The creation of a new American Paganism in the 1950s and 1960s had its roots in a European literary paganism, in the arrival of new Pagan texts, primarily from Britain, in a longstanding American metaphysical tradition but also, equally importantly, in the American tradition of seeing nature as a source of sacred value (Albanese, 1990, 2007). This root, while connected to the transnational Romantic movement, had developed in the young United States a somewhat nationalistic core that enabled new American Pagans of the mid-twentieth century to feel connected to something older and deeper than themselves. Thus, as American Paganism—particularly Wicca, its largest and most robust segment—developed a new identity as “nature religion,” it was able to connect to a pre-existing American spiritual current. While it is difficult to say precisely when this connection was made, it appears frequently in Pagan writing shortly after 1970, the year of the first Earth Day celebration.

Given their self-proclaimed magic-working components, Pagan religious traditions are often placed first in the “metaphysical” group. As a religious nation, America has a long-standing, although often academically marginalized, metaphysical tradition, dating back to the seventeenth-century immigrants from Western Europe who settled the Eastern Seaboard. The historian of religion Catherine Albanese, writing in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, chastises scholars for ignoring the metaphysical tradition, declaring, “This book is suspicious about the fringe status of what [Jon] Butler termed occultism and is suspicious as well about the defeat of the ‘occult’ player in the American religious drama.” Instead, she describes a lively metaphysical religion increasing particularly in the nineteenth century (Albanese, 2007,

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1 I follow the lead of Aidan Kelly here in using “Wicca” broadly to cover any contemporary Pagan religion that honors a god and goddess, meets within a ritual circle, invokes the elemental spirits of the four quarters, and claims to work magic by any definition (Kelly, 1991, p. 177).
Broadly, this metaphysical religion embraces a collection of ideas such as these:

- Privileging the “mind” (as opposed to the “heart” in evangelical Christianity), thus including clairvoyance, intuition, and other psychic abilities.
- Retaining the ancient hermetic doctrine of “as above, so below” and a view of the cosmos as pervaded by spiritual energy. “To put this another way, metaphysical practice is about what may be called magic, and magic . . . lies at the heart of American metaphysics.” Hence metaphysical religion imagines that the trained, magical will can effect change in the practitioner’s world.
- A radical pluralism that embraces horizontal, ephemeral, and egalitarian patterns of organization—networks—rather than top-down hierarchies.

To these I would add an openness to female religious leadership, which would also be a signature of Wiccan structure, but which had already been apparent in such movements as Spiritualism, Theosophy, Christian Science, and New Thought. In Britain, women entered ceremonial-magic groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn for the first time in history; indeed, earlier magical manuals such as *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* has insisted that only virgins could practice theurgy, and even they were not suitable because of “their love of talk.” But it was the Golden Dawn that could “claim responsibility for opening up the world of practical magic to the female sex” (Butler, 2004, p. 228). The importance of women in the Golden Dawn would impress such transitional figures to modern Paganism as the English ceremonial magician and novelist Dion Fortune, whose novels in turn played a part in creating the seedbed in which Wicca sprouted (Clifton, 1988). Given the cultural commonplace of treating human culture as “male” in opposition to the “female” that is non-human nature, we may see a link between that trait and the eventual adoption of the term “nature religion” by Wiccans in particular.

In addition to its metaphysical lineage, American Paganism has literary roots. These roots have been chiefly described in European contexts, but literary “paganism” did reach those Americans who read