Us vs. them: Dualism and the frontier in history.

Jonathan Joseph Wlasiuk

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US VS. THEM: DUALISM AND THE FRONTIER IN HISTORY

by

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This is a history of the origins, forms, and decline of the frontier. After much research, I argue as my thesis that humans consciously constructed physically demarcated frontiers that separated their culture and territory from those outside their own and conceived of an ethical horizon that bestowed sacredness to the geographic and ideological core of the culture, which diminished the further-removed a land or people happened to be from that apex. Behaving much like an amoeba or single-celled organism with clearly defined walls (frontiers) and a nucleus (core), these cultures constantly referenced their cosmology and associated all humans and land that crossed into their frontier with either the positive myths and images from their most axiomatic beliefs or associated the newcomers with the most reviled antipodes of their tradition. In short: the dominant culture of a people provides methods and rituals with which to accept or cast out elements from outside the culture.

I argue for the rehabilitation of the frontier in Western History. Advocates of the New Western History have all too often either denigrated the process of the frontier or excised it from Western History altogether. I posit that by reintroducing the potent explanatory power of the frontier, scholars liberate themselves to explore the function of process along with place. While this revision at first appears radical in its challenge to nearly twenty years of New Western scholarship, it boils down to a modest synthesis of frontier observations that appear in the works of scholars spanning the past 100 years.

I submit that the rift between nature and humans remains an illusion of perception and seek to plug humans back into nature and view our cultures as no less “natural” than elaborate termite colonies, massive underwater coral reefs, or the photosynthesis of chlorophyll. By employing my model for understanding the function of cultures, we can interpret and at times quantify the various consequences of the Us vs. Them model in our modern landscape.
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Introduction

The word frontier is not about to go away, for it will always hold a privileged place in the American cultural lexicon. By refusing to contest its meaning with our new understanding of the past, historians simply concede its use to others who continue to believe in, or perhaps long for, imperialist chronicles.

--John Mack Faragher

I began this thesis as an exploration into the presence of demonic place names in the American West. After creating a map that displayed the nearly 2,000 names, I found that the West held no monopoly in this regard and abandoned my initial conclusion that aridity compelled travelers to react negatively to western landscapes. My work soon deserted the provincial focus of demonic place names for the source of their parentage, the dualist tradition of Abrahamic religion. While I retained my analysis of demonic place names as a corollary of dualism—the doctrine that reality consists of two opposing elements—my research expanded to include some of the oldest recorded myths as well as yesterday's news. At times wishing I had remained in my happy yet miniscule sea, I soon found a focus for the grandiose theme that served to harmonize the vast ocean of literature I chose to plumb. The idea of the frontier emerged as the logical consequence of dualism and appeared as the primary agent in historical issues surrounding our use and perception of the environment and foreign cultures.

Upon receiving my formal proposal for the “Frontier in history” as the subject of my thesis, my advisor Dan Flores scribbled, “Some will say it’s a hubris beyond scale to try this” on my returned copy. Never satisfied with the more traditional, yet abstruse, thesis topics floating about my head, I felt I had struck upon a treatise that either would consume my will to enter academia altogether, or might well prove the foundation of my life’s work. While Dan remained concerned that my topic demanded a deduction, as he

put it, of "all of human history," today I believe he would recognize that I tread little new land in this thesis. The ideas of the "frontier" and dualism have provided fodder for academics of all stripes, spawning the fields of western history and, by extension, environmental history within the past 150 years. Of course, outside of the purview of history, humanities scholars have gleaned valuable insights into the interplay between cultures at their borders (frontiers). Likewise, "harder" disciplines within the sciences have been mining the possible effects that eons of evolution have wrought on the way our species perceives the world as codified in our genome. Too, the "bone collectors" in the fields of paleontology and anthropology have been, literally, unearthing tangible clues to the human experience, seeking to understand the processes by which we emerged as a humble primate to become masters of our environment. However, what I seek to advance is a synthesis of art, literature, myth, and the most recent discoveries of the scientific community and weave it into a meaningful, hopefully comprehensible, human story.

Throughout my thesis, I integrate recent findings from the field of evolutionary psychology to tease out the impact of human evolution on our perception—an influence that underlies all cultural traditions. Although the field is burgeoning with new work, I rely predominantly on the work of E.O. Wilson and allied scholars. Wilson's primary contribution rests in what he calls "Biophilia," which manifests itself in our "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes." Thus, "distinguishing dangerous from benign topographies, and for discriminating between potentially nourishing habitats and less promising sites," writes fellow traveler Michael E. Soulé, "should be simple and
deeply embossed in the brain and the genes that produce it." Therefore, I argue that a genetic inclination toward dualism informs our immediate perception of the world around us and our myths simply seek to codify that perception of our relationships with natural environments and human kin.

I trace my use of evolutionary psychology to illuminate historical trends, however, back to the work of historian Dan Flores, whose book *The Natural West* colors my own writing in no small part. By following the latest findings in fields outside his own, and by incorporating them in meaningful ways, Dan and his methodology continue to instruct me on how to craft exciting yet sound history.

While I stand on the shoulders of many scholars throughout this thesis, the pedigree of this study traces directly to the work of geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. His treatments on the "affective bond between people and place"—what he calls *Topophilia*—anticipated similar findings by years. Topophilia serves as a corollary to Biophilia and explains much of the human dualist perception of land that colors certain places as both threatening and evil, or as habitable and good. Tuan’s insightful illustrations of various cosmologies from throughout the world impelled me to investigate human myths in order to discern how culture could emphasize frontiers, which always served to delineate a concrete "Us" and "Them." The ubiquitous nature of dualist traditions convinced me of a genetic origin cradled in the human animal that not only compels us to think of the world in terms of a relationship between a “center” and “periphery,” but assigns value based on proximity to the core of our society. For Tuan,

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the source of our genetic predisposition to dualist thought rested in the very land that
spawned us, "The earth surface possesses certain sharp gradients: for instance, between
land and water, mountain and plain, forest and savanna, but even where these don't exist
man has the tendency to differentiate his space ethnocentrically, distinguishing between
sacred and the profane, center and periphery, the home estate and the common range."
6
Finally, Tuan's observation that the frontier "is both spatial and temporal" drove me to
find tangible examples of the dualist legacy; particularly, in the spatial form of demonic
place names and city walls, but also in the temporal evolution of a cultural emphasis on
dualist myths (e.g. hell, Eden, etc.).7 Finally, topophilia has its counterpart in
topophobia, the inclination humans possess to avoid landscapes marked by extremes of
temperature, topographic relief, or precipitation; in short, the penchant to avoid
landscapes unsuitable for healthy human habitation.

If Tuan provided the foundation of my analysis, then famed professors of myth
and religion Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade supplemented my work with universal
human methods of reacting to and incorporating new environments into our cultural
spheres. Eliade illuminated this process, what he called "cosmicization," and found that
it pervaded every human culture. The dualist tradition explains why cultures possessed a
mechanism to incorporate, or cosmicize, "wild, uncultivated regions" that "are
assimilated to chaos" into the friendly realm populated by Us. "This is why," Eliade
writes "when possession is taken of a territory...rites are performed that symbolically

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6 Ibid, 15.
7 Yi-Fu Tuan, Cosmos & Hearth: A Cosmopolite's Viewpoint, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
repeat the act of Creation. Those humans who participated in the process of cosmicization always referenced their core beliefs, myths, and images from their dominant culture. Eliade and Campbell recognized that these beliefs served as an *axis mundi*—or meeting point between heaven and earth—that served to continually sanctify Us and the lands cosmicized into our hallowed sphere. Likewise, such myths profaned and instantly cast any lands or people encountered across the frontier as enemies to the order of Us. In effect, the cultural emphasis of dualism envisioned a Them always associated with the most archetypal opponents of civilization.

Campbell used two Arabic phrases associated with Islamic cosmology that I find the most appropriate terms for describing the differences between the *dar al'islām* (or, realm of submission) and the *dar al'harb* (or, realm of war). Although the Judaeo-Christian analogues of Christendom vs. Heathendom and The Chosen People vs. Gentiles do the same trick, I prefer the Arabic for its specificity. These two terms best delineate the land, people, plants, and animals that we include in our community and associate with our *axis mundi* and those elements of the world that we associate with the chaos that threatens to dissolve it. Only a short leap remains to plug in a boundary between these realms before conceiving of the frontier process as a primary agent in shaping human history.

While I endeavor to explain the origins of the process throughout this thesis, grounding the frontier dynamic in tangible case studies that illuminate this omnipresent force is a primary goal of my study. In doing so, my focus gravitates to the

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historiography of the frontier in the history of the American West. As such, I devote an entire chapter to explaining how the idea of the frontier went from the essential condition of American life in the late 19th century, to a corrupted historical cul-de-sac unfit for a modern, multicultural world. One of many “Founding Fathers” of Western and Environmental history, Frederick Jackson Turner, wrote in 1893 that “to study” the advance of the frontier, “the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history.”

Contrast with that the statement by the “Founding Mother” of “new western history,” Patricia Nelson Limerick, that an “abstract” frontier stands as “an unsubtle concept in a subtle world,” and one finds a 100-year arc enclosed by diametrically opposed bookends. The scholarly dissonance is bridgeable enough, and I submit my own peace accord in the chapter; however, I challenge the new school of western history to adopt a frontier process, stripped of Turner’s Victorian naivété, to supplement their laudable inclusion of place and minority voices in the narrative of American history.

Finally, in keeping with the post-modern fad among academics I admit I have a small axe to grind in choosing this topic. It is my belief that by understanding the origins and historical legacy of the frontier, humans can learn to shape better societies in the present by annihilating the withered remnants of boundaries in the modern world. As I reveal in my final chapter, the frontiers between cultures and between humans and the land they inhabit have been vanishing in the wake of generations of popular struggle. In short, the Us vs. Them mentality is fading. It is my hope that academic exercises such as

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this can help provide the deathblow to the cultural institutions that emphasize the boundaries between humans, for our most pressing issues of environmental collapse and state violence remain predicated on this mentality. The British enlightenment thinker Edmund Burke recognized in the 18th century that “To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary.” However, Burke wrote, “When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.” Like the new western historians, who attempt to familiarize us with different cultures in an effort to breed tolerance and understanding, it is my ultimate goal to show the reader that the frontiers between us are of our own creation and, as such, can come crashing down if we so choose. If we can achieve that, then one day when we look across the land previously occupied by our tangible and spatial frontiers, we will finally recognize that the faces staring back at us are not those of devils and monsters, but of ourselves.

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Chapter 1
The Origins of Us vs. Them: The Western Ancients

Mythologies and religions, are great poems and, when recognized as such, point infallibly through things and events to the ubiquity of a “presence” or “eternity” that is whole and entire in each... The first condition, therefore, that any mythology must fulfill if it is to render life to modern lives is that of cleansing the doors of perception to the wonder, at once terrible and fascinating, of ourselves and of the universe of which we are the ears and eyes and the mind.

—Joseph Campbell

In his colossal, multi-volume Historical Atlas of World Mythology, Joseph Campbell posits two possible causes for the striking similarities among humanity’s myths: on one hand, myths spring from a shared human genetic legacy, which informs perception and interaction with the world around us; on the other hand, a myth may stem from a shared antecedent that dispersed its message through cultural transmission. While Campbell notes several examples of the cultural diffusion of myths, his astonishment at the similarities among human societies separated by, at times, thousands of miles of sea and tens of thousands of years of history persuaded him that our shared physiology best explains humanity’s universal need and development of methods to understand the world around us. In short, our myths grow, die, and change in order to represent the story of our species.

The human will to create metaphors of the world around us dwells so deep in our genes that even our extinct hominid ancestors—as modern archaeology slowly reveals—dabbled in that once-thought uniquely human trait known as culture. Most people know that modern chimpanzees engage in tool and weapon use; however, fewer know that Neanderthals buried their dead—often leaving kin in fetal positions that suggests a belief

in an afterworld. Yet, beyond these undeniable expressions of primate ingenuity, modern scholars have been loathe to credit recent discoveries in the field of archaeology.

In 1999 Lutz Fiedler, the state archaeologist of Hesse in Germany, unearthed a six-centimeter stone object near the city of Tan-Tan in Morocco. The object, largely the product of natural processes, contains human-made grooves that accent the shape of the stone—enhancing its similarity to a human form. An academic firestorm erupted immediately after the find among archaeologists arguing whether the object, in fact, bears markings suggestive of human alteration. The debate rages on and deservedly so, for the stakes are high. Fiedler unearthed the Tan-Tan object in a stratum of earth dating to the Middle Acheulian period, which lasted from 500,000 to 300,000 years ago—leaving scholars to deduce that either Homo heidelbergensis or Homo erectus crafted the object at least 170,000 years before the advent of anatomically modern humans. Likewise, a construction crew unearthed stone-carved faces in Italy during 2001 that may date to 200,000 years ago. If corroborated by exhaustive scrutiny, these objects would confirm the marvelous capacity of the human animal and its close relatives to mold profound aspects of our existence into tangible form.

Much of that human story takes place at the frontiers of human cultures—the boundaries that separate humans from uninhabited land or another culture. While the frontier in history, as the subtitle suggests, proves the focus of this thesis as a whole, this chapter concerns itself with explaining some of the earliest recorded frontier archetypes. Likewise, briefly sketching how they evolved, through cultural transmission and reinvention, explains the way humans perceived frontiers throughout history, on through

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4 Paul Rincon, "Oldest Sculpture” found in Morocco, BBC News Online, (23 May, 2003).
to our own time. Therefore, this history of the frontier begins with the Mediterranean, Levantine, and Persian forbears of the medieval Europeans who would reach across the yawning seas and reconnect what historian Alfred W. Crosby termed "The Seams of Pangea." In order to understand the Europeans of 1492 we must first examine the history of their antecedents. While this chapter concerns itself primarily with the cultural influences that established a medieval European perception, following chapters will supplement culture with a discussion of biology's impact on perception. After establishing the ubiquity of metaphoric expression among various hominids, the best place to begin seems to be at the first great revolution in economy, ecology, and thought modern humans made—the Agricultural Revolution.

The Neolithic Revolution: The First Space Age

Approximately 10,000 years ago, some humans abandoned the subsistence strategy based on hunting herd animals and gathering various edible plant life for a sedentary existence dedicated to harvesting domesticated life forms. The simultaneous adoption of agriculture by disparate peoples ranging from China to Egypt indicates a causal factor that either pushed humans—through necessity—to adopt agriculture or pulled them—by bestowing rewards—to assume a radically different subsistence strategy.

Pulitzer Prize winning author Jared Diamond suspects that the double whammy of drastic climatic change after the Pleistocene Ice Ages coupled with the rising "skill and numbers of human hunters" decimated wildlife and impelled hunter-gatherers to abandon

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an “increasingly less rewarding” lifestyle.⁷ To be sure, the adoption of domesticated plants and animals was not universal and among those peoples who did choose domesticates, some societies preferred agriculture to pastoral livestock and vice versa.

However, cities soon followed in the wake of agriculture. Populations exploded with the development of granaries, which could store surplus food. While many scholars contend that the adoption of agriculture created an immediate decline in life expectancy, many also note the auto catalytic nature of the Agricultural Revolution (aka Neolithic Revolution). Again, Jared Diamond best explains the auto catalytic process as,

one that catalyzes itself in a positive feedback cycle, going faster and faster once it has started. A gradual rise in population densities impelled people to obtain more food, by rewarding those who unconsciously took steps toward producing it. Once people began to produce food and become sedentary, they could shorten the birth spacing and produce still more people, requiring still more food.⁸

While populations bloomed on the largesse of the fields and pastures, the Neolithic Revolution demanded a radically new mythology for a people accustomed to transience and displaying deep connections with animals of the hunt. While drastically different mythologies occur in primarily gatherer societies, those societies of the northern latitudes that relied principally on the hunt viewed animals as “a kind of multiplied individual, having as its seed or essential monad a semi-human, semi-animal, magically potent Master Animal” that demanded propitiation if it was expected to yield its body to the hunters again.⁹

This mythology, commonly known as animism, did not recognize death since material bodies represented mere “costumes put on by otherwise invisible monadic

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⁸ Diamond, 111.
⁹ Campbell, Myths to Live By, 40.
entities, which can pass back and forth from an invisible other world into this, as though through an intangible wall.”\textsuperscript{10} Researchers, including Dan Flores of the University of Montana, argue that such myths, when combined with other ecological factors, can contribute to unsustainable hunting practices—further serving Diamond’s explanation for the cause of the Neolithic Revolution.\textsuperscript{11} While we move now to the new myths that emerged in response to the adoption of agriculture, keep the hunter-gatherer mythology in mind for it explains much of the cultural confusion experienced by Europeans and Native Americans upon contact in the fifteenth century and beyond.

If the seemingly immortal animals of the hunt informed hunter-gatherer myths, then the seed and the heavens represented the genesis of Neolithic myths. Humans soon realized that the new focus of their efforts—domesticated plants—required a different knowledge than that demanded by the hunt. Whereas the animals of the hunt required only a sense of where their physical bodies roamed and knowledge of how to convert those bodies into sustenance for hunter-gatherers to live, domestic plants required an intimate sense of time.

With the auto catalytic process of domestication churning out more people than the land required to yield successful crops, a specialization of labor emerged—providing the new cities with a class of people whose only job lay in watching the skies above. These astronomers parading as priests soon bore fruit; they discovered that the heavens contained mathematically observable cycles. Soon, every domesticated plant possessed

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
its attendant heavenly marker, leading to the advent of the zodiac and calendar. These markers—the sun, moon, and five observable planets—became the basis of not only the zodiac, but influenced every myth that followed their discovery.

The moon offered a twenty-eight day cycle in which it shed its body, only to emerge again and reconstitute itself—hence, the month. The sun provided a longer cycle wherein the angle of its voyage over the earth shrank during the fall and winter months and grew during the spring and summer—the year was born, segmented into the four periods between the solstices and equinoxes. Calendars soon emerged as grand structures dedicated to worshipping the sun and as practical timepieces. Archaeologists continue to discover complex calendars the world over, so that now nearly every agricultural society—ranging from ancient Egypt to the Aztec—possesses an attendant calendar.

Reported by archaeologists in August of 2003, a circular observatory in Goseck, Germany, which marks the winter solstice, stands as the oldest known calendar yet discovered—dated to 4,900 B.C. A disk unearthed 25 kilometers away from the Goseck Observatory near the town of Nebra represented the “oldest realistic representation of the cosmos yet found.” Dating from 1,600 B.C., it depicts two arcs that mark the sun’s position at sunrise and sunset on the summer and winter solstices. The Nebra disk also contains a representation of the Pleiades constellation, which leaves the northern sky in the spring and reappears in the fall, a most appropriate messenger for agriculturalists.

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12 The priest/astronomers soon realized that by possessing this esoteric knowledge of the heavens they could argue connections between the zodiac and other events—such as birth, death, and the fortunes of empire. Therefore, the corruption of astronomy into astrology can be viewed as a survival mechanism of a priestly class either devoid of new insights or happy to exploit an unknowing populace with minimal effort. The legacy continues to this day; just check any major newspaper or fashion magazine for zodiacal advice.

These facts represent the considerable level of technology and the scientific knowledge attained by early farmers. While astronomers divined the secrets of the heavens, myths arose to comprehend the new lifestyle as well. To early farmers, the seed signified a miraculous transformation of a hard, lifeless mote to a flourishing bounty of crops. To account for this perennial miracle, intensely complex myths emerged and—with the myths pertaining to the heavens—mark a unique separation between hunter-gatherer culture and that of agriculturalists. The most appropriate myth that illustrated the new order rests in the Greek story of Persephone (aka Kore).

Fittingly, Persephone was conceived of Zeus, the god of the heavens, and Demeter, goddess of agriculture and the soil. While picking flowers in a meadow, Gaia, the earth goddess, sent up an astoundingly fertile plant at the command of Hades, god of the underworld. When Persephone approached the marvel, the earth opened up beneath her and Hades spirited her away to the underworld in a chariot of gold. After Phoebus, the sun god, informed Demeter of her daughter’s abduction, she resigned from the pantheon of the gods in protest and grief. Demeter assumed the form of an old woman and wept endlessly over the Well of the Virgin at Eleusis in Greece, appealing to Hades for her daughter’s return. Receiving no succor, Demeter cursed the soil for an entire year—the world of plant life ceased. After all the gods of Olympus pleaded with her in vain to return the fertility of the Earth, Zeus forced Persephone’s release and Demeter relented. Persephone, however, consumed a pomegranate seed while in Hades,

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14 The Goseck Observatory emerged only 500 years after agriculturalists entered modern Germany—a testament to human adaptation to place and observation. See Ibid.
obligating her to return for four months of every year, in which time the soil would prove sterile.\textsuperscript{15}

The ancient Greeks built an elaborate collection of temple structures at Eleusis to celebrate this myth. In addition to the Well of the Virgin, there stood a Hall of the Mystics in which the rites of Persephone took place. After replicating the grief of Demeter, participants rejoiced in the return of Persephone by elevating an ear of grain. At this moment, according to Joseph Campbell, "A bronze gong was struck...a young priestess representing Kore herself appeared, and the pageant terminated with a paean of joy."\textsuperscript{16}

Campbell does well to point out the similarities between this ceremony and the Catholic mass—the grain, as either cut stalk or host, represents the reconstituted god who was once dead. Thus viewed, the agricultural gods stood as metaphors for the seasonal patterns observed in domestic plants and the myths surrounding their worship offered a human connection to the natural processes around them. The old animism of the hunter gatherers gave rise to the concept of \textit{genii loci}—or guardian spirits that represent the essence of a place—such as Demeter, that were arranged in a three-tiered hierarchy constituting the heavens, earth, and underworld, respectively ruled by the brothers Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. While the three gods can be correctly viewed as constituting the chief deity of their tier, Zeus—that is to say the heavens—stands prominent above all others. Thus, Greek cosmology conceived of a hierarchy among their cosmology that proved ripe for dualism.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 185-6.
The old gods of the hunter-gatherer age remained in this cosmology; however, they received supporting or minor roles in the pantheon of the gods. In this way, we can view the emergence of sedentary agricultural mythologies in much the same manner as the Pan myth. Pan, god of fecund nature and the flock, when weaned from his wet-nurse nymph, fed so intensely that "milk spurted fiercely out of the nymph’s breasts and flooded the sky to become the milky way."17 While the new agricultural order allowed for Pan and the other gods of raw nature, soon the city would breed a new mindset that dichotomized humanity from nature—placing its gods outside of the world and relegating the old genii loci to the dour underworld. Thus, once the old gods of the hunt and the early pastoral life spawned the new agricultural order, they receded in importance and awaited a new life in the future dualist myths as opponents of civilization.

I must emphasize that the human/nature dichotomy and dualism did not suddenly appear during the Neolithic, only that it became magnified by human myths. If one must find its origin (likely impossible), I suggest the intense need most vertebrates have for their close kin—particularly apparent in the developmentally premature human infant. While the frontier likely owes its origin to the genetic and material investment of family, the development of the city based on astronomical observation stands as the earliest perceived bifurcations of humans from nature and each other, as instituted in myth. This cultural emphasis on the frontier separating humans from an Other, supplies the first study of the Us from Them mentality.

**Humans and Nature: Severing the Cord**

As cities grew in size and population, members of the ruling elite realized that efficiency and security demanded a new city-planning system to replace the dominant haphazard, organic growth pattern. Planners culled their solution from the perceived order in the heavens. Hyginus Gromaticus, at the beginning of his treatise, wrote that the origin of city planning “is heavenly, and its practice invariable....Boundaries are never drawn without reference to the order of the universe, for the deumani are set in line with the course of the sun, while the cardines follow the axis of the sky.”\(^\text{18}\) The deumani are roads running east-west, while the cardines run north-south. Before a planner could lay roads, the center had to be found.

The axis mundi, or point where the three tiers (heavens, earth, and underworld) united, marked the heart of the city and the home of the people’s primary temple. The surveyors—elevated to the status of hero for the act of founding a city in the hitherto human-less void—would sacrifice an animal and take auspices from its entrails. A haruspex (liver-diviner) extracted the animal’s liver and would painstakingly examined the organ. Joseph Rykwert, in his exhaustive study of ancient Mediterranean cities, The Idea of a Town, provided the reason for the liver’s role in founding a city, “The liver is a large and delicate organ which at any time contains a sixth of the stuff of life, the body’s blood.” “So the liver,” Rykwert continued, “was thought of as the seat of life, and it followed that in any animal consecrated to the gods, and whose every smallest movement was anxiously observed, the liver, as the focus of its being, would in a particular way become a mirror of the world at the moment of sacrifice.”\(^\text{19}\)


Satisfied with the results, the next steps rest in orienting the surrounding landscape to the *axis mundi*—what Pliny called an umbilicus or navel—by marking the course of the sun with “an upright bronze rod,” which “was set in the centre of a circle, probably on a marble tablet.” After observing the shadow of the rod “and the two points at which its tip touched the circumference of the circle before and after midday were marked and joined; the chord was bisected, and the line joining the centre point of the chord to the rod was the *cardo*, while the chord itself was the *decumanus*.20 The two principle roads—intersecting at the umbilicus—the *decumanus maximus* (east-west) and *cardo maximus* (north-south) partitioned the land into four equal squares, through which smaller *cardines* and *decumani* intersected.

While this system of planning could extend over the landscape infinitely, necessity required that a city mark itself off from the surrounding chaos—the uninhabited land beyond. Plutarch writes that “The founder,” referring to Romulus’s founding of Rome, “fitted a brazen ploughshare to the plough, and, yoking together a bull and a cow, drove himself a deep line or furrow round the bounds; while the business of all those that followed after was to see that whatever was thrown up should be turned all inwards towards the city, and not to let any clod lie outside....and where they designed to make a gate, there they took out the share, carried the plough over, and left a space; for which reason they consider the whole wall as holy, except where the gates are.”21 The boundaries of the city proper and the surrounding farms represented the only barrier between divine order and beast-ridden chaos extant in the surrounding lands; therefore, these frontiers were imbued with extraordinary power and significance. Thus, with the

20 Ibid, 50.
21 As quoted in Ibid, 29.
The advent of the city the dualist tendencies of the human animal emerged in tangible form as a protective wall, ritualized lines, and plowed field.

On the Capitol in Rome, the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus contained a shrine of Terminus—god of boundary lines—where the public could worship. Farmers, however, needed only to revere him at the boundary stones in their fields. The laws of humanity extended to these stones as well for "Numa Pompilius decreed that whoever ploughed up a boundary stone would be outlawed/cursed/, he and his oxen." Whoever disturbed the terminal stones infringed on the divine accord between humans and the three tiers, which threatened the community with destruction. Enforcing dualism through law provided only one way for our ancient European antecedents to emphasize and codify the dualist tradition.

After the founder marked the bounds with his ploughshare, the citizens would symbolically colonize—what Mircea Eliade called cosmicize—the new city by mixing earth from their previous homes with the newly demarcated land. Likewise, fire from the mother city’s hearth transferred to the colony and symbolically lighted the newly constructed hearth—effectively assimilating the new land to the order of the home country. All these acts served to make sacred what once had been profane chaos and was necessary whenever they pushed their cultural frontier over unfamiliar territory. When humans began demarking the bounds of profane and sacred space the order of the genii loci began to crumble. Likewise, the gap between humanity and "nature" yawned measurably with the advent of a rigid frontier mentality. The land of the gods became ever more specific. No longer did humans conceive of the entire Earth as alive
(animism); now the benevolent genii loci dwelled in designated gardens and sanctuaries—occasionally entering the world of humans to test or defend us.

Likewise, Gaia—and her non-Greek counterparts—became associated with the chaotic wilderness beyond the bound of humanity. Her fecundity often spawned monsters, which lurked in the dark woods and blazing deserts. Gaia’s children, the Titans, represented raw nature and ruled before the time of Zeus. After a fantastic cosmic war, however, Zeus ushered the Titans to the pit of Hades where they endured unending punishment for their deeds—Sisyphus rolled a gigantic boulder up a hill repeatedly; Atlas bore the heavens on his shoulders; and Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock, causing a vulture to devour his liver only to have it grow back continually. This mythological articulation remains fascinating for it represents a dualism—although muted—in Greek mythology between good and evil deities and stands as one of the first uses of the underworld for punitive purposes. Slowly the divinity bled from nature until another mythology—that of the Hebrews—would excise it from the world altogether.

**Emphasizing Dualism**

Dualism occurs when a mythology accounts for the presence of good and evil by bisecting the world of the gods and associating one group with good, the other with evil. The Greek myth, despite the Titan and Pandora myths, never fully committed itself to dualism—gods could commit malicious or benevolent acts equally.

However, Zarathushtra (Zoroaster in Greek), living during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. in Persia, established the first truly dualist myth. Remarkably,

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24 These are conservative estimates of his life, recent figures place his life anywhere between 1,500-1,000 B.C.
Zarathushtra’s mythology—comprised in the Zend-E-Avesta scriptures—also represents the earliest movement away from polytheism in the direction of monotheism.

Zarathushtra explained that two principle deities commanded the camps of good and evil gods—Ahura Mazda represented the forces of light (Ahuras) while Ahriman (aka Angra Mainyu) represented the forces of darkness (Daevas).25 The daevas became evil by their own free will according to the Avesta: “Between the two [spirits] the false gods (daevas) also did not choose rightly, / For while they pondered they were beset by error, / So that they chose the Worst Mind.”26

Ahriman, “despairing, yet still possessed of enormous power…bursts forth from the outer darkness and attacks the sky, rending it apart, and plunging through the atmosphere toward the earth.” Ahriman tunnels a vast hole through the earth and emerges in the primal waters of the underworld, “Having now for the first time introduced violence and disorder into the cosmos.”27 The underworld, blighted by Ahriman’s presence, became a land of punishment for the damned—ensconced with devils (the word owes its origin to the Daevas) and burning seas of flame. Ahriman continues to corrupt the world by tempting Mashye and Mashyane—the first humans—into sinning through their own free will. Jeffrey Burton Russell, historian of religion and the devil, succinctly describes the consequences:

The result is, as it was to be in Christianity, ambivalent: on the one hand, the couple gain knowledge and understanding of the arts of civilization. They learn to make clothing, to cook, to work with wood and metal. But chiefly they learn suffering. Into a world hitherto perfect now intrude strife, hatred, disease, poverty, and death.28

25 Interestingly, the Hindus shared the same mythology; however, they associated the Ahuras with evil and the Daevas with good.
28 Ibid, 114.
A savior called Shoshyans—the product of a virgin impregnated by Zarathushtra—redeemed Mashye and Mashyane. Shoshyans travels to the underworld and raises the deceased—reunifying body and soul.\textsuperscript{29} The impact Zarathushtra and his dualist myth had on Judaeo-Christian mythology proves striking.\textsuperscript{30} The emphasis of dualism would establish a tradition (at least in the Western world) of creating cosmographies that read a moral geology into the land—usually the result of sin, as in the case of Ahriman’s descent into the earth. Thus, the boundaries between Us and our environments strengthened noticeably with Zarathushtra’s teachings.

\textbf{Nature Vs. Humanity: The Human Heros}

With the amplification of dualism and elaboration of the dichotomization of humanity and nature, a new myth emerged to explain the relationship between civilization and the perilous nature beyond the gates of the city. The hero or redeemer myth provided humans with an archetype that conceived the human/nature relationship not as one of mutual connection, reciprocity and complementarity—as in animism—but the human now represented a conqueror of the formless abyss outside the community.\textsuperscript{31} The following foray into the voyages of three heroes gleans a clear picture of the hero archetype. This archetype served to cement the dualist conception that imagined tangible frontiers between cities and the natural systems they relied upon. It also acted as a moral code for behavior in the \textit{dar al’harb} (realm of war) just outside the city gates.

\textsuperscript{29} Zoroastrian myth culled from Ibid, 98-120.
\textsuperscript{30} Scholars advance that the message of Zarathushtra influenced Hebrews during the Babylonian Captivity until 538 B.C. when Cyrus the Great captured the empire and instituted toleration of worship in Jerusalem.
\textsuperscript{31} While the Ecofeminist critique of this transition from benevolent earth mothers to heroic male redeemers of a chaotic feminine nature (Eve, Lilith, Pandora) elicits curiosity, the movement fetters itself to a bankrupt criticism of Western culture, since they connect every social and ecological failure wrought by humanity to the fall of the earth goddess.
Gilgamesh, an historical king of Uruk in Babylonia (present-day Iraq) lived about 2,700 B.C. The fact that epics emerged from his rule may establish the historicity of other famed heroes. The epic of the Gilgamesh myth was committed to stone tablets through a method of writing called cuneiform around 2,000 B.C. The largest surviving version originates from twelve stone tablets unearthed from the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria from 669-633 B.C., at Nineveh. The tablets declare that Gilgamesh “built the sheltered wall of Uruk,” assigning him to the founder/hero category described earlier.  

Enkidu, Gilgamesh’s close friend (possibly twin), represents wild nature and runs with the beasts of the wilderness. Enkidu, however, corrupts his relationship through a “fall” archetype slightly different from others but yielding similar, ambiguous results:

For six days and seven nights Enkidu coupled with the [human] whore.  
And after he had satisfied himself with her charms  
He turned to his friends the desert animals.  
When the gazelles saw Enkidu they fled from him  
And the wild creatures of the desert did the same.  
Enkidu was afraid and his strength failed him,  
And his knees grew feeble when he tried to follow the animals;  
He could not run as swiftly as he did before.  
But he had become astute, sensitive and understanding.

Enkidu and Gilgamesh collaborate and venture into a vast cedar forest to face the frightening god of nature, Humbaba, whose “roar is a raging torrent;/Fire comes out of his mouth,/and he himself is sudden and violent death.” Believing slaying Humbaba will “remove evil from the face of the earth,” they soon reached the gates to the cedar forest “And they met there a demon/Whom Humbaba had appointed as guard.”

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33 Ibid, 24.  
34 Ibid, 33.  
Venturing on through the awe-inspiring forest, Gilgamesh exemplified the hero archetype of human conquering nature:

And when Gilgamesh began to cut the cedar trees
With his hatchet,
Humbaba heard the noise and was angry.
He grew violent and raged:
"Who intrudes on my mountain?
Who has disturbed the serenity of the forest
And its growing trees?
Who is the one who has cut down the cedar trees?"  

Gilgamesh and Enkidu, paralyzed with terror at the power of Humbaba, beseeched the sun god Shamash, who empowered them to capture Humbaba:

They caught him and held him fast, and he surrendered to them
And he begged them to spare his life and take him prisoner,
Promising he would serve Gilgamesh
    and give him the enchanted forest
And its trees.
Gilgamesh softened and almost spared him,
But Enkidu urged him to kill him.
They killed him and cut off his head.  

Thus, the Gilgamesh myth conceives of the human domination of nature as necessary 1) for the survival of civilization and 2) capable of bestowing blessings in the form of technical knowledge, artifacts, or resources. Despite the clear message of human authority over intractable nature, the Epic of Gilgamesh contains a warning about unbridled despoliation and a lament for a time before humanity bent animals to our whim:

You coveted the many-coloured roller bird,
Then struck him and broke his wing,
And he alighted in the gardens and now laments:
'My wing, my wing!'
You desired the lion, perfect in strength,
But you dug to trap him seven and seven holes.
You coveted the horse, magnificent in contest,
But you inflicted on him the whip, the spur and the harness
And sentenced him to a race a distance of seven leagues.  

36 Ibid, 41.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid, 45.
The *Argonautica*, the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, operates on much the same level as the hero myth in the Gilgamesh epic.\(^{39}\) Like most Greek myths, Apollonius of Rhodes (born c. 270 B.C.) committed to writing what was a memorized oral poem.\(^{40}\) According to Apollonius, King Pelias, upon hearing a prophesy foretelling of his death at the hands of Jason, sends the hero on a doomed mission into the border realms of Greece. After propitiating the gods—who control nearly every action in the myth—Jason and his band of Argonauts (Heracles included) embarked on their voyage for the Golden Fleece.\(^{41}\) As they encountered new lands in the *terra incognita*\(^{42}\) of the Black Sea, they established many altars to the Hellenistic gods, and proceed to name the landforms after themselves and their home country. Eliade would note that they cosmicize the unknown by recreating the moment of creation—in this case, altar building and place naming serve to push the frontier back. Throughout the voyage, Jason undergoes several trials; however, he eventually captures the Golden Fleece from the archetypal chaos dragon (with the help of Medea and Aphrodite) and returns the boon to his home country. Again, a male hero ventured into the void, what Apollonius of Rhodes calls the Pall of Doom, and returned with a prize. Apollonius described the land beyond the Greek frontier by employing a moral geology that linked the Greek spiritual realm with the material, mortal one:

No star, no moonlight, pierced the funeral dark. Black chaos had descended on them from the sky, or had this darkness risen from the nethermost abyss? They could not tell whether they were drifting through Hades or still on the water.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{39}\) Some Historians argue for an historical voyage dating from 1,400 B.C. or, perhaps, 2,000 B.C.

\(^{40}\) Apollonius succeeded Eratosthenes (276 B.C.-194 B.C.) as head of the library at Alexandria.


\(^{42}\) Unknown and unexplored region. Cartographers often left these areas blank but might also include sketches of monsters or demons.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, 193.
After visiting hero myths of Mesopotamia and Greece, the march westward through time brings us to Rome and the hero myth of Aeneas. Written in 19 B.C., by the Roman poet Virgil, the *Aeneid* supplies scholars with Roman perceptions of outer lands and their underworld. Aeneas, one of the few survivors of the fall of Troy as told in Homer’s *Iliad*, flees his burning homeland in the wake of war. Aeneas, perhaps, represents one of the founder/heroes mentioned earlier, for Virgil notes:

...with a plow Aeneas marks
the city’s limits and allots the houses:
he calls one district “Troy,” one “Ilium.”44

Plagiarized heavily by Dante Alighieri at the turn of the fourteenth-century, the *Aeneid* conceives of the door to hell as an actual physical location on the surface of the earth, clearly bringing a moral geology to bear on the temporal realm. Similar to Pliny the Elder’s description of “breathing holes” and the “jaws of hell,”45 Virgil’s depiction suggests surface volcanism—linking the lower and middle tiers of the *axis mundi*—and applied a moral geology to his own Roman homeland:

There was a wide-mouthed cavern, deep and vast
and rugged, sheltered by a shadowed lake
and darkened groves; such vapor poured from those
black jaws to heaven’s vault, no bird could fly
above unharmed (for which the Greeks have called
the place ‘Aornos,’ or ‘The Birdless’).46

Virgil populated his underworld with the malevolent children of Gaia, whose job lay in tormenting the damned. After passing into the chthonic realm, Aeneas perceived “Centaurs and double-bodied/ Scyllas; the hundred-handed Briareus;/ The brute of Lerna, hissing horribly;/ Chimaera armed with flames; Gorgons and Harpies;/ And Geryon, the

46 (B. VI, 318-23)
shade that wears three bodies.” Virgil constructs the underworld as a morose pit; whereas, its previous Greco-Roman forms—and its Hebrew analogue Sheol—represented ambiguous realms similar to the Catholic Purgatory. Virgil argues, “Here voices and loud lamentations echo,” and the “the Fields of Mourning” lie. While Hades remains the abode of all human spirits, Virgil notes an articulation of the Greco-Roman underworld that punished certain souls and rewarded others. The oracle Sibyl, Aeneas’s guide, informed the hero of the division:

The night is near, Aeneas, and we waste our time with tears. For here the road divides in two directions: on the right it runs beneath the ramparts of great Dis, this is our highway to Elysium; the wicked are punished on the left—that path leads down to godless Tartarus.

While the Judaeo-Christian myth, in its drive for total dualism, would extract the privileged realm from the underworld and set it in the favored heavens, the following two passages reveal the striking difference between two afterlives—both under the vaulted roof of Hades:

taints so long congealed
cling fast and deep in extraordinary ways. Therefore they are schooled by punishment and pay with torments for their old misdeeds: some there are purified by air, suspended and stretched before the empty winds; for some the stain of guilt is washed away beneath a mighty whirlpool or consumed by fire.

Contrast now, the paradise of Elysium:

They came upon the lands of gladness, glades of gentleness, the Groves of Blessedness—a gracious place. The air is generous; the plains wear dazzling light; they have their very own sun and their own stars.

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47 (B. VI, 373-82, 148)
48 (B. VI, 562) and (B. VI, 577).
49 (B. VI, 714-720)
50 (B. VI, 973-980)
My point is not to establish the interesting nuances of Western myths and thought. I posit that the moral geology so blatantly evident in the hero epics also became manifest in the ancient perception of the world—establishing "good" from "evil" places by associating them with either the morose or favored tier of the axis mundi. While the dominant cultures would inform these images by associating places with benevolent or malicious characters (usually divinities), dualism stands as the mechanism for such practice.

As noted, the Epics of Gilgamesh and Jason represent heroes venturing into a profane void to slay monsters representing a primordial nature in chaos (Humbaba and the Fleece Dragon). By the time of the Roman era and Virgil's Aeneid, the threatening wilderness outside the bounds of the empire had been connected to the now malevolent forces of the underworld. As the myths of the Levant and Mediterranean became ever more dualist, the underworld and earth tiers connected by the axis mundi moved from ambiguous to profane, and finally, to wholly fallen realms. Only the heavenly tier and the ethereal souls that represented it remained sacred. These human myths declared war on the earth, insisting that the grid of the city—planned according to the movement of the sacred heavens—represented the only salvation of fallen nature. The final part of this chapter dedicates itself to explaining the crystallization of that myth.

The Soul vs. the Flesh

While the concept of dualism—the doctrine that reality consists of two elemental opposing forces—likely arose in our genetic past, the ancient Greeks applied the

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51 (B. VI, 846-850)
principle to humanity: distinguishing flesh from spirit. The Greek philosophical orders represented a vast spectrum of thought concerning the nature of human life. The Stoics, on one end, argued that a primal fiery soul animates the cycles of the world; the human soul included. Similarly, the Neo-Platonists argued that the human soul originates in a World Soul; however, they submit that bare matter represented the source of evil.

According to the Neo-Platonists and Pythagoreans, therefore, the body represented evil as revealed in a famous saying of theirs: sōma sēma, or “the body is a tomb.” The Neo-Platonists taught that the soul should seek to purge itself of the body and recognize the material world—including nature—as a mere delusion. Likewise, the Greeks argued for a rigid separation between the concepts of nature (physis)—everything that exists outside humanity—and culture (nomos). They dedicated schools to the study of each and made remarkable insights into the workings of both; yet, they failed to “discover” the secrets of modern ecology and evolution because they did not conceive of any relation between the two concepts.

These remarkable changes in thought—the concepts of duality of good/evil, body/soul, and humans/nature—reveal themselves throughout Christian and Hebrew myths and reinforced the Us vs. Them mentality of the Abrahamic forebears. The Hebrew creation myth, as revealed in the book of Genesis, demonstrates the ascendant idea of dualism for it contains two origin myths. Genesis 2, the older of the two myths, dates from the ninth or eighth century B.C. In it, “the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air,” including humans, “from the dust of the ground.”

53 Genesis 2.19, 2.7.
Later, in chapter three, god walks "in the garden at the time of the evening breeze."\(^{54}\)

Humans, nature, and the deity are made of the same cloth and live in harmony. However, in Genesis 1, dating from the fourth century B.C., the concept of human/nature dualism appears. "In the beginning," we are told, "God created the heavens and the earth."\(^{55}\) The earth, in fact, "was a formless void," until the creator molds it.\(^{56}\) After creating the earth, however, god makes "humankind in [his] image, according to [his] likeness" and grants them "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth."\(^{57}\) If the reader failed to understand the message that humanity represented god's exalted children, the following passage clears any confusion:

> God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food."\(^{58}\)

This creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, removes the deity from the natural world, effectively profaning the entire earth. Humans remained sacred for their resemblance to the creator.

However, with the "fall" of Adam and Eve, god not only banishes humanity from paradise and strips us of our immortality—separating us from the divine—but sets nature against us as well:

> And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the/ voice of your wife/ and have eaten of the tree/ about which I commanded you,/ 'You shall not eat of it,'/ cursed is the ground because/ of you;/ in toil you shall eat of it all the/ days of your life;/ thorns and thistles it shall bring/ forth for you;/ and you shall eat the plants of/ the field./ By the

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\(^{54}\) Genesis 3.8.  
\(^{55}\) Genesis 1.1-1.2.  
\(^{56}\) Genesis 1.2.  
\(^{57}\) Genesis 1.26.  
\(^{58}\) Genesis 1.28-1.30
sweat of your face/ you shall eat bread/ until you return to the ground,/ for out of it you
were taken;/ you are dust/ and to dust you shall return.'59

Thus, the final tie between humans and their creator was severed, leaving us to toil in the
profane earth. The coup de grace,60 quite literally, comes when the first born of
humanity—Cain and Abel—war against each other, resulting in Abel’s death. God
informs Cain how, by murdering his brother, he further damned humanity, establishing
an ever-deepened moral geology:

your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from
the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.
When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive
and a wanderer on the earth.61

Humans vs. Humans

Moral geology can get no richer than by connecting the sin of fratricide to environmental
collapse. While the point is anachronistic, unfortunately, the Hebrew myth missed an
opportunity to belabor the message and establish an ethic binding human health to that of
the land around them. Instead, sin worked like a one-way ratchet, despoiling the land
without the possibility of amelioration—through either the elimination of human sin or a
reverse effect of nature affecting human behavior. In addition to god, nature, and
humanity all in conflict with one another, humans were now at war with themselves. By
the sixth chapter in Genesis, god laments humanity and the effect they wrought on his
creation:

And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to
his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have

59 Genesis 3.17-3.19
60 Deathblow
61 Genesis 4.10-4.12
created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."\(^62\)

Fortunately for humanity, "Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord" and would continue our tenure on the earth, according to the Abrahamic tradition.\(^63\)

Another remarkable aspect of the early texts rests in the fact that dualism had not yet penetrated the primary Hebrew myths. God—despite the fall of humans—remains equal parts guardian and destroyer. However, his wrath, in the face of an ascendant dualist mindset, was often reserved for "evil" Others, existing outside the realm of the "Choosen People." Most Jews, Christians, and Muslims know of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in a rain of fire and brimstone; that act—and others like it—demonstrates the wrath of Yahweh. The following rhetoric from Deuteronomy supplies a better picture of the monist Hebrew deity:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For I lift up my hand to heaven, } & \\
\text{and swear: As I live forever, } & \\
\text{when I whet my flashing sword, } & \\
\text{and my hand takes hold on } & \\
\text{judgment;} & \\
\text{I will take vengeance on my adversaries, } & \\
\text{And will repay those who } & \\
\text{hate me;} & \\
\text{I will make my arrows drunk with } & \\
\text{blood;} & \\
\text{and my sword shall devour flesh } & \\
\text{— with the blood of the slain and } & \\
\text{the captives, } & \\
\text{from the long-haired enemy.} & \end{align*}
\]

\(^64\)

By the second book, Exodus, God clearly selects a people to venerate among all other nations. While punishing his own flock for occasional transgressions, Yahweh now focuses his rage on the surrounding tribes who persist in their idolatry. The Canaanites of the pre-Hebrew Levant suffered most regularly; likely due to their being neighbors of the Hebrews. Yahweh, in fact, beseeches the Hebrews to eradicate the surrounding tribes, arguing that their idolatry omits them from the covenant of the living:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. If it accepts } \\
\text{your terms of peace and surrenders to you, than all the people in it shall serve you at }
\end{align*}
\]

\(^62\) Genesis 6.6-6.7
\(^63\) Genesis 6.8
\(^64\) Deuteronomy 32.40-32.42
forced labor. If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; and when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you. Thus you shall treat all the towns that are very far from you, which are not towns of the nations here. But as for the towns of these people that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the Lord your God has commanded; so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord your God.65

In fact, the place that the neighboring Philistines worshipped their gods Beelzebub and Moloch through human sacrifice—the temple of Tophet in the valley of Hinnom—in Jeremiah becomes the valley of Slaughter and serves as the origin of the Hebrew punitive hell; Gehenna, or burning valley.66 Likewise, the Canaanite god of justice and fertility, Baal, and his Philistine analogue Beelzebub, become the chief devils and tenets of the negative afterworld of Gehenna.67 Modern readers may recognize Beelzebub as Satan’s highest-ranking demon from John Milton’s Paradise Lost; yet, it is the Hebrew legacy that provided Milton with the Lord of Flies (a derogatory moniker applied to the Philistine’s chief god by Hebrews).68

In short: the moral geology that applied dualism to land and “nature” also colonized human perception of each other; particularly when a cultural frontier stood between them.

Myths of War Rooted to an Articulated Underworld

65 Deuteronomy 20.10-20.18
66 Jeremiah 7.30-7.34
67 I cannot help but note here that the same story plays out when the Catholic Spanish encounter the Aztec, whose myths demand regular human sacrifice.
68 The Lucifer myth owes its origin to astronomical observation. Lucifer, or the morning star (actually Venus), rose before the sun and stubbornly lingered after twilight (although as Vespers). Thus, myths the world over treated the morning star as usurper of the sun god and associate it with rebellion and evil. See Isaiah 14.12-14.20 for the Judaeo-Christian Lucifer myth.
The Book of Enoch (second century B.C.) likely provided a bridge from the segmented Hades of the \textit{Aeneid} to the Gehenna of the dualist Hebrew tradition. Just as Sibyl guided Aeneas through Hades, the angel Raphael guides the author through the underworld:

Then I asked regarding all the hollow places: “Why is one separated from the other?”
And he answered me saying: “These three have been made that the spirits of the dead might be separated. And this division has been made for the spirits of the righteous, in which there is the bright spring of water. And this has been made for sinners when they die and are buried in the earth and judgment has not been executed upon them in their lifetime. Here their spirits shall be set apart in this great pain, till the great day of judgment, scourgings, and torments of the accursed for ever, so that there may be retribution for their spirits. There He shall bind them for ever.”

Thus, the Hebrew concept of Sheol (ambivalent land of the dead) gave rise to Gehenna (the punitive, burning hell), effectively twinning the afterworlds—unlike the juxtaposed underworld realms of Elysium (blessed abode) and Tartarus (same as Gehenna) in the Greco-Roman myth. Likewise, with the advent of the demonic counter-deity in the form of rival gods, Judaism acquired a dualist conception of good and evil. Finally, the dualist tones of Judaism would prove so profound that it extended beyond the \textit{bene ha-elahim} (or pantheon of the gods) and into the human realm of nations and tribes.

Naturally, the “Chosen People” of the covenant represented “good,” while the idolatrous savages across the frontier represented the evil threat of chaos, ignorance, and barbarism. Thus, the Song of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy speaks of god’s protection of the chosen, and revilement of all others:

He sustained him in a desert/ land,/ in a howling wilderness waste,/ he shielded him, cared for him,/ guarded him as the apple of/ his eye.

He abandoned God who/ made him,/ and scoffed at the Rock of his/ salvation./ They made him jealous with/ strange gods,/ with abhorrent things they/ provoked him./ They sacrificed to demons,/ not God,/ to deities they had never/ known,/ to new ones recently


\textsuperscript{70} Deuteronomy 32.10
arrived, whom your ancestors had not feared. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.\textsuperscript{71}

In case the message remains unclear, the convert Naaman, in 2 Kings, states explicitly, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”\textsuperscript{72} To distinguish the chosen from the infidels, Yahweh commanded that the chosen take the words of the covenant and “Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”\textsuperscript{73} Any dissent elicited immediate response that first established the dissenter as a representative of the chief rebel Satan, followed by the immediate eradication of the heresy:

If anyone secretly entices you—even if it is your brother, your father’s son or your mother’s son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend—saying, “Let us go worship other gods,” ... Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people. Stone them to death for trying to turn you away from the Lord your God.\textsuperscript{74}

Clearly, the Hebrew myth sought to amplify any physical differences that served to separate Us from Them. In this way, the myth proved to make quite manifest the frontier between cultures, leading to the expected outcome of internecine violence (to root out sedition) and war against any Other living across the rigidly enforced boundary.

After borrowing the Persian Ahriman myth to flesh out the nemesis figures of Baal, Beelzebub, and any other rival gods—the Hebrews possessed a proselytizing cosmology that would heavily inform the two monotheistic religions it spawned in the 2,000 years following the birth of its creation myth in Genesis 2.

**The Jesus Ethic**

\textsuperscript{71} Deuteronomy 32.15-32.18

\textsuperscript{72} 2 Kings 5.15

\textsuperscript{73} Deuteronomy 6.8-6.9. This edict is still practiced by modern Jews.

\textsuperscript{74} Deuteronomy 13.6, 13.8-13.10
Despite the revolutionary message of Jesus of Nazareth, Hebrew cosmology changed little in his wake. Jesus became the inviting face of a wrathful Yahweh—the good cop. Likewise, Christians reduced his message and purpose to that of redeemer of Adam and original sin, glossing over the radical nature of his pronouncements. Jesus recognized the brutal nature of Hebrew mythology and attempted to dampen the myth—disarming it of its hatred of humanity and the natural world. In many ways, Jesus endeavored to repeal the divisions between humanity amplified in the contemporary myths of his time. In Romans, the radical ethic of Jesus emerges:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.\(^{75}\)

Although I argue that “neighbor,” as it appears above, refers to all fellow humans, some may counter that it only applies to those within the covenant. Fortunately, the message of inclusion—as opposed to the intense ethnocentrism witnessed in the Old Testament—emerges clearly:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them....Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.... “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.\(^{76}\)

The battle for the “true” meaning of Jesus’s message would rage for centuries and splinter the Christian and Hebrew adherents into warring sects. Most notable among the Christian heresies stand the Gnostics (from *Gnōthi seauton*, “know thyself”) and the Arians. Although the books of the New Testament emerged between 50 and 100 A.D.,

\(^{75}\) Romans 13.8-13.10
\(^{76}\) Romans 12.14, 12.16-12.18, 12.20-12.21
few years stand between them and the “heresies.” Arising in the fourth century A.D, the Arian heresy accepted most of the New Testament; yet, denied the divinity and virgin birth of Jesus. Gnosticism, which actually appeared before the life of Jesus and thrived until the fifth century A.D., argued that the earth and tangible matter represented the profane. The Gnostics added, however, that through knowledge of the world, one could attain the sacred here on earth. The Gospel of Thomas best captured their philosophy:

> His disciples said to him, “When will the kingdom come?” <Jesus said,> “It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying ‘here it is’ or ‘there it is’. Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.”

While the Jesus in the book of Romans re-consecrates humanity (neighbors and enemies both), the Gnostic Jesus returns the deity to nature, abolishing moral geology.

The first council of Nicea (325 A.D.) established the divinity, virgin birth, and resurrection of Jesus as orthodox Christian thinking—branding Arianism as heresy. Although Constantine I (306-337), the first Christian Emperor of Rome, actually convened the council, it was Theodosius I (347-395) who abolished the practice of paganism and established the Nicene Creed as the only acceptable form of Christianity. Theodosius I directed the destruction of pagan temples—including the home of the Persephone rites at Eleusis—and legally elevated Christian citizens over their pagan, heretic, and Jewish neighbors. Councils would form periodically as new heresies arose; however, with the establishment of an increasingly powerful papacy, Christian rulers concerned themselves with defending the myth as laid out in the Old and New Testaments. As a result, the church committed itself to establishing rigid hierarchies for worldly practice (the Catholic church structure) in addition to new myths to justify them.

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78 While the Nicene creed did not fully emerge until the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D., the first council of Nicea represents its birth.
(The Great Chain of Being). Consequently, much of the knowledge of the natural world revealed under Greek and Roman scholars vanished, burned, or fled to the emerging Muslim world.

The church dedicated itself to three goals: 1) maintaining the static myths of the Bible; 2) stamping out sedition in Christendom; and 3) prodding rulers to expand the Christian frontier. In order to achieve the first two goals, the papacy periodically issued bulls such as that of Innocent VIII, which stated, "in some parts of Northern Germany...many persons of both sexes, unmindful of their own salvation and straying from the Catholic Faith, have abandoned themselves to devils, incubi and succubi, and by their incantations, spells, conjurations, and other accursed charms and crafts."\(^7^9\) Innocent VIII concluded by stating, "in virtue of Our Apostolic authority We decree and enjoin that the aforesaid Inquisitors be empowered to proceed to the just correction, imprisonment, and punishment of any persons, without let or hindrance."\(^8^0\) The result of the Bull and the *Malleus Maleficarum*—which painstakingly laid out the procedures of the Inquisition—remain a well-known stain on the history of Western Civilization.\(^8^1\)

By entombing itself in the dogma of stasis, the church and the people of Europe languished under myths relevant only to first century, Levantine Jews and failed to build upon the expanding ethical horizon envisioned by Jesus.

The Christian church captured the most intense ethnocentrism of the Hebrew tradition and rejected the actual teachings of the Christ that distinguished them from the

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\(^8^0\) Ibid, xliiv.

\(^8^1\) The authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* minced few words by honestly stating, "And whosoever thinks otherwise concerning these matters which touch the faith that the Holy Roman Church holds is a heretic." (Part I, Question I), Ibid, 4.
old order. This dogma of conquest and repression pervaded the minds of the medieval Europeans that crossed the Atlantic. That is why, in order to understand the history of America, we start with the Neolithic Revolution and trace the sequence of myths ending with medieval Christianity. The myths a people adhere to serve as mediators between humans and nature, as well as between different human societies.\textsuperscript{82} The dominant myth of the colonial Europeans, informed by an acerbic dualism, augured ill for the people they would encounter in their failed search for India. The rigid Us vs. Them mindset of colonial Americans explains the tangible footsteps they would leave in their wake; particularly, a desire to overcome moral geology by applying the heavenly grid of the city and the plow to habitable American lands, or demonic place names to those that proved intractable.

\textsuperscript{82} While myths serve as bridge between these concepts, I argue in Chapter 5 that biology equally connects humans to nature and one another.
Chapter 2
The Puritans: Scions of Dualism

To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.

—Edmund Burke

Night Terror

My first memory—after the yawning aether of non-being—is of the three year old me awakening from a nightmare. I darted out of my room for the safe harbor of my mother’s arms directly across the hall. Alas, the door to my parent’s room was locked tight. My palm grew sweaty, further frustrating my attempts at refuge. I turned to look down the lengthy hallway forming an axis through the house. Instead of the usual assortment of furniture and toys speckling the ground of the hall and living room beyond, I spied a sinister Egyptian mummy—arms extended forward—lurching toward me. Panic-stricken, I resumed my assault on the unflagging door. Another glance down the hall confirmed that the mummy had inched forward and was now entering the hall proper, closer to terminating my short tenure on the Earth. As I was screaming bloody murder, with tears streaming down my face, the door opened. My pulse slowed. My breath returned to its natural cadence. Mom delivered me from harm yet again.

Although the 2,500-year-old Pharaoh discontinued his harassment, was it really possible that after seeing my rescue he quietly vacated the house, discouraged by a balsa-wood door? If my mummy was merely an apparition—a figment of my imagination—

what could possibly explain the events of that baleful Ohio night, which proved indelible? Similarly, why—when we look up at the exploding popcorn-like cumulus clouds of Spring—do we accredit large collections of water vapor with the qualities of an animal, the boundary of a state, or even a human face? Finally, why is America littered with place names that evoke a horrifying image of the Judeo-Christian underworld and the beings who rule it? The answer rests in exploring the early Puritan reaction to a static, at times threatening, frontier. Although I now know that my early night terror represents a genetic survival mechanism for reuniting small children with their parents during a time when human stereoscopic vision fails in comparison to the stealth of the jaguar or the olfactory sense of a python, the Puritans lacked the science that explains this and other human behaviors. The Puritans responded to the very real anxiety produced by a threatening frontier by employing supernatural images, richly informed by their culture, to fill in the gaps for what medieval science failed to explain. Those images, predicated on their culture’s emphasis of dualism, explain much of the early settler ethos. As such, the story of early New England colonists confronting the “New World” bears a striking resemblance to the three-year-old child who falls into a panic when confronted with sinister darkness.

Relying on the archaic belief that latitude alone determined climate, and accustomed to the invariant temperatures of England and the Dutch Netherlands, the early Protestant settlers of North America encountered a landscape subject to dramatic swings in temperature and weather. Another shock awaited the colonists in the form of dense, dark forests unheard of in denuded England or the reclaimed sea and swamplands.

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2 Being on the Eastern coast subjected New England to Arctic, and at times Polar, air masses, largely unknown in the sea-bounded (and thus moderated) isle of Britain or the western-continental Dutch Netherlands.
of Holland. Add to this surprise American flora and fauna—of which Native Americans form the most visible example—that had never before been documented in the Judeo-Christian texts or Medieval bestiary of the Great Chain of Being, and one can begin to take seriously my comparison of colonists to frightened children. The early threat posed by this annihilating force explains much of Puritan, and later American, behavior in North America. The tenuous foothold that early colonists held on North America serves as a case study in how a European culture responded to a static and occasionally contracting frontier. Thus, it is my intention to offer up the early Puritan experience as a case study in the Us vs. Them model.

Captive Perceptions

In order to understand the underpinnings of the Judeo-Christian theology of early New Englanders, one must start on a rudimentary level founded in the very origins of humankind. The animistic beliefs of pre-Abrahamic Paleolithic humans expressed themselves in genius loci (spirit or atmosphere) of a place, what René Dubos called the “perception of some facet of nature by the god within the human observer.” The genius loci of a location often inhabited aesthetically awesome—either horrifying or unique—landforms. Common candidates include mountain peaks, gorges, torrents, waterfalls, springs, and any geologic “abnormality” such as erosion resistant igneous rock forms (i.e. Devil’s Tower), fault lines, rift valleys, and meteorite craters. Except in rare cases,

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3 Much ink has been spilled concerning the anthropogenic landscape of New England, which I recognize but maintain that the presence of any forest larger than the few enclosed patrician hunting grounds found in Western Europe would be adequate to inspire awe in the minds of New England entrants. Indians surely cleared forests; not enough, however, to convince Europeans that the woodlands of America were anything but infinite.

humans could not live in such landscapes. Most chose the antipode of sublime landforms where comfort trumped geologic exoticness. Thus, human habitation patterns suggest a genetic preference for places connoting safe and healthy habitation. These characteristics include abundant plant and animal food, escape and surveillance opportunities. Essentially, a landscape resembling the African savanna—a place humans spent the majority of their hominid past in. Ever consider why North Americans go to such great lengths in order to maintain a healthy lawn? Michael E. Soulé’s rhetorical response to this question follows as “What are landscape aesthetics, then, if not a mirror of the Pliocene and Pleistocene?” While it may be difficult to unsnarl Biophilia—the genetic predisposition to focus on life and lifelike processes—from what humans call spirituality, the cultural emphasis of dualism, as noted in chapter one, threw in stark contrast the inaesthetic, topophobic landscapes with those that provided largesse for human societies. By the time of European colonization in the Americas, culture had colored this genetic impulse by assigning lands not put under the plow, or otherwise remade my human hands, a depraved, demonic stigma. Thus, biology provided the mechanism for initial perception while culture colored that image with anthropomorphic effigies.

The dominant culture of a people informs many of the decisions they make as well as what they perceive in the mélange of the unknown. Astronomer Carl Sagan found that various humans perceived culturally-constructed forms in images observed the world over. Aside from constellations—somewhat problematic due to their hemispheric

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6 Roger S. Ulrich, “Biophilia, Biophobia, and Natural Landscapes,” in Ibid, 96. Another aspect of the Biophilia Hypothesis arises from the fact that humanity contains no autonomic response to dangerous products of modern technology such as firearms, automobiles, and frayed power lines; Ibid, 449.
specificity—Sagan documented the assorted forms attributed to the moon. Included with the European “Man in the Moon,” are “a woman weaving, stands of laurel trees, an elephant jumping off a cliff, a girl with a basket on her back, a rabbit, the lunar intestines spilled out on its surface after evisceration by an irritable flightless bird, a woman pounding tapa cloth, a four-eyed jaguar.” No doubt, Sagan argues; extra-terrestrial beings observing the medley of stars, nebulae, and other heavenly bodies from a different vantage point in the galaxy would assign different culturally-informed names and images to the constellation Euro-Americans call the Big Dipper.

Any analysis of the human-perceived images on a landscape must start with the dominant culture of those individuals who venture into nature and sense, contemplate, and eventually name the forms before them. Religion, being a vital component of culture that often mediates the human relationship with nature, deserves particular attention. The Protestantism of the early New Englanders serves as one of many (perhaps the dominant) components in the colonists’ formula of sensory perception. Acclaimed mythologist Joseph Campbell reduced this formula to the point where religion served as the sine qua non of interpretation, “If my guiding divinity is brutal, my decision[s] will be brutal, as

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9 Carl Sagan, Cosmos (New York: Random House, 1980): 46-7, 196-8. In fact, time is just as critical a factor when discussing constellations. While the Big Dipper has multifarious interpretations depending on the culture and location in the universe of the observer (the French see The Casserole; the English, The Plow; the Chinese, The Celestial Bureaucrat; the ancient Greeks and Native Americans saw The Great Bear-Ursa Major; and the ancient Egyptians, a procession of a bull, horizontal man or god, and a hippopotamus with a crocodile on its back), the location up or down the stream of time from which one views the Big Dipper determines what form, if any, a culture assigns the glacially-moving alignment of stars and nebulae. So while the constellation of Leo appears drastically different when viewed from the side (according to an Earth-bound observer), the images morph as time passes and stars die, retreat, approach, and collide. Based on computer models, Sagan determined Leo the Lion may well be interpreted as a Satellite dish by observers on Earth one million years hence. So long as humans survive and remember such archaic technology, of course.
well." As evidenced in the first chapter, the Abrahamic divinity of the Puritans could prove quite cruel.

The Greeks took the omnipresent spirit of place—what Tibetan Buddhists signify in the chant “OM”—and simplified it by anthropomorphizing what Joseph Campbell called “the energy of the universe of which all things are manifestations.” Thus, the Greek panoply of gods formed a rough vocabulary for the genius inhabiting a place or human institution: Demeter for agriculture, Poseidon for the sea and earthquakes, Ares for warfare, and Hestia for the hearth and its fire. The Greeks also tendered a membrane (porous as it was) between the divine and corporeal worlds, expressing preference for the former. While the Greek spiritual alphabet simplified the pre-existing “hum of the universe,” the Judeo-Christian religion would abbreviate it to at most three values; heaven, hell, and Earth/purgatory. The desert religion proffered a heaven/paradise of topophilic abundance in water, food, and climate, all available with little or no work required. Conversely, hell bears a striking resemblance to the topophobic landscape of a jagged, sterile, and otherwise unlivable wasteland. Earth/purgatory exists as a fallen paradise where humanity must toil endlessly to obtain sustenance from the soil. This tripartite cosmography endured further alterations at the hands of Medieval and Renaissance thinkers and formed the cultural legacy Puritan colonists employed to understand the New England environment and their place in it.

Historian Alice K. Turner calls the landscape of hell “the largest shared construction project in imaginative history.” Indeed, Joseph Campbell observed, “the

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11 Campbell, with Moyers, 230.
earliest evidence of anything like mythological thinking is associated with graves." The myth or story produced by such thinking usually expressed itself in a "harrowing of hell" or underworld by a courageous hero figure. An analysis of a few examples that emerged in medieval Europe serves as a bridge from the Abrahamic tradition of dualism to the Calvinist moral geology employed by early-modern Puritans.

**Drawing the Christian Supernatural Atlas: Dante Alighieri**

By the turn of the 14th century, Dante Alighieri could rely on myriad sources for his vision of hell. In fact, Dante’s hell—the apotheosis of a Christian underworld ever since—proved little more than an amalgam of Greco-Roman images of Hades populated with an array of mythical beings. Amid Dante’s hell roam centaurs, Medusa and her fellow gorgons, Cerberus the three-headed guard dog of Hades, Phlegyas the boatman of the river Styx, and Charon the boatman of the river Acheron. The lowest reaches of hell contained the Titans—primordial spirits possibly representing the archaic *genius loci*—which Dante described as follows: “These are the sons of the earth, embodiments of elemental forces unbalanced by love, desire without restraint and without acknowledgement of moral and theological law, They are symbols of the earth-trace that every devout man must clear from his soul, the unchecked passions of the beast.” This blatant distaste for all things carnal and Earth-bound coupled with an intense displeasure

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13 Campbell, with Moyers, 71.
14 Odysseus attempted to harrow hell but chose to stand at the gates and let the spirits of the dead come to him. Likewise, in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Aeneas tours Hades and converses with many celebrities of the Classical world.
16 Ibid, 257.
for disobedience presaged the subsequent Protestant misanthropy and insistence on submission to God, family, country, and bodily denial.17

Dante’s *Inferno* also contains the Judeo-Christian notion of a wrathful Yahweh, creating landforms during times of turbulence—the previously mentioned “moral geology.” Indeed, Dante attributes much of the landscape of hell—including inconveniently ruined bridges18—to an earthquake that shook the entire Earth, according to Matthew 27:51, at the moment of Christ’s death.19 Thus, sin and amorality blighted the earth, creating landscapes wholly unsuitable for habitation. The Abrahamic cosmology, richly amended by Dante, offered hell as the most archetypal form of this moral geology.

The Topophobic Hell: Johns Milton and Bunyan

While Dante offered a rich geography of the Christian hell, John Milton provided a further elucidation of the underworld as well as the Garden of Eden and subsequent “fall” for his fellow Puritans. The moral geology that Milton applied to the underworld is richly informed by a topophobic perception that recognizes an aversion in life forms for habitats unsuitable to their habitation or lacking propitious elements. In *Paradise Lost*,

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17 The geography of Dante’s hell if viewed edge-on would appear as a jagged V-shaped chasm. Each Circle—of which there are nine—contains subdivisions representing gradually more audacious crimes. The Circles each form a plateau rim separated by sheer cliffs to the lower, and thus more sinful and condemned, Circle. Eventually, when Dante and his companion Virgil reach the ninth and final Circle of hell—the vast frozen lake Cocytus—they find it populated with those who committed “TREACHERY AGAINST THOSE TO WHOM THEY WERE BOUND BY SPECIAL TIES.” The final Round of this Circle—, which Dante dubbed Judaica, or Treachery against lords and benefactors—lies at the very center of the pit. As if the anti-Semitic overtones were not rich enough, Dante actually places Judas Iscariot (along with Brutus and Cassius) in one of the three mouths of Satan. See Ibid, 282.
18 Ibid, 189.
19 Ibid, 116. The passage that follows Jesus’ cries of “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” or “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”: “Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.” See Holy Bible: The New King James Version containing the Old and New Testaments (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982): 672.
the then-blind Milton conveyed a landscape of hell—deeply informed by his native, damp England—as Satan and his ilk transverse it:

No rest: through many a dark and drearie Vaile  
They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,  
O're many a Frozen, many a fierie Alpe,  
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death,  
A Universe of death, which God by curse  
Created evil, for evil only good,  
Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,  
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
Abominable, inutterable, and worse.20

No longer does hell contain simple sterile and scraggy surface alternating between extremes of fire and ice as in Dante’s treatment. For Milton, “perverse” and “monstrous” nature “breeds” in hell, effectively connecting the image with that of the fallen Earth.21

While the nature of hell and Earth conceives abominations, the nature of Eden provides humanity with all the necessities of life:

Our tended Plants, how blows the Citron Grove,  
What drops the Myrrhe, and what the balmie Reed,  
How Nature paints her colours, how the Bee  
Sits on the Bloom extracting liquid sweet.22

Nature, presented as female, contains such bounty in Eden that her fruitful growth “instructs us not to spare.”23 But while nature is mellifluous beyond compare, Milton continuously informs the reader of “her” separateness from humanity. In describing the home of Adam and Eve in the garden, Milton explains “Beast, Bird, Insect, or Worm durst enter none; Such was thir awe of man.”24 Paradise Lost not only reinforced the Judeo-Christian credo of humanity as severed from nature, but also presented an image of

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hell that bears a resemblance to the fallen Earth. Puritan literary constructions articulated a vision of hell that portrayed “wilderness” as untamed, unvalued, and dangerous to humans. As such, this image would weigh heavily on Puritan colonists in New England.

A somewhat younger contemporary of Milton, John Bunyan, would continue the elaboration of the Puritans’ spiritual geography. Christian—the hero of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*—traversed a metaphorical spiritual landscape, which influenced Puritan ideas of nature. If the Judeo-Christian notion of the fall of humanity provided a relationship with nature founded on human toil to extract tangible fruits, Bunyan’s work posited a nature endowed with utilitarian and spiritual desolation, a bitter moral geology. Nature as obstacle to human design presented itself early in Christian’s journey in the form of a swamp:

This miry Slough is such a place as cannot be mended; it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore is it called the Slough of Despond: for still as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place; and this is the reason of the badness of this ground.25

Likewise, the attributes of the valley of the shadow of death in the *Pilgrim’s Progress* smacked of a topophobic landscape. Bunyan describes it as a “wilderness” composed of “deserts, and of pits, a land of drought…. full of snares, traps, gins, and nets…deep holes, and shelvings.”26 These undesirable properties seemed inadequate to Bunyan, who supplemented the “dark as pitch” valley with “hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons of the pit.”27 After endeavoring through the valley, Christian found himself in a landscape diametrically opposed to that of the valley and bearing a remarkable resemblance to the African plain:

26 Ibid, 107-111.
27 Ibid, 108.
on the banks of this River, on either side, were green trees that bore all manner of fruit; and the leaves of the trees were good for medicine; with the fruit of these trees they also much delighted, and the leaves they eat to prevent surfeits, and other diseases that are incident to those that heat their blood by travels. On either side of the River was also a meadow, curiously beautified with lilies; and it was green all the year long.28

Bunyan’s dichotomy bespeaks a preference for pastoral (read: functional) nature, an image reinforced when Christian strays from the path laid out for him—taken as a metaphor of the proper religion, dharma, or way of a true Christian—he reports “now it began to rain, and thunder, and lighten in a very dreadful manner, and the water rose amain.”29 The self-serving message is clear for Bunyan, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”30 The “fear of the Lord” allows Christian to overcome the moral geology of Bunyan’s cosmography and would manifest itself later as an ethos of domination of nature, seeking to convert intractable “wilderness” into utilitarian farms. In this way, Bunyan assigned the “fear of the Lord” to our biological preference to gravitate toward or remake landscapes manifesting auspicious human habitats.

**Medieval European Literature’s Impact on the Puritan Ethic**

Colonial New England pastors—coevals of Bunyan—would apply the latter’s spiritual landscape to the North American continent in an effort to enforce Protestant dogma through fear. Pastor Cotton Mather’s solution to the wilderness surrounding Boston lay in declaring war on the land as evidenced in the following prayer; “O Earth, Earth, Earth, Hear the Word of the Lord. There is a Plow ordered for thee; a Plow, the penetrations whereof thou must submit unto.”31 While it may be argued that Mather’s

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28 Ibid, 160.
29 Ibid, 162.
30 Ibid, 203.
31 Cotton Mather, *Agricola, or the Religious Husbandman* (Boston, 1627): 1. This and all subsequent italics in Mather are original emphasis.
following comments advocate less a call to peace than a refocusing of humanity's technological violence, his zeal in subduing the Earth rested in a belief that "the Times, when the promised Kingdom of GOD shall arrive" proved attainable only after humanity "beat their Swords into Plow-Shares." Mather went so far as to suggest "Tis not the Till'd, Poor, Lifeless Earth Which gives me all my Store. No: Tis my GOD! From Him comes forth All that has fill'd my Floor." Mather's ardor borders on humor, so long as one overlooks his sincerity in statements such as "A Barren Tree! O, Why, My Lord, This Cumberer of the Ground; Why has it not yet heard the Word, The Just Word, Cut it down!" Clearly, an environmental ethic founded on Luke XIII. 9, "If it bear Fruit, well; And if not, then after That, thou shalt cut it down" intimated a topophilia warped by a cultural emphasis on functional landscapes, made more so by human environmental engineering. In short, Puritans conceived of a dichotomy between humans as the improver and master, and a subordinate nature—at best in need of our help, at worst cursed by our impiety.

Mather commuted nature's condemned qualities to earthly humans as well. The schism advanced by Plato between the spiritual and physical yawned ever wider in the eyes of Puritans. The separateness proved so profound that Mather deduced, "Our Nature being wofully corrupted by our fall from GOD, our complaint must be That...I knew, that in me, (that is, in my Flesh,) there dwelleth no good thing. O wretched Heart

32 Ibid, 3.
33 Ibid, 212.
34 Ibid, 190.
36 Plato argued a spiritual counterpart for every physical object. Platonic "ideal forms" provided a foundation for the eventual Judeo-Christian cleavage between the spiritual and physical; ascribing the spiritual the superior realm.
that thou art; How empty of all that is Good!” Mather’s misanthropy, informed by anxiety toward the corporeal, spurred him to describe a sinner’s heart as “very barren Soyl,” choked with “Fallow Ground” upon which “none of those good things which we set a value on” can grow. Mather’s prescription for a “carnal Mind” overgrown with “evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, False Witness, Blasphemies” and comparable to “Thorns…Hen-bane, and Hemlock,” rested in renouncing the “Flesh…its pleasures,” and “the World.” Redemption from the spiritual “Weeds of Death” apparent in the hearts of humans, however, “are disturbed, yea, they are destroyed by the Plow.” Mather partially forgave the depraved because demons or “Black birds of Hell, do mightily prevent the Seed of the Word, from getting well into the Hearts of the poisoned People.” Those maintaining, however, “Crooked Ways” should expect “Tremendous Vengeance of a Righteous GOD.” Therefore, the sin of humans and the depravity of the New England wilderness lay in an application of the almighty, as represented by the heavenly plow or the righteous word.

While topophilia, the Judeo-Christian ethos of human dominion over nature, and the tradition of dualism establish a foundational explanation for the Puritan perspective, many aspects of their worldview remain obscure. Why did the Puritans see, hear, and feel demons, witches, bugbears, and myriad other fanciful creatures on the North American continent? In short: why did they see what was not there? Human biology,
responding to a threatening frontier, appears to provide the process by which the unseen appears, while culture determines the forms imagined.

The Threatening Frontier and the Terror of History

Carl Sagan argues “Instead of acknowledging that in many areas we are ignorant, we have tended to say things like the Universe is permeated with the ineffable. A God of the Gaps is assigned responsibility for what we do not yet understand.” While Sagan fails to qualify the mechanism through which the God of the Gaps functions, innate human defense and coping strategies emerge as prime suspects. Mircea Eliade, identified a similar process he dubbed “The Terror of History” as the possible cradle of religion and myth:

If it was possible to tolerate such sufferings, it is precisely because they seemed neither gratuitous nor arbitrary....The primitive who sees his field laid waste by drought, his cattle decimated by disease, his child ill, himself attacked by fever or too frequently unlucky as a hunter, knows that all these contingencies are not due to chance but to certain magical or demonic influences, against which the priest or sorcerer possesses weapons....he turns to the sorcerer to do away with the magical effect, or to the priest to make the gods favorable to him.

Likewise, Puritans first arriving in North America happened upon a historical double-whammy, according to Eliade, for the land they chose to inhabit had to be “cosmicized” through the archetype of creation:

Desert regions inhabited by monsters, uncultivated lands, unknown seas on which no navigator has dared to venture....They correspond to a mythical model, but of another nature: all these wild, uncultivated regions and the like are assimilated to chaos; they still participate in the undifferentiated, formless modality of pre-Creation. This is why, when possession is taken of a territory—that is, when its exploitation begins—rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation.

46 Ibid, 9-10.
Thus, Eliade provides a partial explanation of Mather’s motto, “GOD SPEED THE PLOW.”

In his analysis of the New England landscape, William Wood provides several examples of a “God of the Gaps.” Aside from presenting North America as a supermarket populated with Cartesian fauna and descriptions of native flora that would make a broker in the Chicago futures market blush, Wood also mentions several inexplicable occurrences. Wood reports that several colonists “being lost in woods have heard such terrible roarings as have made them much aghast, which must either be devils or lions.” After some inglorious remarks pertaining to the Connecticut and other westward Indian tribes, Wood reassures potential colonists that, after dark, the Indians “will not budge from their own dwellings for fear of their Abamacho (the Devil) whom they much fear, especially in evil enterprises.” Wood, of course failed to believe that Abamacho represented anything less than the Christian Satan, as his following description of a Native powwow demonstrates:

Thus will he continue sometimes half a day in this diabolical worship. Sometimes the Devil for requital of their worship recovers the party, to nuzzle them up in their devilish religion... since the English frequented those parts, they daily fall from his colors, relinquishing their former fopperies, and acknowledge our God to be supreme.

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47 Mather, Agricola. This quote can be found in the introduction titled “A Recommendation.”
48 “Of these [gray squirrels] there be the greatest plenty; one may kill a dozen of them in an afternoon – about three of the clock they begin to walk.” See William Wood New England’s Prospect. Alden T. Vaughan, ed., (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977): 44.
49 “such irrational creatures as are daily bred and continually nourished in this country, which do much conduce to the well-being of the inhabitants, affording not only meat for the belly but clothing for the back.” See Ibid, 41.
50 “The next commodity the land affords is good store of woods, and that not only such as may be needful for fuel but likewise for the building of ships and houses and mills and all manner of water-work about which wood is needful.” See Ibid, 38.
51 Ibid, 42.
52 Wood describes the Indians as libidinous and suggests that they are strong and attain old age due to their laziness, and “that which they most hunt after is the flesh of man.” See Ibid, 76, 82.
53 Ibid, 95.
54 Ibid, 101-2.
What else could such demons of the wilds represent other than the biologically-inherited fear of nocturnal predators humans fell victim to before they became the chief predator? The God of the Gaps, resting on a biological need for comfort and explanation from fears and informed by culture, manifested a decidedly Judeo-Christian devil for Puritans. In this way, the devil Puritans associated with their frontier in New England serves as an historical analogue to the various monsters and beasts of chaos illustrated in the first chapter. Thus, Satan’s presence provided Puritans with 1) a malevolent force on which to blame any manner of phenomenon not explained by their medieval knowledge and science, and 2) Satan’s presence on the boundaries of Puritan society reinforced the dualism between city and un-“improved” nature, between Christians and Native “heathens,” and finally, between Us and Them.

The colonist’s spiritual vocabulary, however, contained a second value, the likes of which proved just as frightening. In his sermon, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” Jonathan Edwards proclaims that “Tis the devil that blinds” the minds of sinners for demons constitute “the rulers of the darkness of this world.”\(^55\) Similarly, in the sermon “The Day of Judgment,” Edwards recognized “How great a part of the world has Satan from age to age usurped the authority over, and set up himself for god of this world in opposition to the true god.”\(^56\) Edwards judged Satan king of the Earth, citing the Temptation of Christ from Matthew 4: 9-10 as proof:

> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil....the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’\(^57\)

\(^{56}\) Ibid, 515.  
\(^{57}\) Holy Bible: The New King James Version, containing the Old and New Testaments.
While Satan and his minions reigned over a fallen Earth, Edwards portrays a frightful Yahweh holding dominion over heaven and hell. In the sermon “The Torments of Hell are Exceedingly Great,” Edwards proffers a “Wrathful Lord” as the true power in hell for “he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.” Again, in the sermon “Warnings of Future Punishment Don’t Seem Real to the Wicked,” Edwards’s god governs without mention of Satan:

In that place [Hell] God has some way of dreadfully expressing his wrath, of pouring of it upon the soul as soon as ever it gets there, and upon all the spirits that are there...”Tis compared to thunder and lightning....There will [be] an extraordinary manifestations of God’s wrath. Everything which they behold shall show tokens of God’s anger and fury.

Edwards’s god takes to his task with as much, if not more, ferocity than typical depictions of Satan:

One sin deserves that the punishment should be to that degree of intenseness as to be the destruction of the creature, because every sin is an act of hostility, and ‘tis fit that God’s enemies should be destroyed. If every sin, therefore, though comparatively small, deserves eternal death and destruction, how dreadful then is the deserved punishment of wicked men.... we are to remember that these things are but types and shadows, and therefore doubtless fall far short of the thing typified. If being burnt alive in a brick kiln or scorched to death in hollow brass be but a shadow, what must be the substance?

God’s work pervaded the landscape of New England as well. An earthquake on Sunday, October 29, 1727 compelled Edwards to deliver the sermon “Impending Judgments Averted Only by Reformation.” In it, he describes a scene much akin to Eliade’s Terror of History passage where “Pulpits rang with the tones of the jeremiad, the time-tested sermonic formula that enumerated and lamented New England’s transgressions and demanded repentance.” Edwards tells us that more than “two dozen of these sermons were printed, so insatiable was the popular need for interpretations of the

60 Ibid, 309, 316.
Edwards capitalized on the fear present in the aftermath of the earthquake by relaying the following interpretation:

God shows us that we are in his hand every moment by this shaking the foundations of the earth, and that he don't stand in want of means to send us down to the pit when he pleases. He can send mortal sickness if he pleases; he can give us into the hands of our enemies if he pleases; he can slay us with famine; or, if he pleases, he can make the earth open her mouth and swallow us up....Therefore we have reason to think that if we turn not, that God hath whet his sword, and bent his bow, and made ready the arrow upon the string.

Edwards's New England (and America itself) remained a "howling wilderness inhabited by wild beasts, and by a barbarous people," pervaded with "sin and wickedness," where Satan and his minions dwelt and god watched over all transgressors, waiting to deliver his fury. For him, only the plow and fear of god could extirpate the "wickedness" wrought by such dualism.

More ominously, colonists found that fraternizing with Natives—by all authorities disciples of Satan—met with public harassment and, at times, death. Mary Staples of Fairfield, Connecticut, came under suspicion of witchcraft because her neighbors reported that an Indian offered her "two little things brighter than the light of the day...Indian gods, as the Indian called them." Accusers at the Salem witch trials "detailed the connections between suspects and native Americans as indicative of their guilt," also claiming "that the Devil looked like a native American." Likewise, after her much-publicized captivity by Indians, Mary Rowlandson described one native camp as "a

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61 Ibid, 32.
62 Ibid, 225, 224.
63 Ibid, 500.
65 Charles J. Hoadly, ed., Records of the Colony of Jurisdiction of New Haven, II: 80, 86. As quoted in Godbeer, 192.
66 Godbeer, 192.
lively resemblance of hell."67 The Wampanoag sachem Metacomet—aside from acquiring the moniker King Phillip by Spanish-hating English colonists—managed to achieve the title “grand Rebel,” evoking the image of the rebellious angel Lucifer among the members of Massachusetts Bay Colony.68 In this way, Puritan observers colored Native Americans with the classic dualist brush that associated all humans occupying the dar al’ harb with their most reviled monsters of chaos.

As Native American populations melted away in response to Old World pathogens, to which Natives carried no latent immunity, Pastor John Cotton preached the existence of a wrathful god, who “revealeth himself in thunderings and lightnings, and flames of fire.”69 Cotton believed that “He casts out the enemies of a people” for “Where there is a vacant place, there is liberty for the sons of Adam or Noah to come and inhabit.”70 Cotton trusted that “He gives a foreign people,” English in this case, “favor in the eyes of any native people,” for they posses “special commission from Heaven.”71 Thus, the dualism of the Abrahamic myth applied equally to humans and land.

**Informed Perception**

The barrage of fear and admonition produced expected results on the population of New England. Colonists reported that “The Devil wore a range of guises” sometimes

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68 William Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians*, pp. 103-4. See Godbeer, 193. The colonists despised Metacomet to such a degree that, after killing and quartering him, they displayed his decapitated head on a pole in Plymouth for 25 years. See http://www.y-indianguides.com/pfm_st_metacomet2.html
70 http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAcottonJ.htm
71 Ibid.
appearing as “Black bears...[or] black dogs.” John Hull recorded that a Long Island man “dreamed he fought with devils, and they took his hat from him... he was soon after found dead... killed, as supposed, by lightning, and his hat some few rods from him.” Likewise, Minister John Brock noted that he “saw a Resemblance of a Trooper in the Air.” Sarah Kemble Knight, in a travel essay that documents her journey from Boston to New York in 1704, notes after viewing the moon pass out of view one evening:

wth the rest of this part of the lower world in darkness, with which wee were soon Surrounded. The only Glimmering we now had was from the spangled Skies, Whose Imperfect Reflections rendered every Object formidable. Each lifeless Trunk, with its shatter’d Limbs, appear’d an Armed Enymie; and every little stump like a Ravenous devourer.

Knight continued to personify the landscape by calling rocky hills and precipices “Buggbears to a fearful female travailer.” Knight confirms her view of nature by providing thoughts on its antithesis, the city. In the following passage, the moon, now present, “glar’d light through the branches, fill’d my Imagination wth the pleasent delusion of a Sumpteous citty, fill’d wth famous Buildings and churches, wth their spiring steeples, Balconies, Galleries.” Salvation, to be sure, after the trials and tribulations of the New England woods.

The culture of wonders in America pervaded every social class and provided a cottage industry for touring ministers and almanac writers. These popular tracts informed readers on “Tales of witchcraft and the Devil, of comets, hailstorms, monster
The almanacs and compendiums, printed in cheap, binded volumes, bore liberal profits for their authors. The books, "Hawked by peddlers and hung up in stalls for everyone to see and gape at," in many ways, foreshadow the presence of tabloids in modern supermarkets. The practice rested in the tradition of astrology and prophesy-making dating back (at least) to the time of Aristotle when Greeks interpreted "monster births" as signs from the spirit realm in response to sins committed or the impending apocalypse. Criticism abounded regarding the sale and distribution of almanacs and the appeal to fear that many preachers indulged in.

Elizabethan theologian William Perkins described such pamphlets as blasphemy, forcing New England Almanac makers to advertise their divinations as marking off the progress of the coming kingdom of god. Many critics also noted that writers purposefully attracted readers who liked any text entitled "Strange and wonderful."

Evolutionary Psychology as Partial Explanation

While the God of the Gaps permeated all of New England, the lack of scientific explanation for natural processes establishes only part of the answer as to why Euro-Americans believed they witnessed otherworldly phenomena in the backcountry of North America. Again, human biology provides clues. A critical trait—one of many present at birth—lay in the ability of infants to recognize and distinguish faces out of the garbled milieu. Primates remain unique in this regard for they possess breasts on the upper torso,

79 Ibid, 72.
81 Hall, 77.
82 Ibid, 59.
83 Ibid, 56.
which allow nursing infants full view of their mothers' faces. Such "Pathognomic activity," as psychologist Rene A. Spitz called it, are likely the reason for the vast and nuanced spectrum of primate facial muscular, which aids in communicating emotion and is likely the foundation of language.\(^8^4\) The ability—by all indications—became biologically selected for since "Those infants who a million years ago were unable to recognize a face smiled back less [and] were less likely to win the hearts of their parents."\(^8^5\) Likewise, the less specific ability for kin—particularly, maternal—recognition most certainly pervades most every mammalian species, for only through the nursing, caring, and protection by parents do many juveniles survive their childhood.

Ever wonder how penguin chicks distinguish their parents from the, at times, hundreds of thousands of other individuals? Undoubtedly, other species employ other senses aside from sight, but the process remains the same. It appears, however, that humans—an intensely visual species—became so good at identifying faces out of the seemingly disconnected universe that they often see faces where none exist.

Finding examples remains easy enough. The anthropomorphization of landscapes—documented as far back as the ancient Greeks—presents itself in most every culture. The profile of Mount Jouctas on the Isle of Crete—home of the Minoan civilization 4,500 years ago—suggests a man's face "turned toward the sky" that the local population referred to as "the head of Zeus."\(^8^6\) Similarly, north of the city of Thebes, where Oedipus proved his worth by answering the riddle of the sphinx, "is a hill which looks very much like a crouching Egyptian sphinx, headless, and looming over the city

itself. More recently, the citizens of New Hampshire found the placement of a popular landmark, the (recently-collapsed) "Old Man of the Mountain," striking enough to place the craggy rock face on their state quarter. The trend continues into deep space, where on Venus astronomers perceived "a rough portrait of Joseph Stalin," and countless irregular clouds of gas and dust-called nebulae spawned the following names; "the Horsehead, Eskimo, Owl, Homunculus, Tarantula, and North American" due to their perceived resemblance. The God of the Gaps recently appeared on the surface of Mars where, instead of attributing a face-like structure on a grainy photograph to natural processes, alien enthusiasts immediately argued, "the Face was constructed by the survivors of an interplanetary war," the violence of which explains the pockmarked surfaces (proven meteorite impact craters) of the Moon and Mars. Carl Sagan convincingly argued that the old Christian forms of the God of the Gaps, "under withering fire from science," would fall from favor, co-opted by the image of extraterrestrial beings. Perhaps today's abduction stories and their associated lucrative book deals demonstrate a further elaboration of the Harrowing of Hell, arguably the oldest human legend. As such, the Puritan specters represent only a form of a larger phenomenon.

Science: Sagan's "Candle in the Dark"

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87 Ibid, 29.
88 See the following website; http://www.usmint.gov/mint_programs/50sq_program/states/index.cfm?state=nh&CFID=8602634&CFTOKEN=84123328
90 Ibid, 53.
91 Ibid, 115.
Science, the Latin word for "knowledge," remains unable to slay the God of the Gaps or the dualist tradition and biological impulse it is predicated on. It may be that topophobic stimuli such as darkness ensure humanity will always encounter extrasensory illusions. Troubling indicators, however, suggest another explanation for the survival of the God of the Gaps. Surveys suggest that 95 percent of Americans—or about the same portion of the African-American population illiterate at the start of the Civil War—remain "scientifically illiterate." While hard to gauge, polls show such scientific illiteracy in the fact that approximately half of American adults fail to understand that the Earth travels around the Sun and takes a year to do so. While Gallup finds that 9% of Americans accept the central tenets of Darwinian evolution—that all life evolved from more simpler life forms over long periods of time without divine intervention—a recent Harris Poll found that 86% of Americans believe in miracles, 73% in the devil and hell, and 35% in ghosts. Recent events—particularly the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the war in Iraq—spurred predictable responses to the Terror of History. Several people witnessed the face of Satan in smoke billowing form the World Trade center while patrons of Pat Robertson’s 700 Club worried what sandstorms in Iraq portend for United States military forces. As I write these pages, the cover of The Weekly World News sports a doctored photo of a bomb debris cloud with the accompanying headline, “SATAN’S FACE OVER IRAQ!”

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92 Ibid, 6.
93 Ibid, 324.
94 See www.gallup.com; THE HARRIS POLL #41, August 12, 1998 at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/
95 http://www.firefromheaven.net/2003/devil-face.html
96 http://cbn.org/700club/askpat/BIO_033103.asp
97 http://www.weeklyworldnews.com/wwn/newsstand.cfm
While laughter usually follows such nonsense, the veneer of science and modernity remains thin indeed, for where some see natural phenomena, a considerable portion of the American population witness a God of the Gaps in a frightening array of forms. Leon Trotsky’s description of Germany on the eve of the Hitler’s ascent to power suggests the possible effects a lack of skepticism can produce:

> Not only in peasant homes, but also in city skyscrapers, there lives along side the twentieth century the thirteenth. A hundred million people use electricity and still believe in the magic powers of signs and exorcism. Movie stars go to mediums. Aviators who pilot miraculous mechanisms created by man’s genius wear amulets on their sweaters.98

A growing hostility toward academia intimates the possibility that the rate of science illiteracy could possibly increase. In a recent personal email, a family member warned me against accepting the lies “spoon-fed” in universities, suggesting I escape “brainwashing” by visiting a list of websites, which included the homepage of the 700 Club. In an age of nuclear proliferation scientific illiteracy and the consequences of dualism could very well prove suicidal. As this chapter and the quote heading it illustrates, the Us vs. Them model, and the rich duelist tradition it rests upon, is only maintained by an absence of familiarity and contact that breeds a scientific understanding of natural processes and cultural tolerance.

**Our Inescapable Biology**

In my mid-twenties, I no longer imagine bogeymen lurking in the shadows. I view the world through profane eyes, and marvel at its intricacy, horror, and beauty. Incalculable wonders pervade the universe—indeed my own backyard—so that I find no need to imagine less spectacular explanations. My eight-month old son, however, is sure to

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experience intense moments of fear at malefic stimuli, a genetic survival tactic particularly strong in ever-vulnerable human children.99 The predation of our species throughout the majority of our tenure on this planet still haunts us. I often find myself confronted with frightening, yet innocuous, forms not unlike those once found in New England's woods. While I will undoubtedly play the role of safe harbor from the God of the Gaps, I too, occasionally remove an impish coat from a door, find faces peering down on me from the random spackling on my ceiling, and retreat from a darkened basement with an extra spring in my step. In such moments, I share common ground with Sarah Kemble Knight and the rest of humanity. The God of the Gaps nips at my back yet.

99 Stephen R. Kellert, Edward O. Wilson, 34.
Chapter 3
New vs. Old Western History: The Frontier as Casualty of a Scholarly War

It is the American frontier concept that needs to be lifted out of its present national setting and applied on a much larger scale to all of Western civilization in modern times.

--Walter Prescott Webb

And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world.

--Joseph Campbell

The more precious memories of my childhood in California are those that transcend mass culture and reveal the human response to the land we inhabit. One moment that broke through the generic realities of the 20th century occurred when I was only seven years old. My parents were visiting friends who lived not ten minutes from the Pacific Ocean when I spied a younger child in a big-wheel tricycle sporting a cowboy hat. I approached the kid and jokingly asked, "Where are the Indians?" to which he replied "Out West."

After sharing the story with my parents and their friends, we all laughed at the mental image of a thriving Native society amid the cool California surf. Yet, the absurd comment made nearly 20 years ago by that child reveals that the myths and images of the "Wild West" still haunt us. Only by adhering to a dualist perception of the world could a modern observer preclude the possibility that such an Other (or their descendents) might live on Our side of the frontier, in our version of the dar al 'islām.

Today's Native Americans bear as much resemblance to their 19th century counterparts as modern industrial farmers—increasingly faceless, sprawling corporate agri-fiefdoms—do their ante-bellum, yeoman predecessors. The myths of the American West—the only place and time associated with the frontier in modern minds—appear

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obsolete to our world. Therefore, we alter the context through period-piece movies, reenactments, and rituals that serve to abolish the century that has passed since Frederick Jackson Turner cited the census of 1890 that declared an end to the American Frontier. A few fearless souls prove brave enough to don their cowboy apparel outside of elaborately-contrived contexts; yet, as George Carlin once noted, wearing a cowboy hat makes as much sense as putting on pirate’s garb or a Viking’s horned helm in an age of satellites, hip-hop music, and cloned life forms.  

Yet, the American frontier experience fascinates modern Americans. In an age of suburban subdivisions and regentrified urban bungalows, adorned with mass-produced kitchenware and other consumables, the “Old West”—real or not—stands as antipode to the easy, cookie-cutter life of modern America. Yet, the accomplishments of previous conquerors no doubt occupied the minds of the early American colonizers of the western US. The feats of Hernan Cortés and the piracy of Sir Francis Drake surely captured the early-modern American imagination in much the same way the exploits of latter frontiersmen like Daniel Boone fire our own. My goal in this chapter is not to debunk or exalt the Old West. Instead, I seek to understand the permutations of the larger “Frontier” in human history and understand why modern Americans fight so bitterly over its representation and legacy in American history.

**Frederick Jackson Turner: Frontier Fact and Fancy**

In his ground-breaking essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Frederick Jackson Turner meditated on the end of the American frontier and provided a theory that served as a dialectic for historians of the American West up into the present.

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Turner defined the frontier as “the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” Turner could not be more correct—from a Euro-American perspective. Writing at the close of the 19th century, Turner’s ideology reflected the synapse between the land-ennobling ideals of Jeffersonian Agrarianism and its 20th century scions—The Progressives. Likewise, the rhetoric of Puritan moral agrarians, such as Cotton Mather, served as logical antecedent to the imperialist nature of 19th century American expansion. The frontier, no longer threatening as in the case of early Massachusetts Bay or Jamestown colonies, began to define the American experience. “So long as free land exists,” Turner wrote, “the opportunity for a competency exists, and economic power secures political power.” Thomas Jefferson himself could not have presented the context for the ideal democratic yeoman farmer any more succinctly. As such, the moral agrarianism of the Puritans gave way to a Jeffersonian democratic expansionism.

Turner, unlike Jefferson and the Puritans, witnessed the effects that a market revolution and industrialism wrought on American democracy and agrarianism, replacing an independent yeoman farmer ideal (along with a de facto American aristocracy) with the faceless tyrannies of publicly-unaccountable corporations. The change in political strategy—from the limited government of the republicans to the benevolent government envisioned by the Populists and actualized by the Progressives—colors Turner’s writing in no small way. “Individualism in America has allowed a laxity in regard to governmental affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest

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4 Ibid, 58.
evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit,” Turner concluded. As such, Turner echoed the Populist strategy to bend, not limit, government power in order to secure the founders’ vision of an equal and just society.

Turner’s thesis, however, contains all the flaws and prejudices of his time. The ideologies he held, while addressing the grievances of disadvantaged 19th century Americans, not only failed to take into account the concerns of Native-, African-, Hispanic-, and Asian-Americans, but argued for the subjugation of these groups if they happened to stand in the way of “progress.” He viewed the battle for land at the frontier as “meeting point between savagery and civilization.”

In his discussion on the impact of the frontier in America, however, Turner gleaned new insight on the formation of our modern country. Turner argued that “the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines” and “to study this advance... and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history.” This statement represents Turner’s most daring insight and provided a powerful dialectic for the history of the American West.

As I pointed out earlier, Turner’s frontier thesis failed to account for many things. Soon after its delivery, scholars exploited its faults and discovered unexplored avenues, effectively abandoning his theory soon after his death in 1932. After nearly a century of critical examination, a new school of Western History—New Western History—appeared ready to toll the death knell on Turner’s work yet again by employing modern findings colored by sentiments culled from the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1987,

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid, 38.
7 Ibid.
historian Patricia Nelson Limerick published *The Legacy of Conquest*, the best articulation of New Western History, and a scholarly war ensued, pitting advocates of the New vs. Old West against one other. The New Western historians correctly pointed out the shortcomings of Turner’s thesis; particularly, its ethnocentric perspective, politically incorrect language, its failure to explain the post 19th century West, and its celebration of a process that marked the end of cultures and the death of countless humans.

Immediately, the more trenchant Old Western historians fired back, declaring the New Western historians revisionists who defended their view of history with Neo-Nazi zeal, while moderate Western historians, like Martin Ridge, called on New Western historians to “explain what is new about their work other than their personal assumptions and value judgments.” The reaction remained more bark than bite for the new school’s criticisms, in fact, did argue for a new vision of Western History and offered fresh criticisms of Turner’s much abused theory. Soon after it declared its independence from Turnerian antiquarianism and replaced the maligned term “frontier” with “conquest,” the New Western History set to task populating the history of the American West with the overlooked peoples and non-human forces that shaped the region. New scholarship emerged placing the roles and influence of women, minorities, Native Americans, the environment, consumer capitalism, and the twentieth century in the picture. However, once historians plugged these overlooked ingredients into the past and applied a declensionist arc to their histories, they have been remiss in revisiting the single force that connects all these stories into the same narrative. The process of the frontier (or conquest) has yet to be treated on the scale and in a manner capable of rehabilitating the

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explanatory power of the frontier model, sans Turnerian flaws. As a New Western historian, I challenge the school to 1) divorce the very real horror wrought by the clash of cultures throughout history from the term “frontier,” and 2) set about uncovering the origins, forms, and future of the frontier in history. To do otherwise blinds us to the power the frontier has in unifying and understanding the stories New Western Historians seek to tell. To merely toss out the frontier as a slur that, due to its “ethnocentricity,” makes historians “uncomfortable,” is akin to an Aviation Historian renaming airplanes “Death Machines” because some have been used to bomb people.9

In their contempt for Turner’s ethnocentrism, New Western historians disposed of Turner’s primary object of study: the process of the frontier. Wishing to replace the process of the frontier with a renewed examination of place, New Western historians abandoned the analytical power of the frontier, stigmatized by its association with the maligned Old West. Limerick refutes the frontier by arguing, “the history of the West is a study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences.”10 The statement rests on valid historical ground but does little to debunk the process of the frontier. The semantic confusion originated from Turner, who stated that the “‘West’ with which I dealt, was a process rather than a fixed geographical region.”11 For Turner, the “West” was always the land just beyond the edge of Euro-American colonization. Therefore, the old Northwest Territories in the Middle West, the Trans-Mississippi West, and even central Massachusetts had all once been to the west of the American frontier.

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Thus, in disposing of the frontier as “an unsubtle concept in a subtle world,” New Western historians, according to Limerick, “gain the freedom to think of the West as a place;” even though “we cannot fix exact boundaries for the region.” In adopting the West as place and disregarding the process of the West/frontier, New Western Historians sought to limn a better picture of people “who considered their homelands to be the center, not the edge.” While they have succeeded in incorporating the history of these overlooked groups, they disregarded the “unsubtle” concept that contained the key to understanding how such groups would be maligned by conquest and forgotten by historians to begin with.

By their own admission, New Western historians recognize that the cultures they seek to plug into Western history, as Limerick’s previous quote informs, invested their perspective in an equally intense ethnocentrism—viewing their cultures “to be the center, not the edge.” As such, the New Western History only provides the story of the other side of the frontier—in this case, the contracting side—without mentioning the frontier that stands between and explains the actions of all clashing cultures. If each culture possesses its own axis mundi, which it places at the core of its world, then everywhere that two cultures meet, the boundary between “Us” and “Them,” seems best described as a frontier—no matter how subtle it may appear to modern scholars. Understanding the permutations of that frontier dynamic does as much to tell the story of the “victims” of history as do poignant, yet ethnocentric, cultural histories that seek to fill in the gaps of scholarship.

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12 Limerick, 25, 26.
13 Ibid.
In her address as president of the Western History Association, reprinted in the *Western Historical Quarterly*, Limerick sought to apply the lessons of the American West to "international patterns of colonialism." Her connection lay in showing analogous barbarity among both American and European colonial institutions, which made it "clear that the United States had no moral advantage over other imperial powers." After she "squirmed and wished it were otherwise," Limerick concluded her essay at a loss over "What to do" about presenting this "unsavory" history to public audiences. Finally, Limerick laments that what she finds "intellectually most stimulating these days is the subject matter that most public audiences reject at first hearing." Limerick believed that pointing out the "unpalatable" aspects of colonial history then applying a balm of formal apology would make western historians "context setters" in a new era of academic and political integration. An admirable goal, to be sure, but merely confessing to our sins and offering verbal, perhaps material, compensation offers little hope of understanding the process that continues to produce such savagery. Ironically, the process that Limerick fails to recognize today and that she has worked intimately with for decades—the frontier—stands as the most effective tool in synthesizing comparative colonialism.

I do not contend that the New Western history fails to tell the story of overlooked aspects of Western history; however, in their contempt for the frontier, New Western historians disarm themselves of a vital tool in understanding what occurs when one

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15 Ibid, 19
16 Ibid, 19, 21
17 Ibid, 21
18 Ibid, 23
19 Ibid, 21.
culture confronts another. Ameliorating this deficit remains easy enough: we should continue to recognize the United States as an agglomeration of distinct places, populated by diverse peoples, governed by unique policies, and containing many unique bioregions; yet, we need to understand the process that arranged this particular constellation of variables and continues to inform decisions pertaining to the still-undeniable frontiers that delimit the boundary of the United States. There persists a mistaken notion of the frontier that defines it as the boundary between humans and terra nullius (land without people, and hence, without existence). Although history provides a few rare cases of this—and if the wilderness movement gets its way we can truly talk about the opening of a new terra nullius frontier—nearly all frontiers exist between cultures. This is not to say that cultures, as I have pointed out, often present each other as representing the forces of chaos and the destruction of a civilized order. The reality of the frontier is that it represents the boundary between cultures, not civilization and a vacant wilderness.

Thus, reconciliation between the two schools of Western History holds the promise of uniting the best qualities of both and establishing an analytical tool that can transcend the restrictions of time and place and apply the process of the frontier to the expanse of human history. However unpalatable, we will have to employ the defamed f-word frequently to achieve that goal.

**The Permutations of the Frontier**

**The Expanding Frontier**

In rehabilitating the frontier as a universal model of cultural communication, we need to classify a few of its subtle permutations. The first variation, the “Expanding Frontier,”
represents the impact a frontier bears on the culture witnessing its expansion away from their core, or axis mundi—the culture of the victors.

In *The Great Frontier*, historian Walter Prescott Webb defined the colonizing states of Europe as the “Metropolis” and the lands in which they established “colonies and empires” the Great Frontier. In his formulation, Webb somewhat erroneously declared, “the Metropolis was indivisible,” ignoring the bitter internecine struggles that ensued in the European conquest of the New World. Likewise, Webb mistakenly declared that the Great Frontier stood where the Metropolis encountered land “assumed to be vacant... an advance against nature rather than against men”; placing it entirely in the New World (with the exception of South Africa) effectively ignored the West African slave trade or the colonization/imperial control of Old World civilizations. Despite these failures, Webb provided the most lucid insight into how the frontier affected the Metropolis—the point from which the frontier expanded.

One of the primary results of the Great Frontier lay in the seeming affirmation of capitalism as the gospel of progress. The frontier possessed a “burden of wealth, or of the stuff that wealth is made of, in such quantity and variety as the Metropolis never hoped to see.” The frontier seemed to provide the capitalistic nations of Europe with the infinite prospect of growth that the new economics demanded. Likewise, the frontier seemingly supplied this boon with little or no labor costs (initially) because Europeans could exchange worthless metal and glass trinkets to Indians for desirable pelts and provisions, or they could simply enslave non-Christian Africans and Indians without a

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20 Webb, 21.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 3.
23 Ibid, 11.
twinge of moral indignation. The paradise that Europeans entered, however, soon became cosmicized and associated with the *axis mundi* back home through the tangible forms of the fence, the plow, and the fields teeming with domesticated flora and fauna. The New World, as Webb points out, changed “into something of an Old World image.”

Webb correctly observed that, for a frontiersman, “the new frontier is always *ahead* of him; he is never in it.” So why venture, you may ask, to the edge of your known universe, leaving the *dar al 'islām* (realm of submission) and risk being swallowed by the *dar al 'harb* (realm of war, which is simply the *dar al 'islām* of another)? The answer undoubtedly rests in our biology. Humans would not have populated every niche in the world had they not possessed some fundamental curiosity or penchant to flee heavily populated zones and seek out habitats not unlike those that hominids spent the majority of their evolution living in. This fact does not upset the established dichotomy, however, because a community never leaves the *dar al 'islām*—instead they merely carry the boundary of it with them as witnessed in the hearth fire and earth rituals of ancient Rome (chapter one). Lillian Schlissel, a premier historian on the influence the 19th century overland trail worked on families, recognized the same behavior in homesteaders (in this case, 19th century Americans) 2,000 years removed from their Roman ancestors:

> a family on an American frontier—wherever that frontier might be—was a family separated from some part of itself. Frontier settlers were fragments of families, maintaining outposts on uncharted land. Far from home, they yearned to connect with those who had been left behind, through memory, through photographs, through letters that carried seeds from old gardens...anything out of which to weave continuity over the distances and the separations.

24 Ibid, 418.
25 Webb, 283.
All of this is not to say that humans cannot selectively admit some lands, people, animals, and plants into their realm and permanently exclude others. The United States possesses a long legacy of uncosmicized realms that any modern scholar can find on a current map. The realms that were marked for exclusion still bear the names of our most feared cultural creations: the Judaeo-Christian underworld and the demons that populate it. Whether it’s Hell’s Half Acre, Nevada or Devil’s Golf Course in California, these lands constituted unconquerable areas that were better left to the forces of evil. For now, I will delay discussion of this trend until chapter four.

The eventual impact that an expanding dar al‘islām bears on a culture rests in the ways that a society changes its institutions and philosophy in response to the retreating frontier. The Roman centuriae (or, celestially aligned grid) developed to organize newly conquered lands into the Roman version of dar al‘islām. Geographer John Brinckerhoff Jackson writes that the colonia, “or planned town” served as nexuses for the centuriated hinterland where farm goods flowed in and “road system[s]” and irrigation ditches flowed out.27 Perhaps because of the absence of a constantly expanding frontier during British rule and the early republic, colonial Euro-Americans persisted in their use of the metes and bounds system of city planning that referenced tangible organic landmarks until the colonization of the Northwest Territories. Therefore, the organization of the dar al‘islām into a network of cities planned on the centuriation system for the efficient harvest, concentration, and dispersal of resources stands as one of the lasting impacts of the frontier on humanity and can be witnessed in many disparate cultures going back to the early empires that formed in the wake of the Neolithic Revolution.

The United States government, reflecting Jeffersonian agrarianism and responding to its frontier experience, passed the Homestead Act of 1862 to regulate the colonization of newly-won lands entering their *dar al'islām*. The act, although not departing from the centuriation system, represents a democratic response to an expanding frontier by ceding 160 acres of land to individuals after a term of five years—provided the homesteaders “improve” their grant by building structures and planting crops commensurate with Euro-American culture, effectively cosmicizing the new land to their *axis mundi*. Soon, however, a few government officials and scientists discovered that a federally-enforced standard for allotment ignored the unique conditions of the *place* the frontier left in its wake.

Recognizing that “the lands beyond the 100th meridian received less than twenty inches of annual rainfall, and twenty inches was the minimum for unaided agriculture,” John Wesley Powell formulated a model for assimilating arid lands into a society whose institutions took climate for granted. Powell understood that the Jeffersonian prescription for a strong democracy failed to account for the unique conditions present in an arid land. Powell also knew that access to water would polarize wealth and power, threatening the very democratic ideals the United States represented. His response lay in recalibrating homestead acreage to take water, or lack thereof, into account.

In his biography of Powell, Wallace Stegner articulates the radical new plan: “Powell therefore recommended eighty acres as the homestead unit for irrigated farms. But for pasture farms he proposed units of 2560 acres, four full sections, sixteen times the

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normal homestead." The mass exodus of western farmers witnessed in the 20th century prove his angry address to a reluctant Congress prophetic: "I think it would be almost a criminal act to go on as we are doing now, and allow thousands and hundreds of thousands of people to establish homes where they cannot maintain themselves." In this case, the current problems in the West remain traceable to a government not adapting to an expanding frontier that delivered ecologically-diverse places into a culture’s realm of submission. As such, the New Western critique would be tempered by a focus on place as well as process.

History also provides countless examples of Non-European assimilation practices. In his amazing look at Pueblo responses to Spanish incursions in New Mexico, Ramón A. Gutiérrez provides scholars with a Native American model of an axis mundi and mechanisms for admittance of outsiders into their own version of a dar al'islām. Gutiérrez writes that the men “of every pueblo considered their town to be the center of the universe” and placed their kiva (Puebloan Temple) “at the vortex of a spatial scheme that extended outward to the four cardinal points, upward to the four skies above, and downward to the underworld.” "Located at the center of the kiva’s floor was the shipapu, the earth’s navel, through which the people emerged from the underworld and through which they would return,” Gutiérrez continues. Likewise, Gutiérrez discovered that only through “Pueblo female rituals” could the “transformation of outsiders into insiders” take place. They possessed frameworks for associating the “Other” to the

29 Ibid, 225.
30 Ibid, 333.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 64.
Puebloan *axis mundi*, which rivaled the *axis mundi* of their European conquerors in complexity and sophistication.

Finally, the expanding frontier drastically changed the philosophy of those who participated in its retreat. The yeoman farmer, in which Jefferson invested the future of American democracy, abandoned the old Puritan judgment that imbued the city with the sacred and profaned all unassimilated land. During the first half of the 19th century, the agrarian ideal viewed the middle landscape of self-sufficient (real or imagined) farmers and their homesteads as sacred, while the city—home to people of corrupt morals, disease outbreaks, and undemocratic barons of industry—joined untrammeled wilderness as profane. Likewise, Environmental historian J. Donald Hughes found that the proto-Romantics of ancient Rome, “Horace, Martial, Juvenal, and others,” fled the cities not to simply shun “human society” but to expose “themselves to the good influences of nature.” J. Donald Hughes, *Pan’s Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 67.

The efflorescence reached in the years before the official closing of the frontier would, as we shall see shortly, march the sacred landscape to its present state—bestowing upon wilderness and an agrarian idealized middle ground the mantle of sacred land, and casting the city as the ultimate moral wasteland. Moral geology, under the rubric of an expanding frontier, could dramatically change.

Countless examples aside, these few establish the profound impact an expanding frontier bears on the culture witnessing its retreat. The following section discusses how a static frontier changes a culture that desires constant outward growth.

**The Static Frontier**
There appears an inverse relationship between proximity of the frontier on one hand, and nature appreciation on the other. A proto-Romantic age occurred at the height of Rome as affluent citizens, no doubt sickened by the noise, waste, and angular walls of the city, frequented the pastoral landscapes that lay beyond the confines of the metropolis, responding to a topophilic need. Some even voiced ideas that bear a striking resemblance to not only the 19th century Romantics but to the Environmentalists of the 20th century. While Seneca and Ovid frequently expressed their appreciation of what modern scholars would call wilderness, “so lofty is the wood, so lone the spot, so wondrous the thick unbroken shade,” Pliny the Elder expressed a deep love of nature, tempered by an intense loathing for humans who willfully squandered its resources:

> She is tortured at all hours by water, iron, wood, fire, stone and crops, and by far more besides to serve our pleasures rather than our needs. Yet so that what she suffers on her surface, her outermost skin, may seem bearable by comparison, we penetrate her inmost parts, digging into her veins of gold and silver and deposits of copper and lead. We search for gems and certain very small stones by sinking shafts into the depths. We drag out Earth’s entrails; we seek a jewel to wear on a finger.

Likewise, in the 19th century, the American Romantics expressed similar sentiments and re-sanctified wilderness. Two conditions undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of nature appreciation in both the first and the 19th centuries A.D. The first rests in the fact that, with the retreating frontier, the chaotic threat of sudden destruction at the hands of a human Other or a tempestuous nature diminished. Thus, when viewing the bitter dualism of Hebrew mythology, modern scholars must recall the centuries of periodic enslavement, defeat, and subjugation that marked the post-Neolithic Levant and profoundly colored the dominant myths that emerged in subsequent centuries. In other words, the human and elemental enemies remained next-door, and ever threatened the

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myths and lives of the community. Similarly, in the early days of sedentary agriculture, the city—often situated on a principle river and dependent on a fickle climate for crop growth—teetered on the edge of destruction with every flood, drought, and other “natural disaster” that plagues agriculture.

The citizens of Imperial Rome believed their legions invincible and their complex systems of water and food distribution unparalleled. With the apparent elimination of the two greatest wreckers of civilization pushed to the edge of their world, Romans could focus on quality of life issues, the tributary concerns of survival. With the two Romantic movements noted above, the frontier appeared to open anew at the core of their world—the metropolis. The natural outgrowth of this new worldview established a vitriolic misanthropy, witnessed in the words of Pliny and Thoreau, who required “pasture enough for my imagination.”

One litmus test a scholar should employ to divine whether a culture has enjoyed an expanding frontier rests in whether or not its intellectuals embrace topophobic landscapes (assuming the culture’s entire realm is not one). For America, the dividing line appears sometime in the latter quarter of the 19th century. So, while Zebulon Pike could find only one advantage to the vast arid region in the western US, “The restriction of our population to some certain limits,” toward the turn of the 19th century and into the 20th, intellectuals flocked to the desert landscapes of the West, embracing them as aesthetically pleasing and as nemesis of human development. Joseph Wood Krutch, John Van Dyke, and Edward Abbey all lauded the desert landscape in the years following

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the official close of the frontier for it proved a barrier to human encroachment and fostered an ecology that represented an antithesis of the capitalistic gospel of abundance. Such a dramatic change in philosophy emerged only after the frontier wiped away the immediate concerns of survival, which partially explains why critics of the Environmental Movement stigmatize it as a "full-stomach issue."

Once the frontier closed, however, the new view of nature, engendered by decades of an expanding frontier, aroused an anxiety that an end to the seemingly infinite possibilities of growth (both economic and territorial) would destroy the very experience that Frederick Jackson Turner believed differentiated Americans from their staid European ancestors. The answer lay in preserving "wild" nature in the form of National Parks. Now, the intelligentsia could visit their sacred landscapes and commune with the sublime while the general populace could participate in a frontier "experience"—cleansed of human and animal predators—and return to the urban squalor they called home knowing they still possessed the virility of their vanquishing forebears.39

The United States government sought other methods to perpetuate the frontier experience aside from massive preservation of existing lands. After dispossessing Native Americans of their land, revolting from the foreign rule of the King of England, purchasing vast tracts from France, Britain and Russia, and conquering half of the land from the newly-independent state of Mexico, the United States participated in the same overseas colonization and empire building that created it. Although the theft of Hawaii from its Native inhabitants marks the only classical example of colonization, the bloody

conquest of the Philippines, the “assistance” lent to Cubans in their effort to win independence from Spanish masters, and countless interventions in the American “backyard” of Latin America sought the continuation of the frontier experience and the guarantee of markets, raw materials, and cheap labor for burgeoning US corporations.40

By fulfilling our “Manifest Destiny” to conquer the contiguous continent, America could then open an era of overseas imperialism that continues to this day. The extant static frontier explains the impulse while the economic and military might of the United States explains its success where less-capable aspirants founder.

The Contracting Frontier

Although the adage “The winners write history” seems to complicate any analysis of their experience, the historical record provides scholars with plenty of examples of cultures responding to an approaching or contracting frontier. The reaction of the Aztec and Inca to the rapid destruction of their dar al’islām establishes several modes of behavior that humans assume when faced with the annihilation of their world.

Opportunism to secure temporary peace or material prizes emerges as a common reaction to conquest. The natives who joined Cortés to unseat their former tyrant Montezuma, the small group of Cherokee (much to the displeasure of the majority of the Nation) that agreed to US terms of removal, and the Kosovar Albanians who converted to Islam in the face of the Ottoman Empire, all represent the strategy of opportunism.

40 Fin-de-siècle corporate barons and politicians from the president of the Illinois Central Railroad, Stuyvesant Fish, to US presidents Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt recognized the need for new frontiers to 1) continue the growth deemed necessary for corporate capitalism and 2) hewing to the Turnerian belief in the invigorating qualities of the frontier, argued that only by the test offered by the frontier would Americans maintain their moral, physical, and intellectual fitness. For a brief discussion, See Faragher, 7.
While most groups who resorted to aligning themselves with the encroaching power did so only briefly, many—like the Kosovar Albanians and Sephardic *Conversos*—underwent rituals that effectively cosmicized them to the new *dar alʾislām*. Any moving frontier, which requires an unbalanced measure of military and economic might among the conflicting realms, requires the “victors” to possess rituals for assimilating once hostile land and people to their *axis mundi*.

One clear instance of temporary opportunism comes from the work of the Spanish conquistador Pedro Pizarro, who documented how a group of Inca promised allegiance to their conquerors once the Christians handed over a handful of local tribesmen. The Spanish instantly recognized the opportunity “And the Marquis Don Francisco Pizarro in order to win their friendship, and because they had come thither in peace, gave up to them some of the chiefs, whom they killed in the presence of the Spaniards by means of beheading.”

Widespread despair and the internal dissolution of culture also emerge as reactions to an impending frontier. Atabalipa, according to Pedro Pizarro, in his comments on the advancing Spanish forces demonstrates the dissolution of myth that precedes the approaching frontier:

> The Marquis... asked him [Atabalipa] why he had said that that Pachacama of theirs was not a God, since they held him to be so. Atabalipa replied: Because he is a liar. The Marquis asked him in what respect he had been a liar. Atabalipa replied: You should know, Lord, that when my father [Guainacapa] was sick in Quito, he sent to ask him [Pachacama] what should be done for his health. He [Pachacama] commanded that he be taken out into the sun, and when he was taken out, he died; Guascar, my brother, sent to ask him [Pachacama] who was to win the victory, he or I, and [Pachacama] said that he would, and I won it. When you came, I sent to ask him who was destined to conquer, you or I, and he sent to tell me that I was. You conquered. Therefore he is a liar, and is no God, for he lies.

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42 Ibid, 209-10 (Vol. I)
Similarly, cases of mass Native suicides became so ubiquitous that famed Flemish engraver Theodore De Bry depicted several scenes of Natives plunging from cliffs and drowning themselves in rivers. Parallels exist throughout history: a few recent examples could include the rise in suicides in the years following the stock market crash of 1929, certainly an economic frontier; the many cases of suicide among Ghettoized Jews in the Third Reich on the eve of liquidations; and the countless Japanese civilians and soldiers who killed themselves rather than surrender as the frontier approached during the American island-hopping campaign of World War II. In this way, despair serves as a corollary to a reaction of “resistance,” which also manifested itself most popularly in armed combat—a strategy well documented throughout history.43

The final reaction to the approaching frontier remains the most prevalent throughout history. Despite the conqueror’s sincerest efforts, most vanquished cultures persist in their practices long after assimilation. Latin America provides ample evidence of the various configurations this amalgam reaction produces. Historian Fernando Cervantes’s *The Devil in the New World* provides a thorough explanation of the permutations of Native adoption of Spanish culture. Cervantes revealed that many Natives, finding little difference between the multiple deities in the Christian myth and their own, simply added the various Christian saints and supernatural figures to their own pantheon of gods. Natives elevated certain saints above others (e.g. the Virgin of Guadalupe) and sometimes associated their hallucinogenic visions “with Christian saints, Christ and the Virgin Mary.”44

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43 While some may fault me for conflating the frontier with military conflict, I argue that military advances, even if temporary in nature, produce the same responses in the cultures participating as if a frontier, with its hordes of colonists and institutions, were present.
A penchant among plant-based myths for human and animal sacrifice to assure the continuation of life produced frightening results in the eyes of the Spanish Friars. Ignorant of the fact that, like all monistic myths, Native cultures contained deities that possessed both good and malevolent countenances, the Spanish religious soon found themselves surrounded by real devil worshipers. The Natives, without previous exposure to a dualistic myth, could not “conceive of a devil that was totally malevolent or even undesirable.” Since early conquistadores insisted “that the devil was the central object of [traditional] sacrifices” and by instilling in the Natives an acute fear of him, Catholic missionaries unwittingly promoted the Native desire to propitiate this fearsome god.

With the importation of the Inquisition into New Spain, Natives adopted a sort of liberation theology that embraced the very deity the Christians so reviled and in turn associated the Spanish with their own preexisting malicious deities. The Natives of Columbia called the Christians yares, their word for demons. Likewise, Central America Natives occasionally referred to the Spanish friars as tzitzimime, “the demonic stars of Mesoamerican mythology, the sun’s enemies and monsters of death and destruction who at the end of time would descend to kill and eat the last of mankind.” These two strategies do not fully amount to an amalgam tactic, however, for they reference the still-extant Native culture and not that of the Christian conquerors. The difference is subtle but important. Yet, by associating their conquerors with the most reviled aspects of their axis mundi, Native Americans participated in the same Us vs.

45 Ibid, 47.
46 Ibid.
Them thinking most scholars affiliate with “Western Civilization.” Clearly, the dualist roots run deep in the human animal, underlying even monist cultures.

However, Cervantes does note the development of a true amalgam strategy, principally among the Native, mestizo, mulatto, and impoverished Spaniard populations. These populations, which existed on the periphery of the dominant Spanish culture, casually adopted devil worship in the hopes of gaining worldly prizes. In 1704, Tomás de Santiago, a mulatto accused of murder, “was known to brag that he had a pact with the devil who had assisted him in his escapes from many prisons in the past.”49 The primary method for signifying one’s adoption of Satan, as revealed in the Santiago case and several others, rest in tossing away one’s rosary. Likewise, other disadvantaged people on the fringe of Spanish culture initiated devil worship in order to gain immediate advantages. For instance: in 1647, a mulatto in New Spain made a pact with the devil after receiving lashings from his master; in 1655 another mulatto “stated that the two tattoos of the devil he had on his arm also helped him to win fights.”50 Amazingly, a Spaniard named Antonio José del Castillo “remembered how at the…age of sixteen when, ‘inflamed with desire for a woman’, he had exclaimed ‘Prince of darkness come!’”51 With large disparities of wealth and power in New Spain, many groups sought the active help of the only figure in the Christian myth who, as is clearly displayed in the myth of the Temptation of Christ by Satan,52 possessed the power to grant worldly goods in exchange for worship and, as evident from Job 1.7, walked the earth awaiting

49 Ibid, 81.
50 Ibid, 84, 88. The latter cites Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Ramo Inquisición, tomo 636, exp. 4, (unfoliated).
51 Ibid, 87. Citing Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Ramo Inquisición, tomo 1000, exp. 20, fol. 288v.
52 Matthew 4.8-4.10.
petitioners. As such, a contracting frontier compels people to adopt several different strategies, including, but not limited to: 1) violent resistance; 2) despair; 3) opportunism; and 4) a coping strategy that employs an amalgam of beliefs culled from the two opposing cultures.

Referencing the axis mundi in the Present

With the Age of Enlightenment and Newtonian Physics, the old myths began a process of disintegration that continues into our own time. The witch hysterias of Europe and its colonial offshoots soon cooled and by the first half of the 18th century the Spanish Inquisition in New Spain “abandoned even the courtesy of replying” to letters claiming the presence of diabolic worship. The growing explanatory power of science slowly vanquished the gaps of knowledge that spawned witches, warlocks, and demons in the wake of hailstorms, comets, and earthquakes and replaced the old gods with the modern fields of meteorology, astronomy, and geology. As science explains more of the natural world, the major world myths constantly retreat to the eroding citadel of “belief,” while the world waits for a new, more relevant myth to emerge and explain the profound connection between humans, their environment, and each other.

Myths, whether declining or emerging, represent only one aspect of culture, however. In many ways, the abstract concepts of democracy, freedom, and equality dominate the modern American axis mundi. They represent the values that inform (or at least shroud) all our major decisions and (for good or ill) remain the measuring stick for assessing foreign cultures. Occasionally, however, the old faces of the abyss emerge when the frontier appears to inch toward us—as it ever so minutely did on September 11,

53 Cervantes, 138.
2001. President George W. Bush instantly—perhaps unknowingly—evoked a bitter delineation between Us and Them. The subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq supply modern scholars with abundant examples of the continuation of the frontier mentality founded in the precepts of dualism that casts entire societies as either subhuman or in league with our most reviled mythic antagonists.

In Iraq, the administration distinguishes coalition forces by their willingness “To defend freedom in the 21st Century,” while the enemy represents “a collection of killers [that] is desperately trying to undermine Iraq's progress and throw the country into chaos.” Likewise, the comments of Lieutenant-General William G Boykin (now employed as Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence) that the United States is battling Satan in our “War on Terror” and that Muslims worship “idols,” represents one of the more extreme cases of the modern Us vs. Them model. The incredible lack of perspective that associates the Other with the most abusive of terms and with chaos itself is only possible in a culture that bitterly refers to its standards for judging the universe. Thus, modern humans have yet to escape the consequences of our cultural emphasis on dualist thought.

Likewise, the long-standing tradition of animosity toward sedition resurfaces with the slightest pressure. Oliver North, a man who surprisingly found a job as a talking head on television after directing US aggression against Nicaragua, which the World Court ruled constituted an “unlawful use of force,” recently called the mere questioning of

54 David Bamford quoting US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in the BBC News Online (26 September, 2003)
55 George W. Bush’s 8 September, 2003 televised presidential address as transcribed in the BBC News Online (8 September, 2003)
56 “US is ‘battling Satan’ says General” BBC News Online (17 October, 2003)
George W. Bush’s Iraq policy “political terrorism.” The failure to “adopt the same standards” when evaluating the actions of your own “political and intellectual elites” and “those of official enemies”—as famed linguist and intellectual gadfly Noam Chomsky observes perennially—results in the continuation of violence against the Other outside and the dissenter within.

As pessimistic as this observation may appear, Oliver North, unlike the book of Deuteronomy and modern totalitarian states, does not publicly advocate the slaughter of dissenters. The ever-broadening circle of civil and human rights, won by centuries of popular struggle, mutes the specter of sedition in most 21st century cultures and will be one of the focuses of the next chapter.

The Tenuous Modern Frontiers

The observation of the miniature cowboy I encountered in my childhood remains with me today. Referencing our cultures (axis mundi) remains the fundamental element of perspective. Only through eliminating our frontiers can humanity attain the harmony that the image of our planet from space now only suggests. After observing Nietzsche’s classification of modern History as an “Age of Comparisons,” Joseph Campbell accounts for the violence of the modern world now that technology binds all humanity:

There are now no more horizons. And with the dissolution of horizons we have experienced and are experiencing collisions, terrific collisions, not only of peoples but also of their mythologies. It is as when dividing panels are withdrawn from between chambers of very hot and very cold airs: there is a rush of these forces together. And so we are right now in an extremely perilous age of thunder, lightning, and hurricanes all

58 Chomsky, 49
around...and we are riding it: riding it to a new age, a new birth, a totally new condition of mankind.  

Our ability to understand the frontiers that divide humanity and learn from the inglorious behavior of our antecedents will largely determine the nature of Campbell’s “new condition.” With the proliferation of technology and weaponry that demands ever-increasing levels of responsibility, recognizing the mechanism that distorts our perception of the Other seems essential to our survival, for we are all somebody’s Other. By understanding the profound biology that connects all of us—all of life for that matter—humanity will disarm its greatest enemy, the devil within, and acknowledge that whoever your enemy, he shares more biology with you than you would like to admit. That is the meaning of Campbell’s quote at the head of this chapter and it remains the most powerful force for world unity. However, by persisting in the acceptance of only our specific axis mundi as the only true reference point, we will stumble into the future with the same mindset as the quixotic seven-year-old cowboy that, regardless of geographical location, believes in the presence of Indians just over the next hill to the west. As biology has shown, humans are all kin, and we had better start recognizing it.

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Chapter 4
Of Life and Land: The Slow Death of the Obstinate Frontier

The ecology movement will never gain any real influence or have any significant impact on society if it advances a message of despair rather than hope, of a regressive and impossible return to primordial human cultures and sensibilities, rather than a commitment to human progress and to a uniquely human empathy for life as a whole.

— Murray Bookchin

Death Valley

America’s desert Southwest provides tangible examples that the dualist tradition, which perceives a boundary between human societies as well as humans and nature, still dictates modern land use and perception. The most palpable example rests in Death Valley National Park and its surrounding environs. Encircled by landscapes no less awe inspiring, a modern traveler is struck by the ubiquity of government owned land in western Nevada and eastern California. Death Valley shares boundaries with military training and testing grounds, manifest in the swirling contrails of fighter jets and endless miles of razor wire enclosing the desert’s apron of creosote and mesquite. Likewise, criminal penitentiaries dot the landscape and provide highway travelers with the humorous yet disturbing reminder; “DO NOT PICK UP HITCHHIKERS.” In a land most people know only from sensational stories on the television show X-Files, bizarre contrasts abound. From the Area-51 themed gas station/brothel in the trucker stop of Lathrop Wells, Nevada, to a spray-painted peace sign on a concrete drainage ditch within throwing distance of the Nevada Test Site, the desert Southwest strikes one as a place not quite able to make up its mind concerning land use; and in many ways emblematic of the modern American West.

Using the desert as a dumping ground for criminals and ordinance on one hand, and as preserved and celebrated wilderness on the other, speaks volumes about the enduring dualism captured by both the environmental and proprietarian movements during the twentieth century, effectively cutting across the political spectrum. The tradition allowed humanity's most advanced (and catastrophic) technology to coexist with that unbroken ambience that threatens to drown you in its silence. The focus of this chapter rests in understanding how the evolution of environmental perception from the enlightenment up through the 20th century explains how two seemingly conflicting ideas—nature as depraved waste vs. nature as venerated "wilderness"—issue from the tradition of dualism, which emphasizes our severalty from nature. The two primary competing traditions (environmentalism and proprietary capitalism) produced tangible footprints on American land. The latter tradition, predicated on the perception of a hostile, inhumane nature, produced nearly 2,000 demonic place names throughout all fifty states, to say nothing of a mindset that seeks to transform inorganic and organic compounds of ecosystems into mere commodities. However, the former tradition grounds itself in the perception of a sacred, Edenic nature, manifesting itself in the preservation of millions of acres deemed "wilderness."

This chapter seeks to draw a connection between the dualist underpinnings of both traditions through an examination of these measurable trails. By understanding the connections between the two competing, yet parallel, movements, modern scholars can distinguish how the physical frontier "process"—assumed closed in 1890—has been followed by an incipient ethical frontier that serves to demolish the cultural emphasis of dualism and the Us vs. Them model it fuels.
The Sublime and Human Perception

The philosophical roots of the modern environmental movement rest in the European and (later) American Romantics of the 18th and 19th centuries. They uncovered, through contact and reflection with the natural world, many of the findings latter-day Darwinists quantified with modern technology. Far from comprising a monolithic group of gasping tree-huggers that, if alive today, would join Greenpeace, the Romantics professed a spectrum of thought and represented their forebears as much as they hinted at the ideas of their descendants. However, their notion that nature was permeated with the sublime—that terrifying quality that inspired equal parts fear and veneration—revolutionized the medieval European notion, inherited from the Abrahamic tradition, that the non-human world at best reflected the sin of humanity and at worst served as Satan's stomping ground.

Some of the earliest calls for the re-infusion of the divine in the natural world came from religious thinkers during the Renaissance. The Protestant Edmund Burke, a British enlightenment thinker and public official, offered what many modern Darwinists would recognize as evolutionary psychology in his classic work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke observed how humanity's deep-rooted desire for self-preservation colored perception and, in fact, excited physical responses to our environments. Burke determined that "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain...danger...is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest-emotion which the mind is capable
of feeling." Contrary to popular notions of the Romantics, Burke echoed many of his contemporaries by arguing "Astonishment...is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree"—relegating the commonly celebrated Romantic impulses of "admiration, reverence and respect" to "inferior effects" of the sublime.

What specific environments, phenomena, or objects conveyed the sublime for Burke? He pointed to its presence in "the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros." Burke recognized the terror elicited by many animals and habitats that environmental psychologist Roger S. Ulrich identified; particularly, the human aversion to "spatially restrictive environments" that tend to harbor "close hidden predatory threats." Likewise, Burke posited that "Greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime" because "the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so." The reason immensity affects us, however, lies with a more benevolent force, for "whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him." Nature, now permeated with the divine, garnered new respect by its association with religious imagery, not as an autonomous, secular ideal. Clearly, the Romantic elevation of the "natural" rested on the previous religious dialectic; a fact often glossed over by many modern secular scholars.

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2 Burke, 39.
3 Ibid, 57.
6 Ibid, 72, 73.
7 Ibid, 68.
Other circumstances evoking the sublime for Burke include: a "quick transition from light to darkness"; "excessive bitters, and intolerable stenches"; "dark and gloomy" mountains; and most relevant and illuminating when contemplating the distribution of demonic place names in North America remains Burke’s argument that a “perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane; and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished.” When examining the map (see attached), one is struck by the general correlation of demonic place names to areas of intense geologic relief; whether in the form of mountains, valleys, or coastlines.

Burke’s insights no doubt influenced the Romantics in Europe and America, however, the deification of nature would prove a double-edged sword. While the romantic ideal—combined with a healthy dose of American frontier anxiety—precipitated the preservation movement at the close of the 19th century, it merely expanded (perhaps only relocated) the realm of the sacred to “wilderness.” As such, Burke and the romantics in general, created an elaborate sarcophagus in which to entomb environmental ethics. Codified in The Wilderness Act of 1964, “wilderness” became an area “affected primarily by the forces of nature” and “untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” “If it isn’t hundreds of square miles big, if it doesn’t give us God’s-eye views or grand vistas, if it doesn’t permit us the illusion that we are alone on the planet,” writes historian William Cronon, “then it really isn’t natural. It’s too small, too plain, or too crowded to be authentically wild.” Thus, the progress of the previous generation would become the impediment to the next.

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8 Ibid, 80, 85, 81-2, 72.
environmentalism has yet to overcome this dualist blockage, to shatter the coffin of "wilderness" that debases any place unable to meet the stringent criteria.

Moral Geology and the Dualism of Wilderness and the Demonic

Our genes influence perception in profound, often imperceptible ways. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan anticipated many of the finding by latter-day Evolutionary psychologists in his 1974 classic *Topophilia*. Tuan recognized topophilia as the "affective bond between people and place or setting" and believed that bond the "strongest of human emotions."\(^\text{10}\)

For Tuan, this sentiment bonded humans to environments where the "excesses of geography (too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry) are removed" and where "plants and animals useful and friendly to man abound."\(^\text{11}\) It is no accident that humans—and most terrestrial life—would prefer such habitats since they prove necessary for existence. As such, comfortable habitats just happens to be where our species has habituated for eons.

As for mountains, they represent an ambiguous ecosystem. Certainly, the ancient Hittites and Greeks found the mountains of the eastern Mediterranean ideal forage for their flocks of sheep, cattle, and goats. Thus, the Greeks elevated many mountain peaks to the realm of the sacred, Mts. Parnassus and Olympus to name the most celebrated. However, the permanent snowcap and vertical excesses of the Alpine Matterhorn or the volcanism of a Krakatoa tended to reserve these places as manifestations of the sublime where worship was in order, to be sure, but habitation was impossible or foolhardy. In either case, the sensation of topophilia and topophobia—as a corollary of biophilia—explains our

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\(^\text{11}\) Ibid, 247.
perception of these and other physical landforms and provides the impetus of judgment that would be colored by images culled from the observer’s dominant culture.

In a splendid piece of intellectual history called *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, Marjorie Hope Nicolson, traces the changing perception of mountains through the Enlightenment and Romantic eras. Nicolson argues that mountains, long maligned as “warts, wens, blisters, imposthumes,” became “almost as sacred as Sinai to the patriarchs” during the Romantic period. Mountain observers colored their natural apprehension for these landforms with images taken from their culture and cosmology.

In fact, early modern Christians employed a moral geology whenever they confronted, as Burke put it, “rugged and broken” land. As mentioned in chapter one, the Old and New Testaments speak of an earth transformed by the fall of Adam and Eve, the first murder, and the crucifixion of Jesus. Later commentators would include the expulsion of Lucifer, in creating hell and Mount Purgatory. Likewise, in chapter two I explained how Dante Alighieri’s underworld bore signs of a wrathful Yahweh damaging the earth, particularly during the death of Jesus—blocking at least one path on the poets’ descent to Satan in the *Inferno*. Nicolson notes the prevalent “belief that mountains arose as a result of the sin of Cain” and points to a rabbinical scholar who posits that the “earth, which originally consisted of a level surface, became mountainous as a punishment for receiving Abel’s blood.” Likewise, Nicolson recognizes the parallel tradition in Christian thought by quoting Martin Luther’s comment that “even the earth, which is innocent in itself and committed no sin, is nevertheless compelled to bear sin’s curse.”

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14 Nicolson, 101.
predisposition for tranquil habitats marked by flowing waterways, verdant yet sparse vegetation, and a stable climate assuring year round plant and animal life stands as the catalyst of judgment when encountering new landscapes while cultural images provided a rich palette with which to paint an area. Conceiving of a moral geology in which the placid Golden Age of Eden became literally broken by an amoral humanity, the Abrahamic cosmology served as the primary compass of perception in the United States, thus explaining many of the nearly 2,000 demonic place names found therein.

Primary source documents contain a plethora of the topophobic and other naming practices. Geographers note that American settlers gave locations negative Christian names because of their “extremely rough character” or because the land proved “very rough and inaccessible.” Similarly, “unusual rock formations suggestive of satanic influences” clearly garnered an appropriate name. Anglo-Americans often thought demonic terrain consisted of “weird shapes” and “crazy forms” that spawned playful names such as Devil’s Golf Course in Death Valley. However, most of the place names within Death Valley correspond to the settler consensus that the region represented the “Creator’s dumping place where he had left the worthless dregs after making a world, and the devil had scraped these together a little”—clearly echoing the dualist moral geology so prevalent in the Abrahamic tradition. Similarly, a place could earn a pessimistic name “because of its forbidding appearance and because of the skeletons of unfortunate wanderers found there,” or for its “damned ingredients,” and “many gloomy

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If an area contained, “numerous evil-smelling pools and wells,” it also invited a fitting name. Lastly, inconveniences to travel or habitation impelled some explorers and settlers to grant a demonic name to a place for “the many accidents to men and animals.”

The direct origin of place names, unfortunately, often prove elusive to historians since many began as colloquial, word of mouth epithets—usually committed to paper and officially established years or decades after their initial designation. While the previous paragraph establishes general reactions to varying circumstances and landforms, a fortunate few sources remain that reveal specific naming events and serve to illustrate the varied sources of demonic place names. Hells Gate, in Death Valley, contains a narrow passage that suddenly opens to an astounding vista of the entire valley, amplified by an accompanying rapid drop in altitude where “travelers are struck by the marked change in temperature when crossing the pass on a hot day.” The Ferdinand Hayden expedition, while venturing through Yellowstone in 1871, named a “dark and gloomy” ten-mile-long canyon Devil’s Den. Similarly, Hawaii contains a small pit crater on the east rift zone of Kī-lau-ea volcano. Created in 1921, a testament to the persistence of this naming habit, the formation earned the name Devil’s Throat.

The African American experience may also shed light on some place names in the United States. Diddy Waw Diddy, Texas marks an example of African Americans.

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20 Ibid, 88.
21 Ibid, 138.
22 Ibid.
naming the land for a rather unique purpose. Although the explanation for why the place earned such a name remains somewhat unclear, one interpretation posits a possible utilitarian motive. “Diddy Waw Diddy was the last depot stop on the railroad to hell. Youngsters who did not walk the straight and narrow were told by elders that they were headed for Diddy Waw Diddy if they didn’t mend their ways.” Clearly, Euro-American settlers held no monopoly on naming a place based on a moral geology.

Due to their long tenure in the Americas, the Spanish left many demonic names sprinkled throughout the continent. Mount Diablo, an isolated, conical peak in the Coast Range northeast of San Francisco carries several stories about how it acquired its name. The accounts of General M.G. Vallejo prove most probable:

In 1806, a military expedition from San Francisco marched against a tribe called the Bolgones, who were encamped at the foot of the mountain. There was a hot fight, which was won by the Indians. Near the end of the fight, a person, decorated with remarkable plumage, and making strange movements, suddenly appeared. After the victory, the person, called Puy (evil spirit) in the Indian tongue, departed toward the mountain. The soldiers heard that this spirit often appeared thus, and they named the mountain Diablo (devil). These appearances continued until the tribe was subdued by Lieutenant Moranga, in the same year. "25

Clearly, unfamiliarity with a hostile Other could impel conquerors to confer derogatory names upon the newly encountered landscape and peoples inhabiting them.

Names could also undergo change when new cultures inhabited the land. Anglo-Americans often renamed locations to simplify complex (in their minds) Indian images. One Native name misinterpreted by Anglo-Americans rests in the Algonquian word “Manito,” which signifies a general animism or “unknown power.” At different times Anglo-Americans translated Manito to “The Great Spirit....Spirit (good, bad, or indifferent); god (or devil) of the Indians; demon guardian spirit, genius loci, fetish,

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A more popular case appears with Devil’s Tower, Wyoming, where an 865-foot monolith formed in the earth of molten lava approximately fifty million years ago presents an example of an Indian name recast by Americans. The Indians named it Bad God’s Tower (among other things); however, Richard I. Dodge renamed the landform Devil’s Tower while escorting a United States Geological Survey party in 1875. Likewise, Devil’s Lake, Oregon—marked neither by unusual formations or immense relief—proved that culture could provide the solitary source for some demonic place names. In this case, Anglo-Americans named Devil’s Lake (in the most popular version) because of the existence of “an Indian legend which is to the effect that a giant fish or marine monster lived in the lake and occasionally came to the surface to attack some hapless native.” Another example in this vein comes from Captain John Hays of the Texas Rangers. After riding across a rough strip of country, Hays came to a formidable gorge. When he asked for the name of the stream at the bottom of the ravine, a Mexican accompanying him answered “San Pedro’s.” Hays response, in true Texas fashion, proved that European settlers rarely possessed a monolithic perspective, saying, “St. Peter’s, hell! It looks like the Devil’s River to me.”

Thus, demonic place names of European origin owe their existence to the dualist tradition that conceives of a moral geology recognizing favored, “good” land as well as fallen, “evil” places. The two primary impulses leading to negative place names rest in: 1) a topophobic, or sublime response to uninhabitable, inaesthetic, terrifying, or generally dangerous land; and 2) the simplification of preexisting Native myths connected to

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28 Urbanek, 53.
29 McArthur, 183.
places. However, the latter impetus was predicated on a similar moral geography employed by Natives throughout North America.

Native Place Names: Parallel Trends

To suggest that Native Americans perceived their homelands in much the same way as Americans did (and do) garners little sympathy and, perhaps, bitter objections. In fact, embattled historian Calvin Martin, among others, cast derision on those who dare to equate Natives “with the white at the level of basic human motivation and self-interest,” calling the argument “specious, a card trick.”31 Although I use Martin’s words here, many other scholars and the general population view Native Americans as somehow immune to many of the less savory aspects of human behavior, particularly those amplified by the technology of Euro-Americans. This view leads to a general lament over “the past five centuries,” which “have been a lesion upon an older history” where, as opposed to the materialistic Europeans, Native Americans “conducted themselves...attentive to the strains of an older, more ancient muse. An older voice, an older song.”32 To suggest that the older, less destructive “song” can be traced back up Canada, over Beringia, through Asia, and finally rests in an anthropoid homeland (of either African or Asian origin) from which all humans evolved amounts to blasphemy. However, a close, honest examination of Native myths, naming practices, and economies reveal far more similarities between the two human groups that, since contact, have been cast as opposing cultures, perhaps even separate species.

32 Ibid, 12.
Native myths contain striking analogues in Old World traditions. Recall the myth of Persephone from chapter one; the maiden swept away by a devious Hades resulting in the flux of the seasons. An Iroquois creation tale contains similar themes; a “youthful wife of the ancient chief” clutching “a handful of seeds” falls from the Sky-World into the underworld’s terrestrial sea. Likewise, a Seneca myth contains dualistic twins who perform their own Genesis:

When the twins grew to manhood, they set out on their tasks. The Good Spirit made the form of human beings, male and female, in the dust and breathed life into them. He created good and useful plants and animals of the world. He created the rivers and lakes. He even made the current run both ways in the streams to make travel easy. Meanwhile, the Bad Spirit busied himself with the creation of annoying and monstrous animals, pests, plant blight, and diseases for human beings.

This myth, with only minor alteration to the language, could find approval in many Christian catechisms. Similar examples prove ubiquitous and speak to the profound genetic similarity among human animals.

Native Americans also named the land and each other akin to European dualist practices. Natives rigorously enforced the idea of the frontier between the Us of their culture and Them who resided on the periphery: Paspatonage Brook in Rhode Island served as the boundary between the Pequots and Niantics; Chargoggagogmanchogagog in Massachusetts translates as “Fishing-place at the boundary”; and in Alabama, Hachemedega signified “Border Creek.” Native cultures also employed ethnocentric names to the land and people surrounding them. Wequaes, in Massachusetts, literally

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34 Ibid, 53.
translates as “The end.” The Navajo actually defined the Anasazi for later ethnographers through their very name, which is Navajo for “ancient enemies.” The Mohawk people also owe their name to others, in this case the Narragansett, whose word Mohowauck translates as “they eat (animate) things” or, simply “cannibals.” The Chickasaw, as place name scholars speculate, may have received their name from former allies. Geographer William A. Read contends that “Chickasaw” perhaps signifies “rebellion,” a reference to “the separation of the Chickasaws from the Creeks and the Choctaws.” Likewise, the Seminole owe their name to the Creek word “siminole” or “separatist,”—applied first to a Muskogean tribe in Florida during the mid to late 18th century composed of immigrants from Alabama and southern Georgia.

If Natives cast derision on other tribes, they often referred to themselves in glowing terms. Likely an offshoot of the Natchez, the now vanished Avoyelles people of Louisiana self-applied their name, which translates as “flint people” or “nation of Rocks.” A little north of the Natchez and Avoyelles dwelled the Tunica people, whose name actually means “the people.” Similarly, the six tribe Illinoisan confederacy derived their blanket name “from iniwek or ininiok,” which later “altered to illiniwek and finally to Illinois by the French.” The name simply meant “men.” The Pawnee referred to themselves as “Chahiksichahiks,” or “men of men.” Further west, the Ute Indians

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37 Gill, 27.
38 Read, Florida, 61; Douglas-Lithgow, Massachusetts, 31;
40 Read, Alabama, 57.
41 Read, Louisiana, 6-7.
42 Ibid, 66.
43 Vogel, 38.
44 Ibid, 105.
called themselves "Nūnt'z," which translates as "the people."\(^{45}\) Cusseta, an ancient band of the Lower Creek, derived their name from the word "hasihta," or "coming from the sun"—and actually believed they did.\(^{46}\) The Klamath Indians of Oregon call themselves "Maklaks," which means "people."\(^{47}\) Moreover, famed anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski found rigidly defined ethnocentrism among the far-flung Trobriand Islanders of the Southwest Pacific, who possess two words for "friend." He translated the words as "friend within the barrier" and "friend across the barrier"—likely a tool for distinguishing the proportional familial relatedness of another.\(^{48}\) The Yurok Indians of Northern California, who actually fish on the Klamath River, developed a fascinating cosmography that locates the center of the world in their homeland, bisected by the Klamath River, and surrounded by two oceans that separate their world from the "Land beyond the world"—the similarity to Greco-Roman-Medieval European cosmographies proves startling.\(^{49}\) The above list is not exhaustive, instead it only hints at the ethnocentrism that marked Native cultures, abolishing any notion ascribing Europeans with a monopoly on this penchant.

Likewise, Native myths often intimate a moral geology similar to that of the Europeans. A swamp in Massachusetts known as "Musehauge" translates as "bad

\(^{45}\) Ibid, 154.
\(^{46}\) Read, Alabama, 28.
\(^{49}\) Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974): see inset figure on 36 pertaining to the Yurok and compare to the European analogues on 39-40.
land."50 Similarly, Okaloacoochee Slough in Florida translates—sans English noun—as "little bad water."51 Likewise, Elise Broach argued, in her analysis of different cultures’
perception of the Dakota Badlands, that a Sioux myth—stunningly similar to the biblical
tale of the Tower of Babel—holds that the “Great Spirit summoned a terrible earthquake
and fire, which consumed the grasses, trees, and animals,” to punish the people; leaving
the Badlands as “a barren waste where nothing would ever grow.”52 After General
Alfred Sully’s ordeal subduing Natives in the Badlands during the summer 1864, he
shared common ground with the Sioux myth when he called the place “hell with the fires
burned out.”53

Finally, Natives often applied utilitarian names to places associated with
particular resources. The cumbersome Chargoggagogmanchogagog, as mentioned
earlier, denoted a boundary and a fishing ground as well. Likewise, Wochsquamugguck
Brook in Connecticut translates as “Place of taking salmon.”54 Clearly, as this and other
chapters elucidate, the human frontier dynamic distinguishes between cultures only
nominally. My point rests in the observation that Natives must be equated with whites
on the level of basic human motivation and self-interest—by doing so we reveal a
universal heritage that explains our vast similarities and demands the inclusion of all
humans into our ethical horizons. To argue otherwise casts one group off as intrinsically
different and participates in the same Us vs. Them mentality that serves only to build

50 Douglas-Lithgow, Massachusetts, 33.
51 Read, Florida, 23.
52 Elise Broach, Angels, Architecture, and Erosion: The Dakota Badlands as Cultural Symbol, North
53 Ibid, 8.
54 R. A. Douglas-Lithgow, Native American Place Names of Connecticut (Bedford, Mass.: Applewood
barriers between cultures. As evidenced by Native naming practices, dualism transcends culture and rests in a common biological heritage.

The Frontier’s Influence on Ethical Horizons

A sea change occurred during the Romantic era that led many affluent intellectuals to revise the moral geology of the Abrahamic tradition. While many aspects of the world continued to inspire sublime terror, sublimity itself, as noted by Burke, wrote the Creator into the landscape. Recall from chapter one the latter Genesis creation, the creation ex nihilo (out of nothing), where the divine gathers the universe in form but remains separate from the new world created. The idea of a fallen earth continually cursed by human sin and, perhaps, the near atheism of enlightenment Deists—where God the clock maker builds his contraption, sets it in motion, then abandons the buzzing machine for an eternal vacation—suggests that the Romantic infusion of God in nature could rest in equal parts intellectual revolution and religious revival. What, one might ask, produced this 200 year arc from Cotton Mather’s plea to “Renounce the World” to Henry David Thoreau’s desire to have “pasture enough for my imagination”? In short: what caused the change in perception of mountain gloom to mountain glory? The answer, like so many in this thesis, lies in the frontier dynamic.

As discussed in chapter three, an expanding frontier breeds a social environment at the core of a society—marked by affluence and safety—that facilitates the transmission of rights to Them; starting with groups closest in proximity, resemblance, and values to Us. Although scholars dedicated many tomes pointing to how this process unfolded with

respect to human Others, culturally-maligned land slowly earned acceptance as well. Nicolson partially recognized this aspect when she observed, “relish for mountain scenery was a result of the fact that, as the dangers of travel lessened, fear gave way to pleasure.”56 Similarly, the celebrated Aldo Leopold observed that “wild things...had little human value until mechanization assured us of a good breakfast”—clearly describing the critique of environmentalism that labels it a “full stomach issue.”57 The Puritans, much like the Neolithic Hebrews, did not fathom granting the rights they reserved for themselves to an Other that possessed the skills, power, and technology to destroy their tenuous foothold on the North American continent. Nor did they consider enchanting the “howling wilderness” around them with their beloved deity when they struggled to sustain themselves on domestic and imported foodstuffs early in their colonization. The annihilating frontier loomed in earshot, threatening to wash over them as it did so often in the first years of colonization. By Thoreau’s time, however, Native Americans had withered in number in the East, eliciting more sympathy than fear, and American dinner tables were adorned with bountiful victuals culled from a reliable global trading empire. Likewise, Thoreau’s ethical horizons encompassed newfound Others as well, particularly in his vehement opposition to US military aggression against Mexico; an unlikely sentiment for a Texas plantation owner, within a day’s ride from the border. In this way, it would not be unsound to argue that an imperceptible ethical frontier eventually follows the physical cultural frontier.

Throughout the past twenty years, scholars established the general trend through an analysis of the slow extension of legal rights to, what philosopher Peter Singer called,

56 Nicolson, 26.
an “Expanding Circle” of beings. In *The Rights of Nature*, historian Roderick Nash provides two figures that illustrate how, in the Western tradition, rights extended beyond immediate kin to include distant human and non-human animal and plant groups. In one of these figures, titled “The Expanding Concept of Rights,” Nash corroborates his claim with pivotal protective documents in political history. Starting with the Magna Carta of 1215, which granted English Barons proto-democratic control over taxation, Nash’s figure leaps to watershed events in American history that established equal protection to Native Americans, Women, and African Americans by way of the Indian Citizenship Act, the 19th Amendment, and the Civil Rights Act, respectively. Nash placed the frontier of modern rights at non-human nature, specifically with the Endangered Species Act of 1973.\(^8\) The tradition remains clear; yet, modern liberal thinkers vary drastically when proposing where the horizon of ethics should expand next and remain fettered to the tradition of dualism.

**Deep Ecology and Biocentrism: Conservative Environmental Philosophies**

Throughout the twentieth century, Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic provided the basis upon which further preservation efforts would expand. Trusting in early ecologists—particularly, Nebraska scientist Frederic Clements’s idea of static “climax communities”—Leopold argued that humans could avoid ecological disasters by employing an ethic that sought to perpetuate ecological stasis. Leopold posited that a “thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic

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community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.\textsuperscript{59} For Leopold, applying the Land
Ethic would result in the liberation of land, which he argued, “we regard... as a
commodity belonging to us.”\textsuperscript{60} Unfortunately, Leopold died before the establishment of
modern ecology, for after scientists began observing ecosystems they failed to find
climax communities based on stasis. Rather, they observed constant change in the flora
and fauna that participated in an ecosystem, the relationship between life and inorganic
matter, and the interaction between extant life forms. Evolution and extinction, not
adynamic oblivion, dominate ecosystems, they discovered. Within years of its
publication, Leopold’s Land Ethic stood bankrupt in the face of scientific revelations.

Despite Leopold’s desire to know “nature” through work (he was a forester and
hunter), much of the environmental movement of the last half of the twentieth century,
captured by the simplicity of the Land Ethic, bent it to confirm their image of humans as
the disrupter by holding fast to Leopold’s fallacious static model of “natural” ecosystems.
During the 1960s and on through to the present, scholars emerged from the Deep Ecology
and Biocentric wings of the environmental movement and argued that Leopold’s Land
Ethic, perhaps, did not go far enough in curbing the blight of humanity on a pristine
Eden. J. Baird Callicott, professor of philosophy and religion, models himself as a
resurrected Aldo Leopold. Responding to destructive criticism of his antecedent’s static
ethic, Callicott intermittently revises Leopold’s flawed principle. Recognizing that
ecosystems in fact do undergo constant change, Callicott asks “How can we conserve a
biota that is dynamic, ever changing, when the very words conserve and preserve—

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 262.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, xviii.
especially when linked to integrity and stability—connotes arresting change?" His
answer lies in "the concept of scale." In general, frequent, intense disturbances, such as tornadoes, occur at small, widely
distributed spatial scales....The problem with anthropogenic perturbations—such as industrial forestry and agriculture, exurban development, drift net fishing, and such—is that they are far more frequent, widespread, and regularly occurring than are nonanthropogenic perturbations.

Unfortunately, the premise—that anthropogenic change occurs more frequently and over a larger area than nonanthropogenic change—proves fallacious. To say nothing of the omnipresent inorganic forces that all life depend on, biocentric thought is predicated on the modern ecological revelation that removing a species from "the top of the food pyramid—a hawk, say, or a human...hardly disturbed" it, however, if you "take away bases like plant life or soil bacteria...the pyramid collapsed." This stance no doubt explains Callicott's statement, in agreement with Edward Abbey, that he would rather kill a fellow human than a snake. Roderick Nash noted that, due to Callicott's biocentric perspective, "even soil bacteria and oxygen-generating oceanic plankton carried more ethical weight than beings at the tops of the food chains such as humans." Thus, humans, by Biocentrists own admission, alter the planet in far less profound ways than oxygen-fixing algae that, I might add, destroy anaerobic bacteria by their very existence—so much for the "problem with anthropogenic perturbations."

If reason, logic, and science fail to explain the biocentric revulsion of modern humans, few options remain aside from the dichotomous, misanthropic tradition—the

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid, 159.
64 Ibid, 57.
65 Applying the same logic, Callicott would be faithful to his stance if he would choose to destroy a human rather than, say, a stone pebble or a drop of water.
66 Nash, 153.
result, no doubt, of a severely misplaced dualism that glorifies "nature" at the cost of a somehow "unnatural" humanity. One cannot exaggerate the prevalence of human hatred among many Deep Ecologists and Biocentrists. Professor of Philosophy, Paul W. Taylor speaks for many in his statement that “Our presence, in short, is not needed,” concluding that “the ending of our six-inch epoch would most likely be greeted with a hearty ‘Good riddance!’”67 The argument of scale, while fine to justify one’s misanthropy, participates in the same “basic (human) chauvinism” Deep Ecology and Biocentrism endeavors to avoid—that humans represent an exceptional species that acts outside of nature.68 Advocates of these philosophies often apply such childish hatred as balm to cloud any serious analysis of the modern human relationship with the world. Alternatively, if they probe the issue at all, only a “green consumerism” likely follows to ameliorate such anomie—dealing with the problem little better than an indolent landlord kicking a bucket under a leaking roof.

Callicott and others within the broader environmental movement, however, refuse to acknowledge that humans and everything they produce remain as natural as a forest, a beehive, or a coral reef. Their rejection, owing to the long human tradition that dichotomizes Us from “nature,” rests on the premise that “If human beings are natural beings, then human behavior, however destructive, is natural behavior and is as blameless.”69 I cannot help but blame Burke, Thoreau, Leopold, Muir et al for simply modernizing the ancient tradition—readily palpable in the western world but no doubt applicable to all humans—that disjoins humanity from “nature.” Unpalatable to his senses, Callicott evoked the dichotomous argument by concluding, “we are moral beings,

the implication seems clear, precisely to the extent that we are civilized, that we have
removed ourselves from nature."\(^{70}\) In a further attempt to resurrect the fetid corpse of the
Land Ethic, Callicott deduced that it need only slight rewriting and offered the following
to placate the ecological critique; "A thing is right when it tends to disturb the biotic
community only at normal spatial and temporal scales. It is wrong when it tends
otherwise."\(^{71}\) As my Tennessean friend Alan Roe is wont to say, "Good Night!"

Deep Ecologists, in particular, rest their arguments on weaker ground still.
Philosopher George Sessions pushes the dualist tradition to its most modern and extreme
form, perceiving "the development of a deconstructionist, artificial world of 'simulacra'
and 'hyperreality'" that seeks to "turn the world (including the last of the wild
ecosystems) into an artificial, megatechnological Disneyland theme park."\(^{72}\) In this way,
Sessions joins the ranks of Puritan dualist theologians such as Jonathan Edwards and
Cotton Mather, describing a depraved human world as opposed to an immoral
"wilderness." If Leopold and Callicott sought to manage human interactions with the
environment, Deep Ecology attempted to curb most human involvement in the "natural"
world. George Sessions joined Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess on a camping trip in
Death Valley during the spring of 1984, whereupon they agreed on an eight point Deep
Ecology platform. Naess posited, "the oil under the North Sea or anywhere else does not
belong to any state or to humanity" and the "'free nature' surrounding a local community
does not belong to the local community."\(^{73}\) Instead, Naess contended that "Humans only
inhabit the lands, using resources to satisfy vital needs. And if their non-vital needs come

\(^{70}\) Ibid.
\(^{71}\) Callicott, "Do Deconstructive Ecology and Sociobiology Undermine Leopold's Land Ethic?,” 160.
\(^{72}\) Zimmerman, 167.
in conflict with the vital needs of nonhumans, then humans should defer to the latter.”

Just what are these “vital” and “non-vital” needs? Naess informs us, “The term ‘vital need’ is deliberately left vague to allow for considerable latitude in judgment.” Deep Ecology, despite its patent misanthropic flaws, proves not as radical as its adherents (and critics) think, for it participates in the same dualist tradition that precipitated the world and economic system it criticizes.

However pleasant a world in which the maxims of Deep Ecology and Biocentrism may happen to be, we must remember that it is not the world we live in. As life forms, humans require the destruction of other life, perhaps species, in order to survive. We are not exceptional in this regard and will go the way of every other terrestrial species by evolving or dying out—likely after no more than 100,000 years. Seeing as modern science estimates the age of our species at approximately 100,000 years old should apply motivation enough to recalibrate our place in the world. Some fields already acknowledge the fleeting nature of complex life forms. Astronomers, in their attempts to contact extraterrestrial life with radio telescopes, long ago produced a formula that speaks to the near impossibility of locating sentient life. In the formula $N = N* f_p n_e f_i f_j f_L$, $N$ stands for “the number of advanced technical civilizations in the Galaxy.” While $N*$ represents the number of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy and $n_e$ corresponds to the number of life sustaining planets in a particular system, all of the “$f$” variables serve as fractions that trim the number ($N$) down. The most startling variable rests in $f_L$, “the

\[ \text{74 Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{75 Ibid, 197.} \]
\[ \text{76 Biologist Ernst Mayr’s average as quoted in Noam Chomsky, Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2003): 1.} \]
\[ \text{77 Carl Sagan, Cosmos (New York: Random House, 1980): 298-9.} \]
fraction of a planetary lifetime graced by a technical civilization." Astronomers recognized that even in an ideal environment, "advanced technical civilizations" exist for only so long before exterminating themselves or succumbing to outside threats such as predation or cataclysmic events like cosmic collisions or intense solar perturbations.

This revelation should not prove shocking. Humans have been evolving, like all life, for eons from less complex forms. Our ancestors often took advantage of the extinction of other plant and animal species and, as our technology and physical prowess continued to develop in ever more articulate forms, we actively brought about the end of countless species as well. When our species is no more, through continued evolution or abrupt extinction, we will simply succumb to the same process that produced us. However, we can choose to try to live by an ethic that arrests evolution’s less savory urges. Only by understanding—and honestly coming to terms with—what is in the world can humans begin to create a world of what ought to be. Seeing as most of our cultures dictate some sort of ethical life—be it through myth, religion, or law—I do not see how we can escape the trend. Yet, we must abandon any illusions that seek to gloss over our inescapable demand on life forms and inorganic materials for existence. Likewise, we should hold no illusions that our innate capabilities may not be up to the challenge of countering our biology and employing such an ethic. We must wish to preserve the operation of our environment not for “earth’s” sake, but for our own. Doing so would preserve the functioning, not stability, of our biosphere.

The Life Ethic: Hope for a New Darwinian Left

78 Ibid.
Despite the capture of the environmental movement to the cultural emphasis on duality, there are ideological rumblings among academics who envision what philosopher Peter Singer calls a "New Darwinian Left." As illustrated in neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins’s *The Selfish Gene*, much of human altruism stems from the subliminal impulse to protect our genes—whether they rest in our own bodies or those of our relatives. Yet, the particular constellations of genes that make us unique individuals, after coalescing in our form, dissolve rapidly—halving with every generation. The situation is analogous to an elaborate fountain display. A pool of water suddenly launches skyward creating beautiful gossamer ropes of water before crashing back into the same pond from which it arose. You and I are that fleeting image created by the ribbon of water, an impermanent *form*. Our genes, on the other hand, prove not unlike the pool. They represent the universal building blocks from which staggering arrays of life forms take shape. If a new ethic can push the moral horizon to its farthest limits, to abolish dualism and the frontier in history, I submit it must rest in recognizing the universality of life as represented in genes. For humans, the Life Ethic would instantly abolish any differentiation; especially that based on the "specious, card trick" of race. Humans, whether an Australian Aborigine or Icelandic rock star, contain so few genetic differences that many geneticists posit the historic existence of a desperately small breeding population out of which we *all* owe our inheritance. In a world where religion, economic systems, and political philosophies spanning the spectrum have failed to produce any lasting peace, the

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recognition that all humans—from Usama bin Laden to Pope John Paul II—share the same genetic legacy may well prove humanity's last refuge for a fulfilling future.

Death Valley Revisited

Balancing myself precariously over the windy summit of Dante's View in late winter, I cannot help but credit the postmodern critique for explaining much of the why and wherefore of demonic place names. Unless you believe that someday a place named Devil's Backbone will rise up to reveal the dark prince or you happen to catch sight of Lucifer sinking a shot from a bunker at Devil's Golf Course, culture reads more into landscapes than is actually present. Yet, humans, responding to topo/biophobic stimuli may actually believe and experience the torments of hell and visitations from demons.81

The better, more compassionate society will come not by seeking a geography that confers a false image of what we perceive "wilderness" to be; still less in returning to an idealized Golden Age by casting off our civilization. Instead, humanity will best live in a world that annihilates frontiers between peoples and the land they inhabit. Thus, revolutionizing the way we treat each other through the powerful lessons endemic to evolutionary psychology and made meaningful in an ethic that recognizes the universality and relatedness of all life, remains our best chance at avoiding self-immolation. It will take the full application of all our latent abilities, however, to overcome the millennia of cultural traditions and eons of evolutionary biology that hardwired dualism into the human animal.

Today, our confused use and perception of land—from subsurface missile silos to flash-frozen “wilderness”—is symptomatic of our failure to recognize humanity’s kinship with all life and the inorganic processes that shape it. The disease is caused by “western civilization” alone, as I have pointed out, but rests in a belief in the exceptional nature of our species, predicated on dualism. Whether that image rests in a “fallen” humanity as blight on creation or in one that elevates humans to “masters of the universe” makes little difference. Harmonizing the very real frontier between all life remains the best hope for abolishing the tangible boundaries between humans and “nature” and between Us and Them.
Conclusion

History is always easier to understand than it is to change or escape. --Donald Worster

By employing the Us vs. Them model for understanding the functioning of cultures, we can interpret and at times quantify the various consequences of dualism in our modern landscape. The profusion of demonic place names in America, the ethnocentric monikers cultures grant themselves and others, and the confused use of land as either exalted "wilderness" or barren waste—all these strange, seemingly paradoxical elements of our world move from obscurity to recognition and explication under the rubric of the Us vs. Them model.

The rift between “nature” and humanity remains an illusion of perception. Yet, by providing this model of human perception, value, and action vis-à-vis other humans and the land, I hope to free us to view our species as a mere form of nature and not a separate entity. We have traversed age-old cultural traditions that spring from our biological urge to view the world as a realm of opposites. By recognizing the role of astronomy in providing the basis of city grid planning, Abrahamic axioms from the book of Genesis, the Wilderness Act and its codification of “wild places,” and the late twentieth century bioethics movement, which largely denigrate humans as disturbers of nature, we can come to understand that our culture perpetuates the perceived schism between humans and nature. By realizing that we are an offspring of, and are always dependent on, “nature,” we achieve an understanding of where we construct tangible barriers to segment our species. As such, these boundaries serve only to arrest the

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expanding circle of ethics that seeks to unify humanity into one global community and 
steer our evolution down a more benevolent course, predicated on reciprocity and 
complementarity with each other and the non-human world.

This thesis has demonstrated the tangible and temporal model the frontier took 
throughout a large expanse of time. As such, I have merely illuminated the mechanism 
of the frontier, straying from the task of explicating all but the most relevant forms it 
took. As Dan Flores pointed out, to exhaustively document the various frontier forms 
would truly "encompass all of human history." A worthy task, to be sure, but one best 
left to several generations of scholars. I hope that my colleagues in Environmental, 
Western, and Social history will recognize the common ground they share by analyzing 
dualism and the frontier mentality it spawned. As evidenced throughout this work, 
human exceptionalism led to the domination of both the land and fellow humans. In this 
way, dualism underlies and informs our most pressing global problems of environmental 
destruction and state violence. If historians can point out the cultural institutions that 
perpetuate such thinking, perhaps the expanding circle of rights, propelled by generations 
of popular struggle, can target the final edifices of the Us vs. Them mentality. One day 
we may see a global *dar al 'islām* founded on a recognition of the universality of human 
biology. Until then, however, we are left with only the promise of that dream as it 
appears in the form of an embattled United Nations, World Court, and that evocative 
product of the Apollo moon landings; an earth without human boundaries whirling in the 
perilous void of space.
Appendix I: Constructing the Map of Demonic Place Names

Searching the wonderful Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), developed by the US Geological Survey (USGS) provided me with coordinates on all of the nearly 2,000 demonic place names in their database. Just what made a place demonic? I limited my criteria to Hell, Devil, Charon, Styx, Pluto, Limbo, Satan, Lethe, Cerberus, Purgatory, Lucifer, Inferno, Diablo, and Beelzebub. The map was painstakingly created using ARCGIS software, which I have had no formal training in using.

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Image 1: Theodore De Bry Engraving showing Natives in despair, responding to an approaching frontier.¹

Image 2: Virgil and Dante descend into the gates of hell, located in a topophobic, yet earthly, landscape.²

² Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia: Inferno, Gustavo Doré, illus., (Palermo, Italy: Pugliese Editore, 1971)
Figure 3 Cosmography of the Yurok Indians, Northern California.

Figure 5 Hecateus of Miletus (fl. 520–500 B.C.).

Image 4: The Greco-Roman-Medieval Cosmography. Compare with the Yurok above.³

Image 5: The topophobic Devil's Golf Course, Death Valley National Park. (Photo by Author).
## Index of Place Names

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