

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER  
ABSTRACT  
FACULTY OF ARTS. SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES.  
Doctor of Philosophy

THE WISDOM OF THE BODY: EMBODIED KNOWING IN ECO-PAGANISM  
by Adrian Paul Harris

Although embodied knowing is fundamental to our experience, no previous study has detailed its role in a specific spiritual group. This thesis offers a new model of embodied situated cognition, and develops an embodied hermeneutics which uses Focusing in phenomenological research. I apply these tools to the first detailed ethnography of Eco-Paganism to reveal powerful processes of connection which have considerable significance for religious studies and ecopsychology.

Chapters 2 and 3 survey the literature on Eco-Paganism and embodied cognition. Chapter 4 uses the latter to synthesise a model of embodied situated cognition which I call the 'enactive process model', because it draws primarily on enactivism (inter alia, Varela et al., 1991), and Gendlin's process philosophy (Gendlin, 1997). Current research shows that key aspects of cognition are situated and embodied (inter alia, Varela et al., 1991), such that we often think with place (inter alia, Preston, 2003). This raises epistemological questions which I address in a discussion of embodied philosophy in Chapter 5. I then explain my embodied hermeneutics methodology, and the practical application of the Focusing Interview technique, in Chapter 6. My fieldwork autoethnography, Chapter 7, provides an intuitive, felt understanding of life on a road protest site, and is followed by ethnographies of urban and protest site Eco-Paganism in Chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 10 discusses six processes which create a sense of connection to the organic environment, which include the felt sense (Gendlin, 1981) and the wilderness effect (Greenway, 1995).

I conclude that a type of wilderness effect can catalyze the emergence of a complex 'nature based' spirituality amongst site Eco-Pagans, while a less intense form affects urban Eco-Pagans. Eco-Pagans sometimes use these processes of connection to think with a place. The processes of connection and thinking with place are

fundamental to embodied situated knowing in Eco-Paganism, and help explain many of its distinctive aspects. By demonstrating the importance of embodied situated knowing in Eco-Paganism, I highlight the potential for further research into processes of connection and the impact of different physical spaces on religious practice in general.