

# The Connection between Religious Nature Orientation and Environmental Beliefs

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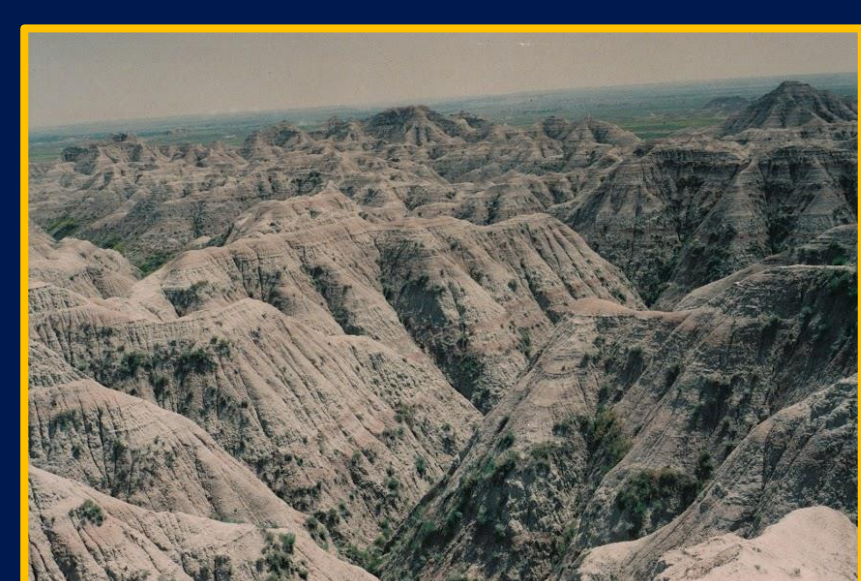
## Research Focus

- Religious teachings provide moral guidelines for followers. Religions establish humans' existence in relation to the rest of the living-world. As a profound source of human values, religions have a remarkable impact upon behavioral decisions (Yang and Huang 2018).
- Therefore religious guidelines regarding humans' orientation to nature contain either positive or negative repercussions upon environmental judgements.
- Fundamental social values vary between populations, yet social scientists have identified core value-orientations shared amongst cultures.
- Dr. Kluckhohn and Dr. Strodtbeck proposed that the environmental value-orientations of all human societies were defined by: **dominion-over-nature, harmony-with-nature, or submission-to-nature** (Hills 2002).
- Researchers have examined in-depth the environmental repercussions of a dominion-over-nature value orientation.

What correlations exist between humans' orientation to nature and environmental beliefs within Western and Native American religions?

My research will compare the values of Indigenous religion (ecocentric) to Western religion (anthropocentric) and examine the implications to environmental beliefs and behaviors.

- Western religions are temporal-based, a fundamental philosophical difference of great importance (Deloria Jr. 2003). Indigenous spatial-based religions held lands and places as having the highest possible meaning (Deloria Jr. 2003).

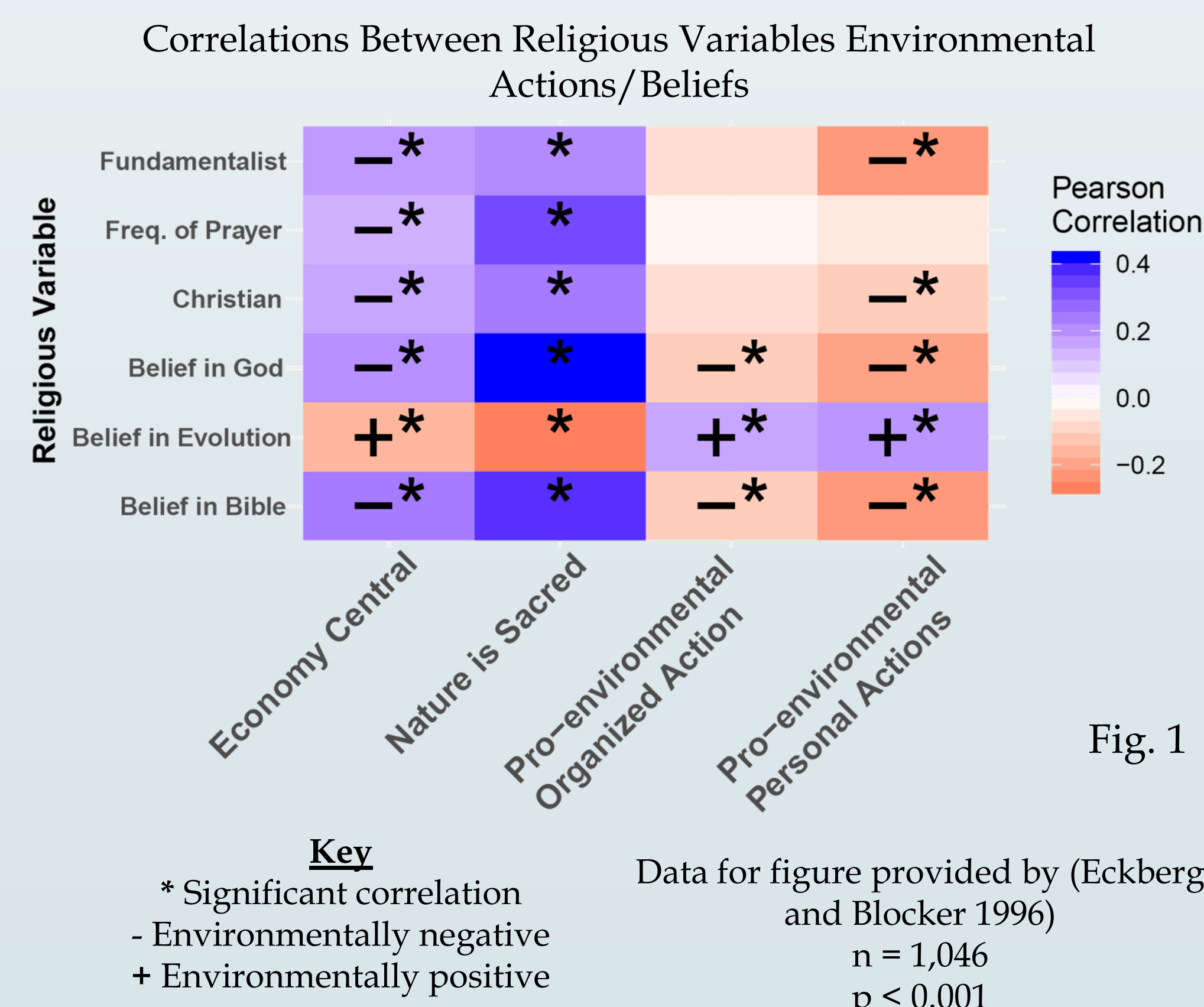


Pic. 1 and 2) Badlands, SD: A sacred site for the Lakota

## Dominion-over-Nature

- Researchers used survey literature measurement devices to discover the implications of anthropocentric worldview upon environmental beliefs (Dunlap and Van Liere 2008; Hills 2002).
- The multidimensional nature of environmental actions require researchers to differentiate between *personal* and *organized* actions. Many religious variables have strong negative associations with *personal* pro-environmental actions, such as conserving gasoline by walking or bicycling, volunteering, and recycling (Eckberg and Blocker 1996; Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000).
- Researchers found less negative correlations with religious variables and *organized* pro-environmental actions.
- Anthropocentrism is positively associated with ranking the economy as more important than the environment (Fig. 1).

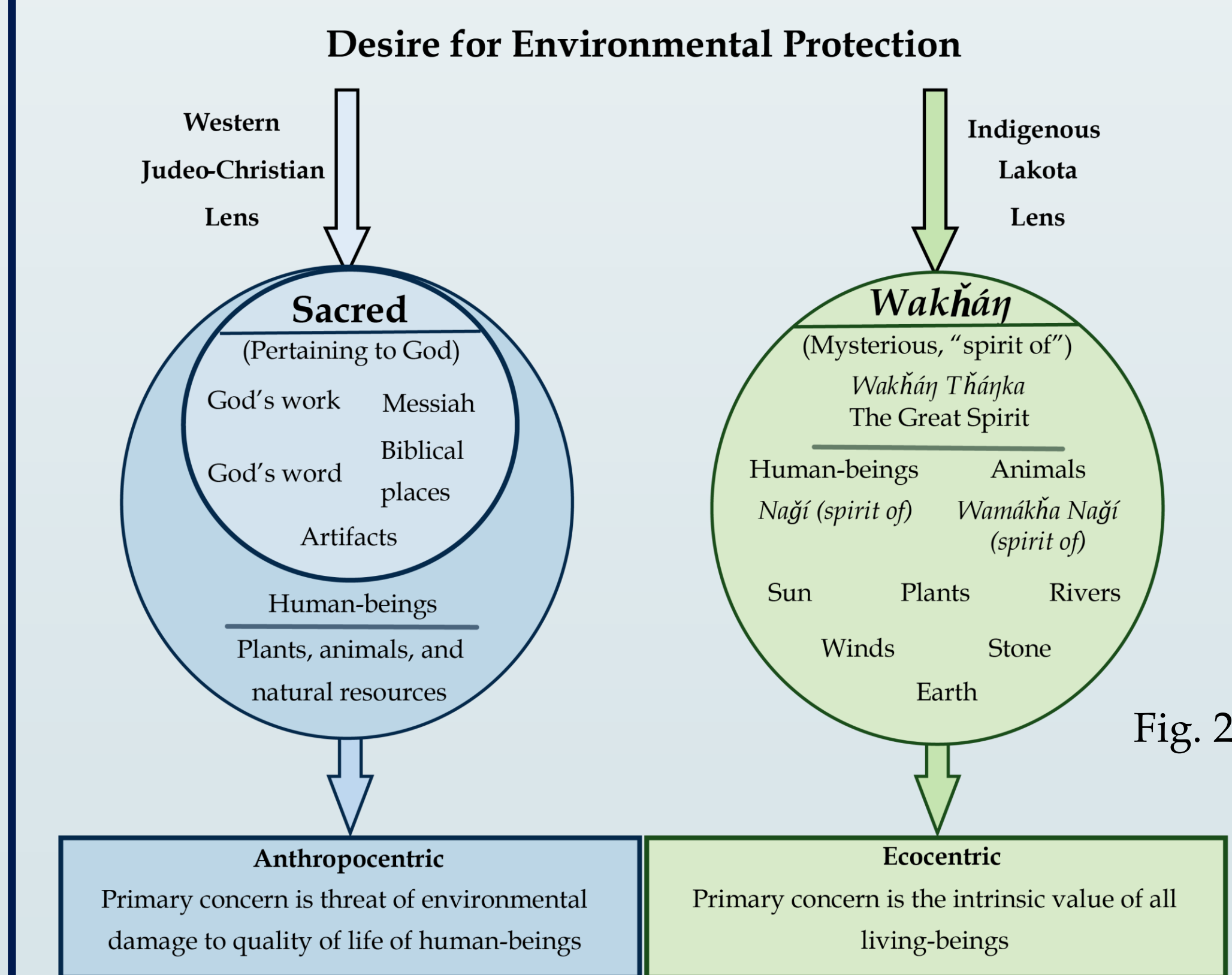
National and multinational survey studies revealed a negative correlation between anthropocentric value orientation and pro-environmental beliefs, measured across a range of actions and policy orientations.



## Harmony-with-Nature

- Among the hundreds of Indigenous religions practiced in North America, most contained themes of ecological interconnectedness to guide reciprocal relationships with the natural world (Hughes 1996).
- Similar to how Judeo-Christianity is separated into denominations, Native American religious values must be considered within tribal cultural context.
- Traditional Lakota (Sioux) religious practices display an ecocentric cultural orientation (Hughes 1996). Lakota tradition testifies for the spirit of "everything that moves" (Walker 1991, 72). Spirits are considered *Wak'háŋ* (mysterious) and treated with consideration and respect (Walker 1991).
- The Western parallel to the Lakota concept of *Wak'háŋ* is the perception of sacred.

Ecocentrism and anthropocentrism are both positively associated with a desire to protect the environment. When filtered through the lens of cultural worldview and religious teachings, the underlying reason for environmental concern is revealed (Fig. 2).



## Discussion

Among the abundant quantitative research studies available regarding the connection between religion and ecology, Indigenous epistemologies are non-existent in the survey data.

- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)** of Indigenous peoples is comprised of invaluable historical wisdom regarding sustainable relationships with the environment. The Indigenous peoples followed religious ecological standards which allowed them to hunt and fish for thousands of years without degrading the water, land, and ecosystems (Hughes 1996).
- In order to understand if contemporary Indigenous-based religious populations maintained the ecocentric nature-orientation of traditional teachings, researchers need to use social survey analyses and Indigenous-centered qualitative methodologies, within Native American sample groups.
- The thesis proposed by my research is that the Native American (Lakota) worldview would be positively correlated with ecocentric environmental concerns.

## Implications

- Community leaders can use religion-nature connections to develop structural and longstanding solutions when faced with ecological crisis.
- The implications of the dominion-over-nature view are troublesome for environmental conservation (Kay 1989).
- Scientific knowledge within academia is measured by the Western method (White 1967). TEK contains significant contributions to science to instruct Western theory on the interconnectedness of ecology and reciprocal relationships between humankind and nature.
- A widespread adoption of a harmony-with-nature orientation would promote more positive environmental beliefs, actions, and policies to address ecological issues.

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