

Practices in Religious Naturalism

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Published in D. Crosby & J. Stone (Eds.) (2018) *Routledge Handbook of Religious Naturalism*. New York: Routledge, 341-51.

ABSTRACT: There are two main ways to develop practices in religious naturalism. The first way is to practice within some traditional religion. Since those religions involve the worship of divine persons, which religious naturalists reject, religious naturalists must develop non-literal or fictional styles of participation in those religions. The second way is to develop new naturalistic religions. Since these will not be religions of worship, they will be religions of self-realization. Self-realization includes physiological, ethical, and spiritual self-realization. The goal of spiritual self-realization is an ideal self whose concern includes all things and which is therefore existentially unified with nature. Techniques for self-realization include Stoic and Buddhist meditative practices, transformational festivals, and the use of entheogens.

1. Introduction

At present religious naturalism is primarily a philosophical perspective. It involves mainly commitments to abstract doctrines about reality and value. As Crosby once put it, religious naturalism has “no practicing communities, no institutional structures, no duly constituted cadre of leaders, no body of traditional beliefs, no rituals or ceremonies, no revered founders or scriptures, no stories, myths and symbols” (2002: 155). Today the situation remains the same. If religious naturalism ever hopes to be more than merely an intellectual exercise, it needs to define genuinely *religious* ways of living. It needs to develop systems of practices. These practices need to embody the core values of religious naturalism. They also need to be attractive. Practices are costly, and successful religious practices provide benefits to repay those costs.

So far there are two main strategies for developing practices within religious naturalism. The *first strategy* is to naturalize your participation in some established religion. On this way, you could continue to attend a Christian church and to participate in its practices, but you would understand them in a new way which would not commit you to any literal belief in any divine persons. You would regard church life as *live-action role-playing (larping)*. The *second strategy* involves developing novel natural religious practices. To do this, you start with practices which are already thought of as religious or spiritual but which are open to naturalization. You then work to fully naturalize these practices. To ensure social success, you need to start with attractive practices – practices which return benefits relative to their costs. As they pursue this strategy, religious naturalists have looked at practices in Stoicism, at the practices associated with meditation and yoga, at transformational festivals, at the use of entheogens, and at other practices. If you pursue this second strategy, then you will start to develop a *natural religion* which includes your new practices.

2. The Religions of Worship

A *theist* literally affirms the existence of at least one *divine person*. A divine person has superhuman powers and is not essentially embodied in ordinary matter. Divine persons, despite their lack of ordinary physicality, can causally interact with ordinary physical things. Theists literally affirm that human animals can socially interact with divine persons (but these interactions often have unusual aspects). We can *talk* with divine persons (but we can talk with divine persons just by addressing thoughts to them). We can be *observed* by divine persons (but divine persons can observe us at all times and places). We can be *praised* or *blamed* by divine persons (but their standards may be higher than human moral standards). We can be *rewarded* or *punished* by divine persons (but their rewards and punishments may occur after we die).

We can participate in economic relations with divine persons. These are sometimes called *do-ut-des* relations, meaning “I give that you may give”. To give a gift to a divine person is to *worship* that person. We worship divine persons by behaving in ways that please them, by praising them, by offering them valuable goods in ritual sacrifices, and so on. Since divine persons are usually thought to be bound by the laws of fair exchange, it is also usually thought that if we give them gifts, then they will give us gifts in return. To ask a divine person for a gift is to *pray* to them for that benefit (it is a *petitionary* prayer). Since we need not ask for benefits which we can reliably obtain ourselves, and since divine persons have superhuman powers, we usually pray for benefits which are hard for us to reliably obtain (such as good luck in risky projects, health, wealth, long life, happiness, life after death, and so on). And if we believe that we have received some benefit from a divine person, we thank that person for it.

But religious naturalists are not theists; they do not recognize any divine persons. So they do cannot engage in *do-ut-des* exchange relations with divine persons. They do not worship any gods or goddesses. They neither pray nor give thanks to them. Since *do-ut-des* relations form the practical core of most traditional religions, it might therefore seem that religious naturalists cannot practice in those religions. However, at least one well-known way exists which enables religious naturalists to practice in those religions. This is the first strategy for developing practices in religious naturalism.

According to this strategy, religious naturalists can adopt the practices of theistic religions by naturalizing them. This naturalization generally has three phases. The first phase involves distinguishing between the *logos* of the traditional religion and the *mythos* of that religion. The second phase involves interpreting the *logos* in purely naturalistic terms. This interpretation usually produces a highly abstract naturalistic theology (Peters, 2002; Gulick, 2013). The third phase involves interpreting the *mythos* in some non-literal way. The *mythos* is treated as a *fiction* valued for its ability to arouse important emotional states, or for its ability to provide moral education, or for its ability to produce prosocial bonds. This strategy is followed by religious naturalists like Goodenough (1998), Peters (2002), Raymo (2008). Adopting this strategy allows religious naturalists to participate in Christian church life – they merely interpret that life non-literally. But their way of life remains Christian. Since a large literature already exists on religious fictionalism, this approach will not be discussed further here.

3. Three Types of Concern

The second strategy which religious naturalists can use to develop religious practices involves turning away from theistic religions to the development of new and entirely nontheistic *natural religions*. Since these natural religions will not involve any divine persons, they will not be religions of worship. As an alternative to religions of worship, many have advocated *religions of self-realization*. A religion of self-realization has practices which aim to move a human animal into some ideal state or to keep it in an ideal state. All practices of self-realization involve techniques of self-modification. They are *technologies of the self* (Foucault, 1988). For most religious naturalists, selves are bodies; hence techniques of self-modification are technologies of the body.

An initial classification includes three types of ideal states and therefore three types of self-realization. Each type of self-realization involves a corresponding type of *concern*. Concern for something is a kind of care which aims at the *eudaimonia* (well-being) of that thing. It aims at the complete flourishing or thriving of the thing. Assuming that things have natures, any concern for a particular thing aims at the full realization of the nature of the thing; if such realization is the *perfection* of a thing, then it aims at the perfection of the thing. Concerns divide into *ontic concerns* and *ontological concern*. Ontic concerns are directed to the well-being of specific things or types of things. They are restricted concerns. Ontological concern is directed to the well-being of existence itself. It is unrestricted or universal concern.

The first type of self-realization is *physiological*. Physiological self-realization aims at ideal physiological states. The practices linked with this type of self-realization either aim to change a human animal from sickness to health or they aim to keep it healthy. Since the mind is part of the body they also aim to restore or to maintain mental health. Physiological self-realization involves techniques which modify any part of the body (e.g. diet, surgery, drugs, exercise). Such practices are discussed outside of religious contexts (e.g. by doctors, athletic trainers, dieticians, and so on). But religious naturalists seek to bring those discussions into their own religious frameworks. Since the body is a thing among things, this type of concern is ontic.

The second type of self-realization is *ethical*. Ethical self-realization aims at ideal ethical states. Its practices either aim to create or maintain an ethically ideal human animal. An ethically ideal human animal is concerned with its own physiological flourishing. So ethical concern includes physiological concern; but it transcends that concern. For the ancient Greeks, an ethically ideal human animal is a *sage*; for the Buddhists, it is an *enlightened* human animal. Since ethical behaviors are rooted entirely in brains, religious naturalists seek technologies which produce virtuous and prosocial brains. They seek technologies for *moral therapy* and *moral enhancement* (Hughes, 2015). Such technologies will be grounded in fields like interpersonal neurobiology (Hollingsworth, 2008). Ethical concern aims at the well-being of social groups of humans; it ultimately aims at the flourishing of the whole human species. However, since humans are only one type of thing, this concern remains ontic.

The third type of self-realization is *spiritual*. It aims at spiritually ideal states. Its practices either aim to change a human animal into a spiritually ideal state or to maintain it in a spiritually ideal state. A spiritually ideal human animal is concerned with its own physiological flourishing. So spiritual concern includes physiological concern. A

spiritually ideal human is also concerned with the well-being of the whole human species. So spiritual concern includes ethical concern. But a spiritually ideal human animal is further concerned with the flourishing of all life on earth. And spiritual concern radiates outwards without any constraint to include all things in this universe and in any others. It aims at the well-being of the whole of nature. What is nature? To welcome diverse approaches to religious naturalism, the concept is left vague. Still, nature obviously exceeds the uncultivated portions of the earth. Nature may include an infinity of universes. Since religious naturalists affirm that nature is all that exists, a human animal in a spiritually ideal state becomes concerned with the totality of existence itself. Its concern transcends the ontic to become ontological.

When your concern expands to embrace all natural things, you become unified with nature. This unification is not merely intellectual; it is existential. Hence the goal of spiritual self-realization is the *existential unification of the self with nature*. As long as the existential depth of this unification is kept in mind, the goal of spiritual self-realization can be stated more simply as *unity with nature*. Since any natural religion aims at spiritual self-realization, its goal is unity with nature. Since spiritual self-realization includes both ethical and physiological self-realization, unity with nature implies health and virtue. What do we want? We want unity with nature. How do we get it? Through spiritual technologies. For Wildman (2011: ch. 7), the main spiritual technologies are meditation and entheogens. The spiritual technologies discussed below include ecological rituals, Stoic practices, mindfulness meditations, transformational festivals, the use of entactogens, and the use of entheogens.

4. Religious Naturalism and Ecological Rituals

Religious naturalists have proposed practices aimed at extending our concern to the natural world beyond humanity. Some of these practices involve speech. Crosby says that religious naturalists can “express gratitude, trust, and personal resolve in meditations upon nature” (2002: 153). Although petitionary prayers make little sense in religions of nature, Crosby points out that religions of nature can include “something akin to payers of thankfulness, praise, confession, repentance, and endeavoring to live a more worthy life” (2002: 153; 2014: 141-5). Of course, Crosby correctly says that it makes no sense to talk to an impersonal nature (2014: 143). So any verbal practices in religions of nature are either self-talk or talk to other humans. For example, the *Council of All Beings* is a practice in which humans talk to each other (Seed, Macy, Fleming, 2007). The humans in the Council represent different animals or plants, and they speak up for the interests of those non-human life forms. Although these verbal practices involve interesting ideas, they have not proven to be culturally attractive. It does not seem likely that verbal practices will be able to expand human concern beyond human self-concern.

Ecotherapies aim to provide people with physical and mental health benefits by immersing them in wild environments. Thus *shinrun-yoku* involves meditative walking through a forest (Morita et al., 2007). These ecotherapies can produce psychological benefits (Ambra, 2007; Bratman et al., 2015). But so far these ecotherapies aim only at physiological self-realization. They do not aim to produce ethical or spiritual self-realization. However, ecotherapies could be designed to expand our concern to include

the entire earthly ecosystem. Although such concern would still be ontic, and thus not spiritual, it could be a stepping stone to spiritual concern.

Many religious groups use the four cardinal directions (north, west, south, east) in their rituals. The cardinal directions are used by Native Americans. They are used by Wiccans in their circles (Sabin, 2011: ch. 6). They are used by the Catholic Green Sisters in the *Earth Body Prayer* (Taylor, 2007: 231-5). And they can be used by religious naturalists. Crosby encourages religious naturalists to develop “rituals orienting to the four points of the compass, suggesting fealty to the whole of the earth and its creatures” (2014: 147). Likewise many religious groups use the cardinal elements (fire, earth, air, and water) in their rituals. These elements are used by Wiccans (Sabin, 2011: ch. 6). Perhaps these can also be used by religious naturalists. Crosby says that “water, fire, air and earth . . . can be put to use as religious symbols and, in particular, as symbols of nature as the religious ultimate” (2014: 90). However, while these are interesting ideas, religious naturalists have generally not developed such rituals.

Religious naturalists might perform the *Cosmic Walk* to symbolize the evolution of complexity in our universe (Taylor, 2007: 249-52; Crosby, 2014: 148). This ritual involves tracing a spiral on the ground. The spiral represents the history of our universe from the Big Bang at its center to the present at its end. Unlit candles can be placed at significant historical events (such as the appearance of matter, the formation of the sun, the beginning of life on earth, and so on). A *Walker* starts in the center of the spiral at the Big Bang. The Walker then walks outwards along the spiral while a *Reader* narrates the history of the universe. As the Walker passes a candle, he or she lights it. This ritual can help increase our awareness of our cosmic environment. But this ritual seems to have only been practiced rarely. It seems to be more of a history lesson than a religious ritual. It does not bind us emotionally to the past history of the cosmos.

Many religious groups hold celebrations on the solstices, the equinoxes, and the four cross-quarter days between them. These seasonal holidays are celebrated by Druids (Greer, 2006: 74-82) and by Wiccans (Sabin, 2011: ch. 9). They are celebrated by the Catholic Green Sisters, who refer to them as the Earth Holy Days (Taylor, 2007: 252-8). More naturalistically, they are celebrated by pantheists (Harrison, 1999: 84). And they are celebrated by atheopagans (Halstead, 2016). Among religious naturalists, Crosby encourages “rituals recognizing the equinoxes and solstices” (2014: 147). So these holidays can be used to expand human concern to the entire earthly ecology, whose evolution is driven by the cyclical flow of energy from the sun. However, religious naturalists have shown little interest in these practices.

5. Religious Naturalism and Stoic Practices

Natural religions can adopt many ancient Stoic practices. The ancient Stoics were concerned with physiological self-realization. They made many recommendations about how to care for the body. They aimed at bodily health through practices like vigorous exercise and proper diet. Here Stoic practices can be combined with naturalized versions of yoga. Stoics are materialists about human persons: you are strictly identical with your body. Hence physiological self-realization includes psychological self-realization. Many Stoic practices aimed at psychological self-realization. The Stoics aimed to replace

unhealthy emotionality with healthy emotionality. To cultivate this replacement, they developed many psychological exercises (Irving, 2009).

Modern Stoics have developed a large system of psycho-physiological practices. They are described in detail in Robertson (2015). These include the *Morning Meditation*, the *Evening Meditation*, *Acting with a Reserve Clause*, and the *Premeditation of Adversity*. They include exercises for cognitive distancing, decatastrophizing, and decentering. These Stoic exercises inspired modern *cognitive behavioral therapy* as well as *acceptance and commitment therapy*. These exercises are effective against learned helplessness and depression. They can reduce fear and arouse hope in the midst of suffering. They are easily integrated into natural religions.

The Stoics were deeply concerned with ethical self-realization. Their practices aimed to transform an ordinary human animal into an ethically perfected Sage. The Sage is a fully rational and virtuous person. The Sages preserve their serenity through all possible adversities (including death). Stoic serenity resembles Buddhist enlightenment, and Sages resemble Buddhas. All Stoic practices aim at ethical self-realization. The Stoic exercise known as the *Circles of Hierocles* involves expanding your concern beyond your body (Robertson, 2015: 107-9). You start with your self-concern, expand your concern to include your family, your country, and the whole of humanity. So far this is an ethical exercise which helps you to build an ethically ideal self. But you can continue to expand your circle of concern to include the whole earthly ecosystem. This exercise helps breed compassion for all living things. This outlook is consistent with the religious naturalist valuing of all life on earth. It may inspire ecological activism.

The Stoics were also interested in spiritual self-realization. Stoicism is intensely theological; perhaps it is even religious. But Stoic theology is also highly naturalistic. It is a kind of scientific pantheism. For the Stoics, nature is rationally organized, and the unity of nature is pure reason. As an intellectual anticipation of spiritual self-realization, you can imagine expanding your circle of concern to include all natural things. A related Stoic exercise is the *View from Above* (Robertson, 2015: 220-5). This exercise involves adopting a cosmic perspective. You endeavor to cognitively grasp the whole universe. Although your life is only a small part of this great whole, the whole has had enough concern for you to bring your life into existence. You can identify with this cosmic concern. This can help you with spiritual self-realization.

Stoic practice includes a kind of prayer (Algra, 2003: 174-6). For the Stoics, this prayer is a kind of self-talk in which the irrational part of the self talks to the rational part of the self. So Stoics can address petitionary prayers to their higher selves. But your rational self participates in the pure rationality of nature. This cosmic rationality is also pure virtue. Modern Stoics can therefore embrace a version of the Serenity Prayer: "Virtue grant me the courage to change the things I can, the serenity to accept the things I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Stoicism is currently undergoing a surprisingly strong revival. Ancient Stoic ideas and practices have been translated into modern psychotherapies. Books on modernized Stoicism are widely read. These include *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness* (Roberson, 2015), *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations* (Evans, 2013), and *A Guide to the Good Life* (Irvine, 2009). The University of Wyoming runs a week-long *Stoic Camp*. The University of Exeter runs an annual *Stoic Week*, which involves an intensive seven-day course in practical Stoicism. There are annual popular *StoicCons* in London

and New York attended by hundreds of people. This revival of Stoicism may provide religious naturalists with an enduring metaphysical and ethical system.

6. Religious Naturalism and Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a popular practice. It came to the West from Buddhism; but its current Western incarnation is highly secular and divorced from most Buddhist metaphysics and religion. Meditation can help to facilitate physiological self-realization (Flanagan, 2013; Harris, 2014). Meditation is effective for stress-reduction. It can help relieve anxiety and help with depression. It is an effective psycho-therapy (Tang et al., 2015). Meditation can change the default mode network in the brain, which is associated with self-reference and the self-concept (Brewer et al., 2011).

Mindfulness meditation can also help to facilitate ethical self-realization. Meditation can also be practiced in order to develop prosocial virtues. These include empathy, altruism, loving-kindness, and compassion (Kristeller & Johnson, 2005). More than merely a mind-hack, meditation is a tool for ethical self-transformation. Like the Stoic exercises, it can move the self towards the ethical ideal of enlightenment. It can help you to expand your concern to include the whole of humanity. The scientific study of meditation has led to efforts to precisely formulate the concept of enlightenment in neurological terms (Davis & Vago, 2013).

Meditation can help to facilitate spiritual self-realization. It can aim for a state in which consciousness is emptied of all contents (Fasching, 2008). When consciousness is emptied of all contents, it ceases to be consciousness of any particular thing. It is no longer the ontic awareness of some being among beings. This empty consciousness is pure awareness. Since this pure awareness is not consciousness of any particular thing, some say it has no intentionality at all; it is entirely self-centered and not directed towards any reality beyond the self. But another interpretation says that it is the ontological awareness of being-itself. But this pure awareness can be thought of as the existential unification of the self with nature. It is spiritual self-realization.

7. Religious Naturalism and Transformational Festivals

Natural religions may include festivals similar to *raves*. Raves involve dancing to electronic music and computer-generated imagery. Raves can facilitate physiological self-realization. Raving can be therapeutic (Hutson, 2000). It helps you overcome anxiety and depression. It helps you overcome destructive behaviors. It gives you hope, confidence, and courage. Raving can facilitate ethical self-realization. It can produce positive social values, expressed in the rave ethic of PLUR (Peace Love Unity Respect). Raving produces an emotional unification with all other people. It generates profound prosocial feelings of love, sympathy, empathy, and compassion.

Raves can facilitate spiritual self-realization. Many raves involved altars, opening and closing ceremonies, and so on (Sylvan, 2005; St. John, 2009). As they dance, ravers enter *hyper-arousal trances*, in which they often have intense spiritual or mystical experiences. During these trances, ravers often experience a profound energy flowing

through their bodies; their egos dissolve; they experience all things as connected and unified; they feel that this same energy flows through all things (Sylvan, 2005: ch. 3). Ravers often report *pronoia*, the feeling that nature is ultimately benevolent. Thus raving can lead to an existential unification of the self with nature.

Some ravers used *entactogens* (aka *empathogens*) in order to enhance their prosocial feelings (Saez-Briones & Hernandez, 2013). The primary entactogen was MDMA. MDMA may help treat many mental illnesses (Sessa & Nutt, 2015). Hence it can be used in physiological self-realization. MDMA produces many positive social effects (Wardle & de Wit, 2014). Hence it can facilitate ethical self-realization. Nevertheless, despite its many psychological and social benefits, there is considerable evidence that regular long term use of MDMA can have serious neurotoxic effects (Parrott, 2004, 2013). Hence natural religions cannot endorse the unregulated use of MDMA. MDMA is illegal in many countries. As long as it remains illegal, the ethical concerns of religious naturalists prevent them from using it or condoning its use. But natural religions need not rule it out entirely. Taking a small number of low doses of MDMA may not produce long term toxic effects (Morton, 2005). Religious naturalists can endorse further research into safe and legal ways to use MDMA and other entactogens.

Classical rave culture flourished during the 1990s and 2000s. It continues in *yoga raves* and in *transformational festivals*. The paradigmatic transformational festival is *Burning Man* (Doherty, 2004). The *Ten Principles* of Burning Man include positive ethical and ecological principles. So it can be understood as a festival aiming at ethical self-realization and ecological self-realization. It has been interpreted as a religious festival (Gilmore, 2010; Pike, 2001, 2005). Besides Burning Man, there are many other transformational festivals. And there are smaller transformational groups, such as drum circles and fire circles. An example of a drum-fire circle is the *Spark Collective* in San Francisco. It is a member of the *Fire Family* of drum-fire circles. Perhaps surprisingly, the ancient Stoics often wrote approvingly of festivals (such as Saturnalia and the Olympic games). Although they did not endorse the excesses of those festivals, they saw them as models of the cosmic city in which all humans are citizens. So transformational festivals can also be incorporated into Stoic spiritualities.

The ideas and practices associated with classical rave culture continue to have popular appeal. Religious naturalists may use ideas from classical rave culture and established transformational festivals to develop their own technologies of self-realization. There are two ways to do this. One way is for religious naturalists to get involved with existing transformational festivals and to integrate their values into those festivals. Another way is for religious naturalists to develop their own transformational festivals. They will incorporate entactogens if and only if they are safe and legal. These festivals will aim at physiological, ethical, and spiritual self-realization. They will aim at the existential unification of the self with nature.

8. Religious Naturalism and Ayahuasca Ceremonies

Ayahuasca is a psychedelic tea. For hundreds of years, it has been used in healing ceremonies by shamans in the Amazonian rainforest. Its use has recently exploded outside of its Amazonian context (Tupper, 2008). It is now popular in North America

(Harris & Gurel, 2012). Its main psychoactive ingredient is DMT. Since it acts strongly on serotonin receptors, DMT is a *serotonergic psychedelic* (like psilocybin, mescaline, and LSD). The effects of serotonergic psychedelics on the brain are slowly becoming understood (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014).

Ayahuasca is used as a sacrament in syncretic religions like the Santo Daime and Unaio de Vegetal churches, which combine Amazonian rainforest shamanism with Christianity. These churches now have branches in the United States. Under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), these churches may legally use ayahuasca in the United States. Unfortunately for religious naturalists, these churches have developed highly supernatural interpretations of the ayahuasca experience (e.g. illness is caused by evil spirits). Others have also offered supernatural interpretations of ayahuasca (e.g. Barnard, 2014). But some ayahuasca groups, such as the *Ayahuasca Pantheist Society*, reject supernaturalism. Religious naturalists can accept only naturalistic interpretations of ayahuasca experiences (Shanon, 2010). Natural religions will focus on the ways that its use can facilitate physiological, ethical, and spiritual self-realization.

Ayahuasca can facilitate physiological self-realization. For many hundreds of years, people have used it on a regular long term basis. The regular long term use of ayahuasca appears to be safe (Ribeiro Barbosa et al., 2012). It may be an effective treatment for many mental illnesses (Labate & Cavnar, 2013; Dominguez-Clave et al., 2016). It has been used to treat addiction, anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Ayahuasca has also been used in practices of ethical self-realization. It can produce many positive personality changes which facilitate the development of prosocial virtues (Bouso et al., 2012; Harris & Gurel, 2012; Bouso et al., 2015; Soler, 2016).

But ayahuasca can also be used for spiritual self-realization. Taking it can induce mystical and spiritual experiences. These can be studied using well-established questionnaires (Trichter et al., 2009; Harris & Gurel, 2012). Ayahuasca users reported that they gained a deeper “connection to nature, a deep love for living things, belief in a higher power and belief in maintaining a peaceful existence of service to living things” (Trichter et al., 2009: 128). Shanon reports that ayahuasca experiences “usually converge upon a coherent metaphysical outlook, one which is monistic, idealistic, pantheistic, imbued with religiosity and tainted with optimism, joy, and love” (2010: 269). They induce “animism and a platonic realism” (2010: 269).

Religious naturalists can work on developing ayahuasca ceremonies which move the interpretations of the ayahuasca experience away from supernaturalism and superstition and towards a naturalistic ontological concern. Thus natural religions can use ayahuasca to facilitate existential unification of the self with nature. Here Stoicism may be helpful. Many ancient Stoics praised the Eleusinian Mysteries. These Mysteries involved taking a substance, the *kykeon*, which some have speculated was psychedelic. Whether or not it was psychedelic, Stoic interpretations of the Mysteries may help to place modern psychedelic use into a more naturalistic framework.

Since natural religions seek ethical self-realization, they will not involve any illegal ayahuasca ceremonies. To ensure that their ayahuasca ceremonies are legal in the US under the RFRA, religious naturalists will need approval from the US Drug Enforcement Agency. They will need to show that their natural religions pass the tests used by the US courts. They will need to avoid the often horrific failures of the psychedelic churches from the 1960s (Stuart, 2002; Lander, 2011). To develop legal ayahuasca ceremonies,

religious naturalists can work with the Council on Spiritual Practices, the ICEERS Foundation, the Beckley Foundation, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, the Heffter Research Institute, and similar groups.

9. Religious Naturalism and Psilocybin Ceremonies

Psilocybin, like DMT, is a serotonergic psychedelic. It is an entheogen which has been used in traditional religious ceremonies in the Americas. Psilocybin can be used in practices of physiological self-realization. It has been studied as a treatment for anxiety, addiction, depression, PTSD, OCD, and other illnesses (Burdick & Adinoff, 2013; Kraehenmann et al., 2015). It has also been used in practices of ethical self-realization. It can help produce many positive personality changes which aim at prosocial virtues. Psilocybin has been used to successfully treat end-of-life anxiety in patients with terminal cancer (Grob et al., 2011; Grob et al., 2013). It can remedy existential distress.

Psilocybin can also be used for spiritual self-realization. Here it appears to act more powerfully than DMT. Taking it can induce extremely powerful mystical experiences (Griffiths et al., 2006; Griffiths et al., 2011). Mystical experiences produced by taking psilocybin have been scientifically studied using the *Mystical Experience Questionnaire* (MacLean et al., 2012; Barrett et al., 2015) and the *Altered States of Consciousness* questionnaire (Kometer et al., 2015). Psilocybin often produces mystical experiences in which the subjects experience “a sense of unity without content (pure consciousness) and/or unity of all things” (Griffiths et al., 2006: 277). It may thus facilitate the existential unification of the self with nature. This psilocybin-induced unification is highly correlated with changes in how the sense of self is processed by the default mode network (Carhart-Harris et al., 2015; Kometer et al., 2015).

Since religious naturalists are materialists about human persons, all religious experiences are patterns of neural activity in the brain. All ethical and spiritual self-realization depends on physical changes in neural networks in the brain. So religious naturalists are especially interested in technologies for changing our brains. At the present time, some of the most effective technologies for changing our brains involve the use of neurologically active molecules such as the serotonergic psychedelics. But our knowledge of molecular neurobiology is in its infancy. Religious naturalists will want to pay close attention to further developments in this area.

10. Conclusion

As a new religious movement, or a new way of being religious, religious naturalism looks to the future. If it wants to be more than just another system of beliefs, then it will need to develop systems of practices. To ensure social survival, these will need to be practices which have some motivation. To avoid fracturing into a plurality of conflicting denominations, these practices should not be tied too closely to particular doctrines. They should be such that people can interpret them in many ways. People are naturally driven towards physiological, ethical, and spiritual self-realization. So religious naturalists can develop naturalistic interpretations of practices of self-realization.

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