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxiii.
[344] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxiii.
[345] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxiii.
[346] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 79.

> very fundamental level. Again, this task is related in many ways to the symbolic life of a culture.[347]

In other words, in agreement with Goodenough, Rue claims that we need a *religious* approach to wising up – meaning, strategies for symbolically manipulating our emotions and behaviours.

> … by modifying key symbols it becomes possible to redirect the emotional responses (and therefore the behaviours) of individuals. The secret to wising up in response to the global problematique will be to come up with the right symbols that will engage the emotions in a new way, such that the result of our doing so will be to enhance global solidarity and cooperation. To simplify, our task is yet again to enlarge the tribe, that is, to expand by symbolic means the range of our affection, sympathy, gratitude, and guilt to include all members of our species, even those of future generations.[348]

Rue refers to a needed "transformation of social reality" with "new institutions and organisations at all levels, as well as the demise of others;"[349] this is another way of recommending a new story, a new wisdom tradition and a new axial age. "What is called for is a moral calculus that will motivate individuals to act in ways that will reduce population and material consumption."[350] Rue breaks down this challenge into three supporting strategies: *ecotherapy*, *psychotherapy* and *politics*.

> The imperative of ecotherapy is to foster the conditions for biospheric integrity, that is, to act in ways designed to maximise biodiversity. Psychotherapy is governed by the imperative to act in ways that engage the abilities of persons to achieve wholeness, thereby to maximise the goods inherent in motivational systems. Politics embodies the imperative

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[347] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxii – xxxiii.
[348] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxii – xxxiii.
[349] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxii – xxxiii.
[350] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxiii.

> to confirm to social norms, thereby to maximise social solidarity and cooperation.[351]

Similar to Goodenough's notion of reducing the stresses that lead to moral susceptibilities, Rue believes that certain economic facts point toward required changes to our global society. First, that "a certain minimum level of economic prosperity is needed for self fulfilment;" secondly, that no particular amount of prosperity will guarantee such fulfilment; and thirdly, "elevating the economic status of impoverished women reduces birth rates."[352] From these premises he concludes, in alignment with Goodenough: we must 1) enhance prosperity in the impoverished regions of the world and 2) reduce prosperity in the affluent regions. This will require a "radical transformation of moral conscience" and a transformation of realities – social and psychological.[353]

Rue's aspiration for his book *Everybody's Story* expresses a personal obligation similar to Goodenough:

> …to participate in the most important intellectual endeavour of the new millennium – that is, to stimulate the emergence of a new wisdom tradition based on the integration of evolutionary cosmology and ecocentric morality. This new story, everybody's story, is full of potential for uniting our species around a common apprehension of how things are and which things matter. United by a shared story, we may come to possess a sense of solidarity and cooperation sufficient to inspire the will to seek human fulfilment within the limits of biospheric integrity.[354]

By "a new wisdom tradition," Rue clearly means a new religion, although he goes out of his way in *Everybody's Story* to avoid the word *religion*, as if he

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[351] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 76.
[352] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxiii.
[353] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, xxxiii.
[354] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 83-84.

believes the very word is problematic. He notes elsewhere that the word religious is offensive to some "because it connotes supernaturalism."[355]

Crosby on what matters

Crosby's core value, as previously discussed, is life and therefore the biosphere. Like Goodenough and Rue, he promotes an environmental ethic. His starting point is that, in general, "we should refrain from needless or frivolous despoliation of the earth."[356] Not surprisingly, he prescribes conservation of energy sources and development of renewable sources, recycling, wilderness preservation and protecting endangered species. "Ecological ethics and environmental responsibility are integral parts of a religion of nature."[357] Crosby believes, for example, that we should avoid harming animals, just as we avoid harming people. He believes hunting and fishing for entertainment is a serious wrong, [358] as is factory farming and experimenting on animals (with a few medical exceptions).[359] He refrains from prescribing a vegetarian diet but makes the point that eating meat is not nutritionally required.[360] Crosby believes that human social ethics follows naturally from – and is a subset of – environmental ethics; "for our obligation is to treat all living beings with respect and to reverence the earth as our natural home."[361] Like Goodenough, he also stresses *flourishing* as a summative goal, noting that we should contribute to, or at least not interfere with the flourishing of natural beings.[362]

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[355] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 123.
[356] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 57.
[357] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 57-58.
[358] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 57.
[359] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 57.
[360] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 57.
[361] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 58.
[362] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 58.

In his *Living with Ambiguity*, Crosby connects eco-morality to his notions of evil and ambiguity. Nature is *ambiguous* in that it interweaves profound opposites, including "…life and death, disease and health, satiety and starvation, pleasure and pain, and moral goodness and evil."[363] Crosby then defines *evil events of nature* as those resulting in "suffering, deprivation and death to sentient beings."[364] Therefore, in response to systemic natural evils, Crosby argues that we ought to "show enough respect for nature as not deliberately to produce, or allow to be produced, conditions in it that make us or other creatures more susceptible to natural disasters.[365] Crosby offers a long list of examples, including (in abridged form):

- Avoid pollution of the earth, seas, watercourses, and the atmosphere.
- Avoid building on wetlands, floodplains, or directly on seacoasts.
- Stop destroying rain forests.
- Avoid erosion and depletion of topsoil.
- Use renewable sources of energy and ones that are less likely to pollute the atmosphere.
- Develop better ways of predicting and protecting ourselves against earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes.
- Use preventive medicine to fend off debilitation and disease.
- Avoid addictions and practices – smoking, drug use, bad diet, overeating, lack of exercise, stressful situations, etc.
- Protect endangered and other living species
- Help the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the needy in our own neighborhoods and around the world.[366]
- Keep human population under control.

Of course, Crosby notes, there are very many things we *could* do; the real challenge is putting such ideas into practice. Therefore, he provides additional

[363] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 24.
[364] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 35.
[365] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 105.
[366] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 105.

prescribed activities (abridged here) for cultivating the right *attitude* and the right *motivation*, activities loosely called *spiritual practice*:

- Regular meditation.
- Repentance for past failures and weak resolve.
- Aspiring to do good and to find ways to do so effectively.
- Giving fervent thanks for all the good things of the world.
- Preparing oneself to be open and responsive to events of grace.
- Reaching out to help others.
- Finding instruction and inspiration in the lives and teachings of exemplary moral and religious persons.
- Participating in collective rituals, traditions, teachings, stories, songs, and work of religious communities supportive of the outlook of religion of nature. [367]

What about when we are not feeling up to this, when it feels that our will is weak, when we are tempted to take action that is in our immediate best interest, but against our longer-term interests, or our principles? The danger here, notes Crosby, is the damage that can be done to our notion of self-worth:

> One can even become despicable to oneself and lose all confidence in one's ability to reform and become a better person. Hopeless, spiritless moral self-condemnation can result. And it can have devastating consequences for one's obligations to and relations with others. [368]

This, Crosby notes, requires the compassion of those "not so afflicted" in order to help such people regain their dignity, responsibility and freedom. Thus, Crosby adds an obligation for spiritual counselling, although he does not use the term.[369] He believes that religion, and in particular, his religion of nature, is

[367] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 106-107.
[368] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 110.
[369] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 110.

suited to the mission of motivating and encouraging us to develop ourselves in alignment with our intentions.[370]

For Crosby, we ought to possess "genuine reverence and respect for nature as a whole." [371] He suggests a range of behaviours for cultivating this attitude.

> We can do so by religiously inspired deeds of kindness and mercy toward all creatures; by meditation, prayer, ritual, and other forms of public and private religious practice; by reflecting frequently upon the vastness of the universe in space and time; and by careful observation and study of the intricacies and interconnections of the myriad life forms on this planet…[372]

Similarly, a religion of nature ought to include "contemplation and practice of the rightness of nature affirming both the metaphysical and the religious ultimacy of nature." Again, Crosby offers many ways (abridged here) that we can approach this rather vague notion:

- Glorifying in the starry heavens, the sparkling seas, the rushing rivers and in all the marvellous life forms of earth.
- Gratitude for the providingness of the earth and feeling at home here.
- Forging an abiding sense of companionship and kinship with all creatures, human and nonhuman alike.
- Working to alleviate needless suffering and pain
- Finding ways to contribute to – but also to avoid undue interference with – the flourishing of all of earth's creatures.
- Meditating on the freedom that nature has bestowed upon us as a species and learning to use these gifts effectively and responsibly.
- Being open and receptive to events of grace, to the lessons to be learned from them and the transformative possibilities inherent within them.[373]

[370] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 111.
[371] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 87.
[372] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 87.
[373] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 88-89.

Religiopoiesis and Mythopoiesis

Finally, it is appropriate to include *religiopoiesis* and *mythopoiesis* in a section on *what matters*; Goodenough and Rue agree that a new story is needed, and perhaps a new religion; and Crosby has suggested that adherents of a religion of nature should take part in story and ritual to support their intentions. Crosby has emphasised *spiritual practice* as a key reinforcer, while Goodenough and Rue focus on the structural elements that have long served the traditional religions: core narrative and the ancillary strategies. In short, if our intention is to behave as desired, ways of reinforcing those behaviours are required, and according to Rue's model, that is exactly what religion has traditionally provided. Goodenough believes there is a challenge ahead:

> For me, a religion works only if it offers the opportunity for mystical experience, but it needs to be more than mystical experience. It also needs to be embedded in my cognitive reality, and the New Age earth cults seem to be disinterested in this reality. Therefore, if we want an earth cult grounded in a scientific cosmology, we're going to have to invent one.[374]

Rue's notion of religiopoiesis is to design the strategies to achieve the aims – those being personal wholeness and social cohesion. Religion plays a therapeutic role by creating stories that reinforce a desired frame of mind and ultimately, the desired behaviours. Rue's description of such a story reads like a *prayer* for religious naturalism, although he does not call it such:

> The universal story now becomes my own particular story. My self-understanding is transformed, for now I apprehend my true nature, my ultimate origins, what is genuinely good for me, and how I might be fulfilled. I now have a new perspective by which to order my aspirations

[374] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 325.

> and obligations within the larger scheme of things, including the social order.
>
> The selfish goals I once pursued have been displaced by new commitments and my self-esteem is not linked to projects that advance the common good. There may continue to be moments of mental conflict in my life, but as these arise I will return to the story to recover my bearings in the world. The story is always available to me, to absorb my uncertainties and to conquer my temptation to default back to narrow self-interests. As the challenges of everyday life erode my personal integrity, I may restore my soul by revitalising the story.[375]

Rue concludes that, given the global problematique, "We are called – here, now, urgently – to the task of mythopoiesis."[376]

Rue and the prospects for religious naturalism. Rue sees religious naturalism, currently, as an unruly mix of conflicting ideas: there are those who anthropomorphise nature and those for whom that is abhorrent; those comfortable with the word God and those against; those who see purpose in the universe and those that see purpose as emergent in living systems. 'Serious' religious naturalists, he notes, are perhaps more likely to focus on environmental activism. Some are new age romantics, while others are of a scientific bent. The message of religious naturalism is perceived by many as hostile to religion.[377]

> …religious naturalism may be compelling, coherent, and tidy in principle, but it fact it is ragged, unruly, and tainted with negativity. No one should expect religious naturalism to grow and galvanize into a recognisable movement or tradition anytime soon. There are too many obstacles and diverse factors in the way, and not nearly enough historical momentum to overturn them.

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[375] Rue, *Religion is Not About God*, 163.
[376] Rue, *Religion is Not About God*, 164.
[377] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 123.

> Having said all this, I fully expect the day to arrive when religious naturalism will prevail as the most universal and influential religious orientation on the planet.[378]

The evolution of religious naturalism. Rue describes two scenarios for the evolution of religious naturalism, one gradual and one catastrophic.[379] The gradual scenario is one in which religious naturalistic ideas slowly emerge within the religious traditions and those traditions evolve syncretistically, eventually giving up their theism. He notes the example of the Unitarian Universalist Religious Naturalists. Rue argues that this process will be supported (if, that is, science education improves) by the "epic of cosmogenesis" winning over other cosmologies in the battleground of cognitive dissonance.[380] Ultimately, religious traditions will let go of their supernaturalism.

> …in time we will see the great religious traditions relinquish their supernatural moorings in a manner not unlike the way many of the world's great universities have transcended the religious identities of their origins.[381]

The catastrophic path, which Rue sees as more likely, is a global ecological and social apocalypse that sees a significant decline in population and civilisation, caused by overpopulation and overconsumption that will lead to a serious decline in the Earth's life support systems. As a result:

> Supplies of vital resources diminish, and competition for the grows increasingly ugly and dangerous; important industries begin to falter and fold; unemployment skyrockets; homelessness increases; individuals become increasingly more fearful, anxious, suspicious, uncooperative, devious and desperate; inflation soars; gangs coalesce; crime becomes

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[378] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 123.
[379] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 123-129. Also: Rue, *Religion is not about God,* 341-360.
[380] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 125
[381] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 128

> rampant; raids on hoarders are commonplace; vigilante groups organise; public services decline; cities grow unmanageable and squalid; utilities become undependable; riots, looting, and fires ravage whole cities; schools close; nothing gets repaired; water and food becomes increasingly scarce and putrid; diseases spread; healthcare systems buckle; sickness and death at every hand; armed conflicts flare up in city streets; refugees, scavengers, and shanty towns everywhere; border incidents escalate into minor wars; and the lamps of civilisation go dark.[382]

The remnants of humanity will need to explain what has happened – to make sense of it – because, Rue argues, humans must find meaning in their suffering.[383] Stories will emerge describing how the cause of the cataclysm was a lack of understanding – thinking that humans were in some way outside of nature, such that we did not need to revere nature or focus on sustainable living.

> These stories would explain that the holocaust happened because human beings, filled with supernatural pretensions, had failed to acknowledge and embrace their true status as contingent natural beings. In other words, the holocaust would be seen as a direct consequence of devaluing the order of nature. But nature, they will explain, is enough. It is the ultimate source of truth and value, the ultimate context for human fulfilment. To be wise is to live in harmony with nature.[384]

In essence, the *myth of religious naturalism* will be the story. Rue has been writing chapters in such a story, with a prophetic voice, arguing for the promise of religious naturalism. This is a myth that is, recursively, about the myth.

> …there is no promise for the future of the biosphere apart from a story that can inform us about how things really are in the physical world, and which things ultimately matter for sustaining the viability of natural and social systems. We have no hope…apart from a story that can unite diverse cultures with a vision of their shared natural history, their shared problems and their common destiny. We shall be doomed…unless we

[382] Rue, *Religion is not about God*, 360.
[383] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 124.
[384] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 125.

> embrace a story that can move us to enlarge the scope of our interests and affections to include all humans, all species of life, and the biosphere itself. And no story…holds more promise for addressing these needs than the myth of religious naturalism.[385]

Hubert Seiwert claims that Rue is actually offering a myth "camouflaged as scientific theory," and that *Religion Without God* is itself a myth of religious naturalism. Seiwert warns that, based on his earlier works, Rue believes in the necessity of noble lies, and that he is advocating religious naturalism as an adaptive alternative to the truth of nihilism.[386]

5.0 Conclusions: Painting the big picture

In this conclusion, I first summarise atheistic religious naturalism, completing the sketch that this paper intends to draw; I then review key objections and challenges to this perspective, and propose several topics for future research. I close with brief, personal reflections.

5.1 What is Atheistic Religious Naturalism? – a concluding sketch

My intention for this paper is to paint a picture of atheistic religious naturalism. Borrowing from Rue, any sketch will be a contingent caricature, of sorts, and my description is based on a small sample of thinkers. What, then, *can* be said with some sense of clarity?

How things are. Essentially, atheistic religious naturalism is a naturalistic perspective: nature is all there is; nature = the universe = reality; these all refer to the sum of everything. Describing this *everything* is most rigorously and

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[385] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 129.
[386] Hubert Seiwert, "Theory of religion as myth," In *Contemporary Theories of Religion*, ed. Michael Strausburg (London: Routledge, 2009), 239.

objectively accomplished through scientific language; however, *communicating* how things are also requires conceptualisation, metaphor and story. The epic of evolution takes many forms: from artistic and poetic to the highly technical. Perhaps most descriptions fall into a middle ground – like those for popular audiences or children; they lack accuracy and focus instead on the goal of understanding. The epic of evolution is a myth, in the academic sense of the term; *all* of our descriptions are like this, including scientific narratives. All of these many ways of thinking about the universe have their place; all are needed. Humans are a symbolic, social species, and stories are a large part of how we think, conceptualise and communicate. The epic is a story of life, about how we got here, how we thrive and how we may continue.

Which things matter. Atheistic religious naturalism values life, and that which sustains life; therefore, the entire biosphere *matters*, along with particular areas of concern, e.g., biodiversity, sustainability, food and water. There are many global challenges to a thriving and flourishing biosphere, e.g., overpopulation, depletion of resources, contamination of the environment and reduction of biodiversity through human impact. Addressing these, *matters*; they are the *oughts* of religious naturalism – the moral imperatives.

Global challenges require global cooperation – social cohesion on a global scale; this, in turn, requires cultural means of reinforcing *how things are* and *which things matter* so that behaviours and choices are aligned with global imperatives. Such an undertaking requires, in essence, the growth and transmission of *wisdom*. This is what *religion* does through narrative, myth and the various strategies, e.g., intellectual, aesthetic, ritual, etc. However, the traditional, axial religions were designed for another time; they emphasise a supernatural

cosmology and individual notions of salvation, rather than the essential importance of a flourishing earth and biosphere. While they may indeed foster personal wholeness and social coherence, they do so through *their group's particular story* – not *everyone's* story. And their supernaturalism is simply untenable to many modern, educated minds. In short, the traditional religions are not a solution for addressing the global problematique.

Arguably, we therefore need a new axial age, a new wisdom tradition and new stories. This is the mission and promise of religious naturalism, a religio-cultural approach designed for our times: naturalistic and focusing on the flourishing of life on Earth, a perspective whose core narrative is the *epic of evolution* and whose core *ethic* is based on today's global imperatives. It is not yet a religion; it exists as a movement of sorts – in books, journal articles, conferences, presentations and internet groups. It exists also *within* individuals and even denominations of religious traditions; for example, within liberal Christianity, Reconstructionist Judaism, Unitarian Universalism, and elsewhere. It is perhaps best described today (in 2013) as an intellectual movement.

Religious naturalism is particularly *conscious* of the tools, techniques and strategies of religion, and is therefore in a position of being consciously designed – via *religiopoiesis* and *mythopoiesis*. The narratives and strategies will, as with all religions, communicate and reinforce *how to live in accordance with how things are and which things matter*, which is a practical definition of wisdom.

Atheistic religious naturalism is a coalescing vision for a global, naturalistic, life-flourishing wisdom tradition.

5.2 Challenges and Objections to Religious Naturalism

There are a wide variety of objections to atheistic religious naturalism, from every conceivable philosophical and religious direction. Most obviously, theists such as Plantinga, object both to its atheism and its naturalism. Griffin complains that, while a minimal naturalism is true, the maximal view of naturalism (scientific naturalism) is false. In this section, however, I focus on more *practical*, rather than philosophical, challenges.

Crosby surveys several practical challenges to his *religion of nature* due to common beliefs associated with the very concept of religion, particularly in the West. God, he notes, as a focus of religious concern, is "a deeply etched assumption," while non-theism is associated with a lack of meaning and value.[387] Similarly, the universe is often assumed (by religious people) to have a purpose, provided by God.[388] Salvation is assumed to include rewards in an afterlife, and without this, any religious perspective is likely to seem, literally, unrewarding.[389] The very idea of *nature as ultimate* will be difficult to support by those who have assumed a clear line of separation between humans and nature.[390] This is made more difficult by the belief that a worthy object of religious concern must be *entirely good*, rather than including ambiguities (e.g., natural evils) as does nature.[391] In short, *religion without god* generates substantial cognitive dissonance, and this might be one of the greatest challenges to its adoption.

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[387] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 8.
[388] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 8.
[389] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 9.
[390] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 11.
[391] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity,* 12.

William Rottschaefer believes that religious naturalism is thwarted by a moral non-realism resulting in commitments "too weak to command self-sacrifice when the chips are down."[392] He claims that the lack of objective values is a fatal flaw and that Rue's "non-realist position is contingent on a misappropriation of the naturalistic fallacy..."[393] Rue counters than religious naturalists will *not* tend to be moral non-realists because evolution has embedded moral intuitions. "These competencies do not quit working their wonders in the event that individuals become disillusioned about the supernatural ground of moral values."[394] As we have seen, Rue claims one objective moral value – *viability* – which can serve as a foundation for ethical behaviour.

Leslie Marsh argues that religious naturalism requires *pantheism* for an effective mythopoiesis and an effective ethic. Rue admits this may be so, but is not convinced. [395]

> I take pantheism to involve the assertion that everything is sacred, that being itself (or the ultimate source of being) is of intrinsic value, independent of our valuing it. It is my impression that some religious naturalists will have good reasons for not going so far. For example, a religious naturalism may insist that the concept of value makes no sense apart from living systems."[396]

Donald Braxton similarly suggests that religious naturalism will probably not work without some "meta-entity" – pantheistic or otherwise. [397] Rue construes this as reintroducing anthropomorphic and quasi-supernatural elements.[398] As

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[392] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 410.
[393] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 411.
[394] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 410.
[395] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 422.
[396] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 420.
[397] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 415.
[398] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 415.

an alternative to establishing a new religion, Braxton believes religious naturalism is best approached as streams within existing religious traditions; religion can be naturalised and remain effective.[399] Rue agrees that we are likely to see naturalistic movements *within* religious traditions – that is, if we avoid a major, global environmental apocalypse.[400]

For Marsh, there is also a potential conflict between the pluralistic notion of a global myth and the goal of social cohesion. Religious pluralism, he believes, "is socially destabilizing."[401] Rue agrees that a global myth requires global cooperation, and that this, in itself, is a challenge.

> Sound politics for our time calls for the creation of a genuine global parliament that can begin to address the challenges of the global problematique. But such a development is precluded by what appears to be an absolute commitment of the world's political leadership to the doctrine of national sovereignty. The flaw here is to suppose that this doctrine can ever be consistent with global solidarity and cooperation.[402]

Hardwick argues that there is simply not enough *theology* to be found in religious naturalism, and that this leads to a lack of anything particularly religious.

> Too many religious naturalists have nothing to say religiously – or only things to say that are very thin – because, having stated their naturalism, they think that they must then reject their own religious traditions on the assumption that those traditions are essentially and necessarily antinaturalist. That may be so, but it is not self-evident. In any case, I want to claim that for religious naturalists the really interesting

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[399] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 414.
[400] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 148.
[401] Leslie Marsh, "Taking the Super Out of the Supernatural," *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 343-356.
[402] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 80.

> questions are the issues of theological and/or religious content that emerge on the far side of defending some version of naturalism.[403]

John Haught, agreeing with Hardwick, argues that religious naturalism has insufficient "spiritual amplitude", that it is explanatorily inadequate, and that, ultimately, naturalism is inaccurate as a world-view.[404] If naturalism is true, Haught claims this is very bad news for humanity; the universe's ultimate end is "the pit of nothingness."[405] Its spiritual deficiency does not make it untrue – just spiritually impotent. Haught claims that divine action and nature are different layers of explanation. "Divine action or divine creativity" contributes to the emergence of "life, mind, ethics, and religion."[406] Why is the pot boiling, he asks? The divinely-related explanation is: "I want tea," whereas the naturalistic explanation describes the physics of water molecules.[407] Finally, Haught argues that naturalism cannot logically account for the trust we place in our ability to determine truth. Biological adaptations are passed along according to their *usefulness*, not *truthfulness*; so naturalism provides no justification for our determinations of truth.[408]

Rue notes that the new atheists (e.g., Dawkins, Harris, Weinberg and Dennett) consider religious naturalism an oxymoron.[409] These popularisers of strong atheism and anti-religion have created an industry out of ridiculing religion.[410] For similar reasons, I suspect that the word *religious* is a challenge for the

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[403] P. Hardwick, *Religious Naturalism Today*, 113.
[404] John Haught, "Is nature enough? No." *Zygon* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 771.
[405] John Haught, "Is nature enough? No." *Zygon* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 773.
[406] Haught, *Is nature enough? No*, 776.
[407] Haught, *Is nature enough? No*, 776.
[408] Haught, *Is nature enough? No*, 780-781.
[409] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 418.
[410] Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 123. Rue refers to the new atheists as "aggressive cranks and party-poopers."

growth of religious naturalism; for many, *religion* denotes made-up, superstitious, antiquated, fear-based, control-oriented nonsense.

5.3 Areas for future research

Based on my sketch of atheistic religious naturalism and the challenges and objections surveyed, there are many opportunities for future research into this religious perspective.

The future of religious naturalism. Perhaps the most exciting – and the most speculative – would be to consider *what comes next* for this movement. Might it become a global religion, rising from the ashes of a global catastrophe? Rue is hesitant that the epic of evolution will resonate with everyone:

> I have no doubt that for a substantial number of people the features of everybody's story will enlarge to fill all the roles of their former religious orientations, without remainder. But there will always be a substantial number for whom everybody's story leaves a remainder – those for whom the epic of evolution does not say all they want to hear. For some, it may become so, but for others it will not. In any event, it does not pretend to be everyone's religion. I prefer to use the term "wisdom tradition" as a label for this story.[411]

Marsh questions whether religious naturalism lends itself to being mythologised, and agrees that having a root metaphor is critical.[412] How might mythopoiesis take shape, and what root metaphors will emerge?[413] Who will be creating these and in what contexts? What will everybody's story (or stories) look like – stories that could motivate and unify global humanity in alignment with common goals and behaviours?[414] Goodenough emphasises that

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[411] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 90.
[412] Leslie Marsh, "Taking the Super Out of the Supernatural," *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 352.
[413] Rue, *Religious Naturalism – Where Does it Lead*, 421.
[414] Loyal Rue, *Redefining Myth and Religion*, 318-319.

religiopoiesis requires being open to metaphors of all kinds, including religious metaphors, those found in poetry and art, and those that "emerge from our articulation of scientific understanding." [415] The goal, she notes, "is to come up with such a rich tapestry of meaning that we have no choice but to believe in it. This is, to my mind, the urgent project before us all."[416] How might such a project take shape? Using Rue's model, we can ask whether narratives and strategies are already in place, and evaluate new materials against his model. Certainly, many versions of the *epic of evolution* already exist and, arguably, intellectual strategies are in place through the writings of Goodenough, Crosby and Rue – among others. Ritual strategies are being designed, such as ritual plays related to the epic compiled by Connie Barlow.[417]

Technology and Religiopoesis. What will be the role of technology – particularly the internet and social media – in religiopoeisis and mythopoesis of religious naturalism? Developing a global religion and a global myth arguably requires global collaboration, and there are many online technologies that can be leveraged for such activities, e.g., virtual classroom, virtual media and virtual worlds applications, as also telephony and whiteboarding applications. How might these technologies be used in the collaborative creation of religious naturalism? Just as some religious organisations have an entirely online presence and congregation;[418] gatherings of religious naturalists may take place largely within online environments rather than in person.

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[415] Ursula Goodenough, "Religiopoiesis," *Zygon* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 2000): 566.
[416] Goodenough, *Religiopoiesis*, 566.
[417] Connie Barlow, "Rituals and Experiential Processes for Learning and Celebrating The Great Story," an *online article* in *The Great Story*, a website (http://www.thegreatstory.org/Rituals-list.html)
[418] An example is: OurJewishCommunity.org. From its FAQ: Recognizing the changing needs of the Jewish Community, OurJewishCommunity.org reaches out to progressive Jews throughout the world. OurJewishCommunity.org provides some of the same services of a brick-and-mortar congregation, such as access to rabbis, sermons, educational materials, social networking,

Education. How might atheistic religious naturalism impact education – in particular, science education and religious literacy education? Rue believes that science educators will eventually teach using narrative strategies, with a focus on emergent systems, and that this will increase the effectiveness of the instruction.[419] What exactly would such instruction look like? Rue and Goodenough agree that science texts are, in effect, the equivalent of the bible for religious naturalism. Science, Goodenough claims, can help tell us what is "fair and feasible" in the choices we make.[420] What kind of curriculum could relate science and values in this way? What kind of schools would deploy such a curriculum? Also, how might religious naturalism be included within religious literacy and religious education curricula? How will religious naturalism be characterised?

Relating Science and Religion. Similarly, how might atheistic religious naturalism play a role in the ongoing debates on the relationship between science and religion? It is often assumed that many or most philosophers and theologians believe that science and religion are incompatible.[421] Rue outlines what he considers the likely societal results of the conflict between these domains.

> Under these conditions, a culture might begin fragmenting into three general groups – those who reject the advancement of science, those who reject traditional binding stories, and those who desperately engage in the futile activity of reinterpreting the old stories to make them appear

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discussions, and more. The benefits of OurJewishCommunity.org are many: It is not restricted to geographic boundaries. It provides a place for people who may not have a progressive synagogue in their local community to which they feel connected. It is convenient – and open 24/7. It appeals to people who use technology on a regular basis. It promotes individual autonomy. It offers the opportunity to be part of building the future of Judaism. http://ourjewishcommunity.org/about-us/faqs/

[419] Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 85.

[420] Goodenough, *What Science Can and Cannot Offer to a Religious Narrative*, 328.

[421] Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, 11.

> compatible with the new knowledge. In terms of our own culture, we are left with the fundamentalists at one extreme, the atheists and agnostics at the other extreme, and a good many anxious and confused people in the middle.[422]

Death and Dying. Finally, might a religious naturalist perspective be useful in *hospice* work, *grief counselling* and other areas where the challenges of death are at hand? Goodenough, Crosby and Rue all speak to the appropriateness and naturalness of death – ideas that could be shaped into narratives, symbols and strategies to assist those facing their own or a loved one's death. For Goodenough, an appropriate perspective on death can come with an understanding of biology:

> Sex without death gets you single-celled algae and fungi; sex with mortal soma gets you the rest of the eukaryotic creatures. Death is the price paid to have trees and clams and birds and grasshoppers, and death is the price paid to have human consciousness, to be aware of all that shimmering awareness and all that love. My somatic life is the wondrous gift wrought by my forthcoming death.[423]

For Crosby, death can be accepted through an understanding that salvation is not tied to the individual, but to our descendants.

> To live is eventually to die… The assurance dimension of a saving faith in nature is, in large measure learning to accept this fact and to surmount an obsessive preoccupation with ourselves and our survival as individuals by focusing on what both our lives and deaths can contribute to the whole scheme of things…We can be assured that our lives amount to something and are worthwhile, even as we acknowledge that they must eventually end on our deaths. While we live, we can devote ourselves to one another and to the whole system of nature, and in that life of devotion we can find assurance, confidence, and peace. We can be inspired and renewed by the beauties and wonders in every way we can.

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[422] Loyal Rue, "Refining Myth and Religion," *Zygon* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 317-318.
[423] Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature,* 151.

> We can also be receptive to the salutary possibilities of events over which we have no control or ability to predict but which can sometimes give anticipated depth and meaning to our lives.[424]

5.4 Closing Reflections

Atheistic religious naturalism, as presented by Rue and Goodenough, appeals to me – someone who is an atheist and who believes that the structures, functions and strategies of what we call religion are designed to help people live in harmony with *how things are*. If you want to align group behaviour with a particular set of goals, religion is perhaps *the* strategy. There are innumerable examples of "groups with goals": families, businesses, teams, communities, nations, etc. These groups could all use religious strategies – core narratives, rituals, etc. – to reinforce attitudes and behaviours in alignment with their goals. One could certainly use Rue's model to analyse group cultures in order to determine which strategies are being used (perhaps not consciously) and which are missing and are opportunities. My current profession, for example, includes the induction, orientation and acculturation of new leaders and staff into a large, commercial organisation, and through these activities, reinforcing the businesses priorities and values. As I write this, I cannot help but see this mission through the lens of Rue's model and, in general, his functional approach to religion.

In contrast with Rue, Crosby's presentation of his *religion of nature* does not resonate with me. He seems to be striving for substitutes for the inventory of traditionally religious ideas: instead of God, nature; instead of God's grace, events of grace, etc. His metaphysical approach to nature – emphasising values

[424] Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity*, 59.

to be found and reasons why nature is worthy of religious concern – does not seem required to believe in the functional aspects of religious naturalism. (Crosby, it seems, is an *essentialist* rather than a *functionalist*.) A narrative of *how things are* that is based on the *epic of evolution* does not require such language, although I believe that many *styles* of the epic will likely evolve. In addition, I find Crosby's notion of *free will* unconvincing and unsatisfying; he feels strongly that human free will is intimately connected to novelty and unpredictability in nature and that more than causal explanations are required to yield the choices we make.[425] Free will, as he defends it, seems completely unnecessary for religious naturalism, and is perhaps something he has brought along from his theological and philosophical background. (Rue briefly notes that free will is an illusion, just as selfhood is an illusion.)[426] In short, Crosby's presentation of religious naturalism may resonate with those that are more accustomed to theological language, but it may make it harder for the more scientifically-minded to embrace his religion of nature.

Perhaps most exciting about this movement, is that it makes it seem possible – and essential – to gather extremely diverse people around common goals; to synergise their energies, efforts and creativity for the sake of nurturing our world, for the sake of thriving; and to do so *fully accepting and celebrating diverse world-views*. As a religious naturalist, one can look back at the history of religion and also consider modern forms of religiosity, and without judgement, celebrate humanity's ongoing creative attempts to understand *how things are* and *which things matter*. I believe there is incredible freedom and delight to be found in such a perspective. There may be a wonderful sense of mission,

[425] Crosby, *A Religion of Nature*, 27-30.
[426] Rue, *Religion is Not About God*, 290-291.

purpose and meaning in the religiopoiesis, mythopoiesis and evangelising of religious naturalism, as Goodenough feels an obligation to do.

Hubert Seiwert may be right in claiming, perhaps accusing, that in *Religion is Not About God*, Rue has knowingly created a myth for religious naturalism – that Rue's theory of religion is itself a myth.[427] I find this idea compelling and I wonder whether the book's title could actually serve as a root metaphor for atheistic religious naturalism. It begs the question of what religion really *is* – a question foundational to learning about religious naturalism. I currently believe that religion is best conceived as *wisdom-striving emotional and behavioural support systems and strategies*, where wisdom means living in harmony with *the way things are*, and where the strategies are designed, following Rue, to foster personal wholeness and social coherence in alignment with group goals.

Given this definition of religion, I would argue that we on Earth *need* religion – or something like it; something that connects 1) our best understanding of the universe with, 2) our best ideas regarding behaviours that align with our goals, and 3) well-designed strategies for reinforcing and sustaining those behaviours. In addition, we need to leverage the strategies of religion to achieve global cooperation toward global goals – the ultimate goals, perhaps, being reduced suffering and a flourishing biosphere. Further, I currently believe that the traditional religions are not designed for this mission and that, therefore, *new* strategies are needed: new naturalistic religions, new naturalistic streams within existing religions, new wisdom traditions, a new axial age – perhaps all of these. Atheistic religious naturalism, as conceived by Goodenough, Crosby and Rue, may be emerging to satisfy these needs.

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[427] Seiwert, *Theory of religion as myth*, 239.

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