Features

Green Religion

The Features section in this issue concentrates on a variety of articles looking at religion's response to a number of environmental problems. Alan Black analyses the responses to the International Values Study dealing with environmental matters. 'Tricia Blombery poses the question of the nature of the relationship between religion and environmental concern in Australia. Garry Trompf considers what the different world religions have to say on population control. Shirley Wurst looks at the religious response of ecofeminism. Reviews of two relevant recent works complete the section.

'Lord, her watch thy Church is keeping' or is she? Religion and the Environment

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A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics survey reveals that the environment is 'well and truly in our hearts, minds and hip pockets. In fact, we're quite worried about it'[1]. Results of this survey show that an estimated 69 per cent of Australians are concerned with at least one specific environmental problem. Another ABS report on the environment[2] shows that $5.1 billion was spent on environment protection during 1991-92 (ie 1.3 per cent of the GDP). Australian households spent $828 million or 16 per cent of that total. Just how serious this interest is perceived to be is reflected in the lavish 'green' programs outlined by both major parties in the recent Federal elections.

However, 69 per cent is a far higher proportion of the population than claims allegiance to a particular denomination or regularly attends church services and twice as large as the proportion who claim to believe definitely in the existence of God. This paper will draw on material from the 1994 National Social Science Survey[3] to consider whether any of these components of religious commitment -belief in God, denominational identification or church attendance - relates to acceptance of the ideas of God as creator as developed in

the Genesis accounts and the assumption implicit in them that all of nature is sacred. They will then be related to knowledge of and attitudes to different environmental problems and to commitment either theoretically or practically to addressing them. Perhaps then we will be able to answer the question raised in the title - Is the Church keeping watch over God's creation? - or are Australians concerned regardless of any religious considerations?

Australian Views on the Environment and how Science is Affecting it.

Overall, the 1378 adult Australians drawn from the Electoral Roll who completed the 1994 National Social Science Survey affirm the idea that humans have by their actions contributed considerably to the environmental problems and, consequently, that they can and should be involved in solving them. However, their views are not altogether consistent.

Almost half the group (47 per cent) agreed with the statement that 'Almost everything we do in modern life harms the environment'. A further 22 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. Similarly, only one quarter refuted the statement that 'Nature would be at peace and in harmony if only human beings would leave it alone'. 75 per cent believed it was true that 'Human beings are the main cause of plant and animal species dying out'.

Several aspects of modern life are also perceived by Australians as potentially dangerous to the environment and, to a lesser extent, to themselves and their families. Cars were seen as particularly bad characters. 78 per cent thought that it was at least fairly likely that within the next ten years there will be a large increase in ill-health in Australian cities as a result of air pollution caused by cars. 19 per cent were certain this would be the case. Only 16 per cent thought it true that cars are not really an important cause of air pollution in Australia. 94 per cent considered air pollution caused by cars as at least somewhat dangerous to the environment and 87 per cent saw it as dangerous to themselves and their family.

It is clear also that Australians consider that concern for the environment is justified. Only 28 per cent agreed that 'People worry too much about human progress harming the environment'. Also they did not appear to think that this degree of concern was excessive. Less than one quarter of Australians (23 per cent) thought that 'We worry too much about the future of the environment and not enough about prices and jobs today'. The majority favoured government intervention to protect the environment. 68 per cent felt that the 'government should pass laws to make ordinary people protect the environment even if it interferes with people's rights to make their own decisions'. 84 per cent supported environmental legislation for businesses.

Yet this concern for the environment is not a looking back to some earlier pastoral utopia. While seeing human beings as responsible for the problems this is not coupled with either an unrealistic rejection of science or progress or with sentimental idealism about nature. The majority (54 per cent) disagreed that 'Overall, modern science does more harm than good'. A further 24 per cent could not decide either for or against science. Slightly more (26 per

cent) were prepared to support the idea that 'Any change humans cause in nature -no matter how scientific - is likely to make things worse' but more than one third did not express an opinion either way. Yet very few (14 per cent) thought that 'Modern science will solve our environmental problems with little change to our way of life'. Science, therefore, although it will cause change in our lives is not generally perceived as harmful or dangerous *per se.*

There is a definite tendency among the respondents to blame human and scientific developments for many of the environmental problems but how well informed these opinions are is called into some doubt by answers to a number of the questions on nature. For example, 85 per cent thought that nuclear power stations posed some danger for the environment and 74 per cent thought that they were dangerous to themselves and their families. 94 per cent said it was true that some radioactive waste from nuclear power stations will be dangerous for thousands of years. Yet almost a quarter (24 per cent) believed that 'If someone is exposed to any amount of radioactivity, they are certain to die as a result' and 30 per cent affirmed that all radioactivity is made by humans. Similar contradictory and ill-informed opinions were held with regard to the greenhouse effect and agricultural chemicals.

As with science, opinions were not negative with respect to economic progress. Almost half the group (43 per cent) disagreed with the idea that 'Economic growth always harms the environment'. Another third could not decide either way. Economic growth was not, however, perceived as a necessary prerequisite for Australia taking some action to protect the environment. Only 38 per cent agreed that 'In order to protect the environment, Australia needs economic growth'.

The conviction that human beings should take action on environmental matters does not appeared to be linked to a 'warm fuzzy' idealism about nature. Over two-thirds (68 per cent) agreed that 'Nature is really a fierce struggle for survival of the fittest' and only 12 per cent rejected this notion. 43 per cent refuted the idea that ' Animals should have the same moral rights as human beings do' with only 27 per cent agreeing with the statement. Fewer again (23 per cent) disagreed that 'It is right to use animals for medical testing if it might save human lives' and 54 per cent supported the idea.

Even given the perceived enormity of the environmental problem, Australians answering the 1994 NSSS did not feel powerless. Only 19 per cent agreed that it is 'just too difficult for someone like me to do much about the environment'. 62 per cent agreed that 'I do what is right for the environment, even when it costs more money or takes more time'.

The level of commitment to practical measures will be explored later but from an overview of opinions the level of concern is undeniable. Is this concern stemming from fears for self preservation, from patriotic spirit, from feelings of responsibility for the future of the earth or is there perhaps sufficient active or residual religious sentiment in the Australian culture to link this concern with religion? One surprising response was to a statement that 'Human beings should respect nature because it was created by God' which was refuted by only 22 per cent. This appeared to be contradicted one question later when as

few as 13 per cent affirmed that 'Nature is sacred because it is created by God'.

Do Australians accept God as creator?

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

If you grew up in Australia or any of the other English speaking countries, or even in those areas to which the Western church extended its missionary ventures, chances are that the words of this children's hymn form part of your cultural heritage. The somewhat contradictory Judeo-Christian creation myths presented in the bible in the first two chapters of Genesis, even when the specific details are challenged by scientific theory and evidence, still have a high level of acceptance in certain areas of the society.

Three religious measures - belief in God, church attendance, and denominational affiliation - have been used to grade the responses to questions about degree of belief in the creation myths. The percentage affirming each statement about belief in God was:

* I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it 32
* While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God 23
* I find myself believing in God some of the time,
but not at all times 8
* I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe
in a higher power 15
* I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out 14
* I don't believe in God 8

Denomination will be considered for Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Uniting Church, and No Religion. Church attendance will be considered for those who never attend, those who attend monthly, and weekly attenders. These measures will be used to see if opinions about creation are influenced by religion.

In response to the questions 'Did God create the world?' and 'Did God create mankind?', overall 41 per cent agreed and only 31 per cent disagreed. When belief in God was considered a very different picture emerged. 90 per cent of those who believed in God without doubt agreed that God created the world and humankind, while 97 per cent of those who did not believe in God disagreed. Those in the other belief categories showed a great deal of difficulty in deciding either way but generally the less the belief in a personal God the less their acceptance of God as creator. Among the denominations, around two-thirds of Catholics (66%) and Baptists (62% world, 65% mankind) affirmed God as creator, half the Uniting Church members, but less than 40 per cent of the Anglicans. Of those who claimed to have no religion, 66 per cent refuted the idea of God creating the world and 64 per cent mankind. 94 per cent of weekly attenders and more than three-quarters of monthly attenders supported the ideas of God as creator of the world and mankind whereas 53 per cent of those who never attended rejected them. From responses to these questions it appears that degree of belief is most significant followed by church attendance and to a far lesser degree denominational identification.

There was a much lower level of support for the idea that God made people

in his own image with one third agreeing, one third rejecting and one third unable to decide. Again belief in God without doubt was significant with 81 per cent accepting and 97 per cent of those who do not believe in God rejecting the idea. However, in all the groups with less absolute belief the majority either rejected the idea or did not commit themselves. When considered in terms of denominational identification there was also a high degree of uncertainty. '90 per cent of those who attended church every week and 63 per cent of those attending monthly affirmed the notion that God created people in his image whereas 57 per cent of those who never attended disagreed.

More (40%) agreed with the statement that God made the different kinds of animals and birds than rejected it. Most of those who believed in God without doubt (86%) agreed while most of those who did not believe(89%) disagreed. The majority of those with less certain belief disagreed. In terms of denomination there was a high degree of uncertainty in response to this question. Over one third of Anglicans did not commit themselves. Around two thirds of Baptists (64%) and Catholics(62%), half the Uniting Church members(52%) but only 37 per cent of the Anglicans agreed. 65 per cent of those with no religion disagreed that God made different kinds of animals and birds. 91 per cent of weekly attenders agreed and 68 per cent of monthly attenders supported the idea while 53 per cent of those who never attend refuted it.

Two pictures of the relationship between human beings and nature are presented in the Genesis accounts. These appear at odds and present contradictory instructions when applied to environmental issues. Genesis 1:28 sees God saying to the newly created male and female 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth'[4]. This account of humans as superior and having power over the other elements of creation may be interpreted as allowing exploitation of nature. The account in Genesis 2 sees God as creating man and woman and 'settling [them] in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it' (:15) thus entrusting humans with the stewardship of nature.

Two questions on the 1994 National Social Science Survey attempted to test if people believed they had a right of superiority. People were asked if they believed that 'humans have a God-given right to master the earth'. The responses to this question when considered in terms of belief in God were far less polarised than those to earlier questions. The majority of all belief groups except those who believed without doubt disagreed with this position. 89 per cent of the non-believers disagreed and even 36 per cent of the absolute believers also disagreed. Only 44 per cent of those believing without doubt accepted the position. The majority of all denominations and the no religion group disagreed that humans had a God-given right to master the earth. Only with church attendance was there any real distinction. 70 per cent of those who never attend opposed the idea, 57 per cent of those attending weekly supported it and the monthly attenders were equally divided on the idea.

The second question asked if people believed that 'animals exist mainly for human use'. This was opposed by all belief groups ranging from 53 per cent of absolute believers to 86 per cent of

non-believers. All denominations and the no religion group disagreed. Although opposition to this view lessened with frequency of church attendance, all groups were still opposed to the idea that animals exist mainly for people's use.

From the above answers it appears that belief in God and church attendance, and to a much more limited extent denominational identification, are significant in acceptance of the different elements of Genesis creation stories. However, for the majority this acceptance of the accounts is not coupled with acceptance of the idea that humans have a God-given right to mastery over creation. The only exception is for some of those who believe in God without doubt and those who attend church weekly but even here it is by no means all of the group. Relating these findings back to environmental and conservation issues it would appear that religion is related to acceptance of the biblical account but generally the interpretation of the account does not lead to an exploitative or neglectful attitude to nature.

Another aspect of the religion question is explored with relation to the sacredness of nature. People were asked to select from the three statements below whichever was closest to their view:

Nature is sacred because it is created by God 14%

Nature is spiritual or sacred in itself 25%

Nature is important but not spiritual or sacred 57%

37 per cent of those who believed in God without doubt affirmed the first statement and 83 per cent of non-believers opted for the third. The second position was affirmed by significant proportions of all those who had some belief in God, but particularly so by those who denied a personal God but believed in a Higher Power. The majority of those with no religion and of all denominations considered, except the Baptists, accepted that nature is important but not spiritual or sacred. 30 per cent saw nature sacred because God created it and a further 23 per cent saw it as sacred in its own right. Weekly church attenders were divided as to whether nature was sacred as God-created (48%) or merely important(42%). In all other groups the greatest support was for nature as important but not spiritual or sacred.

Perhaps this apparently perplexing contradiction between acceptance of the creation stories and lack of support for the idea of nature as sacred either as God-created or in its own right can be explained by the theologians among you. However, to me it seems that although there are a number of people within the Australian population who could be considered religious in terms of their belief in God and their frequency of church attendance and these people to a significant extent, increasing as their religiousness increases, accept the creation stories that for only very few does this relate to a concept of nature as sacred. It would appear then that Australians are concerned with the welfare and protection of the environment regardless of any religious ideas. This will be considered in the next two sections on attitudes to environmental issues and practical involvement.

Does religion influence attitudes to environmental action?

People answering the 1994 National Social Science Survey were posed a

number of hypothetical questions about contributing to environmental protection. Half the group responded they were at least fairly willing to pay higher prices to protect the environment, 29 per cent were unsure, and 21 per cent were unwilling. All the belief groups were as willing as the general population with the exception of those who denied a personal God but believed in a higher power where 62 per cent were willing to pay higher prices. The denominational groups were also about the same with those with no religion showing the highest commitment (54%) and Baptists, surprisingly, the least (41%). There was no significant difference between the attendance groups in willingness to pay higher prices but the weekly attenders are slightly less willing(47%).

Australians were overall less willing to pay higher taxes to protect the environment. 37 per cent were against higher taxes, 36 per cent for, and 26 per cent undecided. Those who believe in God without doubt were most reluctant to pay (34%) compared with those who believe in a higher power(46%) and non-believers (48%). Attitudes to higher taxes differed between denominations. 43 per cent of those with no religion were willing to pay higher taxes to protect the environment but only 27 per cent of the Baptists and 24 per cent of Uniting Church members. Those who never attended church were more willing to pay than any of the attending groups.

The third question asking if people were prepared to accept cuts to their standard of living to protect the environment received overall similar responses to that on taxes but with slightly more for (38%) than against (33%). Again greater support came from those who believed in a higher power (44%) or didn't believe (46%) than from absolute believers (37%). There was a greater distinction between denominational groups with the greatest willingness to accept standard of living cuts expressed by those with no religion (47%) and Baptists (43%). Uniting Church members were again those least willing (28%). Church attendance does not appear to influence willingness to accept standard of living cuts in order to protect the environment.

From these findings it would appear that although Australians show a high level of concern for the environment, the majority are reluctant to make any personal sacrifices in order to protect it. Overall it is the non-religious and those who deny a personal God but believe in a higher power who are more likely to be willing to pay higher prices, pay higher taxes, or accept cuts in standard of living in order to protect the environment. One possible exception is the Baptists who while unwilling to pay higher prices or higher taxes are prepared to accept cuts to their standards of living. However, from these results it would appear that what little influence religion has on attitudes to nature and the environment to has a negative influence when it comes to personal commitment of resources. Is this also the case with personal practical involvement?

Does religion influence practical involvement in environmental matters?

As well as the theoretical questions about environmental protection people answering the 1994 NSSS were asked details of their actual participation in activities which may protect the

environment. Although Australians were generally unwilling to make personal financial sacrifices to protect the environment almost two-thirds said that they did what is right for the environment even when it costs more money or takes more time. There was no significant differences across belief groups, attendance groups or denominations.

In terms of practical action only 11 per cent said that they never made a special effort to sort glass or metal or plastic or paper for recycling and 45 per cent said they always did. Again religion made no significant difference although there was a slight tendency for those who didn't believe in God to show higher commitment to recycling. Overall there was less interest in making a special effort to buy fruit and vegetables grown without pesticides or chemicals (33% never tried) or to refusing to eat meat for moral or environmental reasons (81% never refused). There were no significant differences based on religion but a slight tendency for people who believed in a higher power to be more concerned with their food choices.

One of the practical considerations explored was whether people have cut back on driving cars for environmental reasons. A high response in favour would be anticipated in view of the high level of concern shown earlier over air pollution caused by cars and the deleterious effect this has on health. However, over half the group said they never cut back on using a car for environmental reasons. A third said they sometimes did but again there was no correspondence with religious commitment as measured by belief, denomination or church attendance.

Thus it appears that for Australians there is little connection between their widely expressed concern for the environment and its protection and their actual life style decisions. The contradiction is even greater when actual involvement in environmental action is measured. Only 9 per cent are members of a group whose main aim is to preserve or protect the environment and only 6 per cent have taken part in a protest or demonstration about environmental issues in the past five years. More have exercised the easier options of signing a petition about environmental issues (47%) or giving money to an environmental group (42%). In all cases the involvement was least among those who were definite believers in God and were regular attenders. Those who deny a personal God but believe in a higher power showed the highest level of practical commitment. Baptist were more likely than the other denomination to belong to or give money to an environmental group than the other denominations but not to the same extent as those with no religion. Those with no religion are much more like likely to have taken part in demonstrations and protests. The seeming lack of interest from those heavily involved in church activities may reflect their priorities rather than actual negative interest. They may simply not have the surplus time and money or may contribute it through church based societies involved in these areas, but this does not give an excuse when religion is defined in terms of denomination affiliation or degree of belief. It would appear that, as with the hypothetical theoretical questions, greater religiousness is associated with lower commitment in practical terms to environmental issues.

Is the church keeping watch?

There is certainly ample evidence to show that overall Australians are concerned with the environment, that this concern is reasonable, and that they see humans largely responsible for the deterioration and also the remedy. There is also ample evidence to show that there is a strong although small group made up chiefly of people who believe in God without doubt and weekly church attenders who accept the aspects of the creation stories presented in Genesis. While some feel this gives them the right of mastery over creation, more would see themselves as caretakers or stewards of nature. Strangely, this support of the creation stories does not generally translate to a respect for nature as sacred because it is God's creation.

The majority of Australians feel they are able to help protect the environment and that in fact they will act in the interest of the environment even when it costs more or takes more time. However, when it comes to practical matters of environmental protection these answers would appear to be contradicted. In response to hypothetical questions although some said they would pay higher prices to protect the environment, only a few were willing to pay higher taxes or take cuts in living standards. For those taking practical action such as protesting, demonstrating or joining environmental groups the proportion is even smaller. There is a fairly high commitment to recycling and a lesser participation in signing petitions and giving donations to environmental causes. When both the hypothetical and practical measures are compared with religion it seems, where it makes any difference at all, it is those who have less involvement - the non-believers, the non-attenders and those with no religion - who are more active. One small group that stands out is those who believe in God as a higher power and who see nature as sacred in its own right.

So in response to the question posed in the title, it is not the church, not the believers, and not the attenders who have a particular brief for protecting the environment. Perversely it is those most committed to the creation stories and the sacredness of nature as God's creation who take the least action and are least willing to make personal sacrifices for the environment. However, they aren't that much more reluctant that the total group. Although Australians show a great deal of concern for environmental issues and accept collective responsibility for the remedy only the minority are prepared to put this concern into action.

Notes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1994. *Environmental Issues - People's Views and Practices.*

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1992. *Cost of Environment Protection, Australia: Selected Industries 1991-92*

3. Evans, Mariah, Jonathan Kelley, Clive Bean and Krzysztof Zagorski, National Social Science Survey 1994, data file, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU.

4. Quotations from *The Jerusalem Bible.* Darton, Longman & Todd, London. 1968

The Attitudes and Involvement of Religions in Population Planning[1]

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Religions, as highly complex phenomena, are constantly creating crises and projecting solutions for the human predicament - often at the same time. As the world of religions embraces the issues of life and death so strongly, we quite naturally ask what sorts of attitudes are to be found among them concerning the current population explosion, and what involvement do the adherents of religions have in addressing this enormous crisis?

If, as current estimates have it, Planet Earth may be forced to sustain eleven thousand million humans early in the next millennium, the prospect of terrible struggles for resources will be immense - especially if politicians keep on 'dangling the carrot' of an increased standard of living before the noses of national populations. Some may admit that too many scientific prognostications have made ours the 'most unnecessarily fearful of all generations', while still acknowledging that one glaring exception - 'overpopulation' -should cause us to panic, according to one who has been both a physicist and a scientific administrator[2]. If so are religions compounding the problem, or offering an answer; or are they, even while easing the human being's anxieties spiritually, giving us all the more reason to worry over the survival of the human species?

Some strange paradoxes arise simply by posing such questions. Religions have traditionally been the nurturers of group life; could it be that, in praying for health and fecundity, and encouraging love and sexual union between men and women, they are now abetting rather than preventing 'the population bomb' or 'population explosion'[3]? And could it be that in those instances which most undermine religions' popularity today - in their use of sacred commitments to bolster violent conflict on one hand or, on the other, in imparting ascetical modes for repressing sexual desires - we possess, shockingly enough, some necessary (if contrasting) means to reduce population?

Because such big ethical issues are entailed here we would like to know what kinds of responses religions would make to them, and whether their teachings - as powerful influences, being vehicles of collective discipline and restraint -might make any difference.

Let us concede, in advance, that one cannot expect too much from social organisms as traditionalist as religions are. After all, the major world religions came into existence when not even the slightest prospect of global population crisis was in sight. Historically, at any rate, the limitation of populations has not been on their agendas -certainly not as some conscious plan for the comfort of future generations. Only over the last two decades have members of belief systems felt international pressures to contemplate overpopulation macroscopically - often to be caught off guard, and not at all in a position of readiness to face up to the

effects of drastic world-population growth.

Indigenous Religions' Responses

Separate, small-scale traditions do not normally find themselves in a position to present programatic solutions to global problems. Regarding population, what is most impressively and frequently conveyed by these traditions is a sense of biocosmic unity. Primal spiritualities assume an intimate relationship between human and other animal life, and have a keen sense of the interdependence of the components in their immediately-involved environment. A group's survival is, typically and most reasonably, recognised to depend on a balance being struck between human needs and accessible resources.

Two relevant, yet apparently opposing, configurations are manifest. On one hand such tribal or small-scale group orientations are quite naturally survivalist. A plethora of rites among them seeks the fecundity of women and the avoidance of shameful barrenness, the fertility of the ground, or the increase of game and/or herds for the group's health, as well as the strengthening and protection of men in 'warrior societies'.

Survivalism and ritual enhancement of fertility, however, are also principles working towards strong population growth. A prayer among the West African Akan asks, for example, that those about to marry should have 30 children! This illustration reflects the broader black African understanding that there is no greater social scar than sterility with even spontaneous abortion being abhorrent[4]. The case also reflects the world-wide preoccupation of indigenous religions with population increase.

On the other hand, such preoccupations betoken the harsh realities of long-inured, even 'stone-age', conditions of subsistence. Not only high infant mortality rates, but also the hazards of war and sorcery, really make religious accentuations of fertility more balanced than they may at first seem.

The symbiotic interconnectedness between primal peoples and their environments rightly intimates the greater, almost inevitable, attachment of each indigenous people to their 'cosmos', which is a highly confined one. Such localised awareness, however, undergoes serious modification under the new internationalising pressures to which primitive people are liable nowadays to be more and more subjected.

As soon as biocosmic rhythms are disturbed by new technologies and horizons, many of the highly culture-specific customs and practical responses start to lose their hold and some become highly vulnerable to the charges of being mere superstitions and functionally inhumane. On the other hand, some of the old ingrained general attitudes remain - such as those concerning fertility and security - and while these are to some extent reinforced by introduced religions new pressures often have to be faced.

When and where chances of survival are decreased, the spiritual and psychological pressures are to multiply, so that some children will survive; these are the typical responses of indigenous world-views.

'Official' Statements of World Faiths

The only publicised attempt to collate 'official responses' of world faith with the population issue was that made in 1990 through the World Wildlife Network on Conservation and Religion (WWF)[5]. Each tradition is considered in order of its historical appearance.

The Hindu Tradition

It is false to speak simply of Hinduism (over 500 million strong) because the religious groupings derived from the ancient Vedic tradition are highly diverse, consisting of some large 'schools of practice' (Vaishnavites and Shaivites) or 'thought' (Vedantic), and a vast number of minor ones - some highly ascetical, some very fertility- and even sexually-focused. The most popular scriptures, though, set the main tone by extolling the procreative powers of beneficent gods or heroes. Although these model beings were more active or incarnated in superior Ages or eons they offer ideal images of big and status-producing families. Sons are important for carrying out ritual functions after their father's death, while female reproductive power is sanctified in Brahmanical (and thus priestly) regulations against abortion (*Laws of Manu* 5: 90; 11: 88).

India, where the vast majority of Hindus is located, is currently the world's second most populous nation (830 millions). Hindu religious leadership has not reacted in a uniform way to the problem of overpopulation. Some factions have acquiesced to the post-War independent government's program of family planning and sterilisation[6]; others have opposed contraception as being contrary to the principle of non-violence towards life (*ahimsa*). Other leaders again keep locating the cause of the population problem in wrong orientations of life, teaching against materialisms and its illusions (*maya*), and trying to revitalise old virtues of asceticism and the celibate 'masters' (*brahmacaryas*).

Judaism (the Israelite-Jewish Tradition)

The imperative to 'be fruitful' is writ large in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Book of Genesis (esp 1: 28-9; 9: 7). As a result it is a Jewish duty to marry - the very mark of being fully a man or woman, in fact - and to have children. The will to be populous as God's special people has been very much effected by two crucial developments in the twentieth century, one terrible - the 1939-45 'Holocaust' - and the other more promising, but a little disruptive as things turned out, the creation of the modern state of Israel from 1948.

Particular Jewish regulations - what can be called 'orthopraxy' or right practice, which is especially important for Orthodox Jewry - are on balance leaning more towards 'healthy increase' than 'restrictive decrease'. Along with non-marriage, celibacy, monasticism, homosexuality, masturbation, *coitus interruptus*, as well as abortion, contraception and artificial birth-control methods, are considered reproachful in tradition. In modern Israel, rabbis acquiesce to government sponsorship of Family Planning Clinics, and to women's access to Committees that officially permit abortion, although these

institutions are not tolerated in religiously sensitive centres.

The effects of expanding populations on environments, living standards, and the global future, however, have just begun to generate a new era of debate. As Aubrey Rose, Chairman of the Jewish Working Group on the Environment in the UK put it, Jews will have to balance the old injunctions to multiply with their 'environmental percept, "Thou Shalt Not Destroy"', if 'a population explosion' would lead to 'the destruction of nature and human dignity'.

Zoroastrianism

Of all the world faiths, Zoroastrianism is the only one faced with steadily declining numbers (now down to 80,000), and there is constant talk of survivalism - particularly among pockets of refugees from Iran who are scattered around the Western world[7].

Traditionally three children per family were considered enough by Zoroastrians and after that women 'had to be careful'. The tradition is known more for its emphasis on permission of ethical choice than on strict moral regulations, and using birth-control techniques was a personal matter of seeking 'right actions'. Women pressing a special case for an abortion have been respected. The self-limiting aspects of this tradition are its own advertisement as a solution to overpopulation.

Jainism and Buddhism

These two traditions, as ascetical movements breaking away from the Vedic-Hindu tradition, are both inevitably 'passive' regarding efforts to control fertility. Their teachings of compassion towards 'all sentient beings' (as Buddhists put it), and 'all life-forms'(thus the Jains), require avoidance of any action (*karma*) that takes away life (so abortion, and certainly infanticide, are generally opposed). On the other hand, some nerve-centres of leadership in these traditions have become quite proactive over environmental issues of late, and 'religious solutions' to the population dilemma are now being more confidently stated than heretofore.

Self-restraint and *ahimsa* are essential to Jainism. 'Population control' is attendant upon 'self-control and transcendence of passions', which is expressed by monks *par excellence*, but also in the moderate and monogamous conjugalities of lay couples.

Buddhist schools, for their part, abound in traditions of self-abnegation and the renunciation of earthly love for the sake of Enlightenment. Sexual desires, then, or the want to make one's mark with a large family, can very easily be recognised as forms of craving (*tanha*), which causes the very 'suffering' or 'unsatisfactoriness' that the famous Buddhist *Fourfold Path* is set to eliminate. All social problems, including the population one, can be solved through the frugality and simplicity of life that constitute what Buddhists call 'right livelihood'[8].

Taoism and Confucianism

Taoists speak of the unfortunate consequences of disequilibrium. All personal or social problems result from the creation of some imbalance (*cf. Tao Te Ching 42*): even too much good can bring evil against it. Thus

overpopulations, in the manner of epidemics and even earthquakes, are calamities that come because of failure to attend to matters of cosmic harmony. In the contemporary situation, this is an implicit policy of wise restraint.

Confucianism, though formerly more politically powerful in old China than elsewhere, contains no clear guidelines to address overpopulation. Its scriptural classics contain nothing specifically about birth-control, even though the human family becomes the model in Confucius' philosophy for the ideal ordering of states. If anything, what is stressed as the virtue of 'filial piety' puts a priority on having sons to succeed as family heads - a principle not lending itself to a consistent limiting of births. In modern-day Taiwan, mainland China, and elsewhere, Confucians (approx. 350 millions) acquiesce to the pressure of family-planning clinics.

Shinto

Although Shinto (with over 100 million members) possesses its socio-political centre in the Japanese emperorship, and although there is a body of common customs reflecting its impact, as a religion its beliefs are unsystematised and its practices are often localised to temples and their domains, which have been patronised by leading families for generations. In Shinto there are a number of background factors and attitudes with implications for population matters. The glorification of the male hero is probably stronger in Japan than anywhere else in the world, and tends to foster family hopes for the birth of sons. Also because of the long-standing customary methods of reducing child numbers through abortion, and, earlier, infanticide, Shinto - among all the religions in Japan - is the tradition most lending itself to the high abortion rate there.

Christianity

Christianity (more than 1,000 million adherents) is, as the largest of the world faiths, deeply divided over aspects of the global population predicament, and for that reason there is more lively controversy, theological positioning, and specialist literature, about the subject in Christian, than any other, circles.

The official divide between the Western communions (Catholic and Protestant) over the birth-control question sharpened with the publication of the Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 (Paul VI) - which declared against artificial methods of contraception (and reinforced Pope Pius XI against abortion) - and the clarification by the 1960s that most Protestant churches accepted the adult individual's personal right to contraception and saw its importance for checking population.

Catholic teaching is very much affected by the Old Testament imperative to be fruitful and guard life, and Christ's re-validation of the Commandment against murder (Mark 10: 19) militates against liberal policy over abortion. Official mainline Protestant positions have stressed more the response of Christian love to whole contexts, admitting certain 'valid' social circumstances which 'justified birth-control'. Orthodox leadership, amid discussions of theological opinion, leans more towards the official Western Catholic line, while most sectarian Protestant groups (eg most Baptist

groups) accept personal rights over contraceptive methods but loudly inveigh against abortion.

Certain technicalities make it difficult to fathom the current crisis over birth-control within the Roman Catholic fold. To understand it better, it must be remembered that no Papal pronouncement on this matter has so far been taken as infallible or an article of faith (*de fide*), because none has been made in or through a Church Council or in collusion with the majority of bishops. This means - as various Catholic ecclesiastics who are worried about the currently stated position have been quick to argue - that the Catholic laity are, thus far, left to explore their own consciences on birth-control. Practical advice sets much store in the rhythm method as 'scientific' and thus also stresses the discipline of self-restraint.

Islam

As the second largest religious tradition (c.1,000 millions), Islam also contains inner tensions in its reaction to threats of overpopulation, whether global or regional. By the late 1950s a number of family-planning clinics were accepted to meet crises in Egypt and Pakistan (though simultaneously rejected in the more secular but far less populous Turkey). In 1953 the Fatwa Committee in Cairo, authoritative on Sunni cannon law, declared that the use of medicine 'to prevent pregnancy temporarily' was not debarred (the Qur'an not requiring hardship from believers, *Sur* 2: 185; 22:78), even if medicine 'to prevent pregnancy absolutely and permanently' was forbidden.

Other arguments from the Scripture and tradition of Islam are for granting the right of birth-control to feeble women, poor householders, or even women who are fearful of losing their beauty. On the other side of the coin, there are current ideological pushes for strong, increased Muslim populations, more politicising (ie fundamentalist) Islamic leadership advocating world-wide expansion in population terms.

Popular and Unofficial Attitudes of World Faiths

Non- or less-official approaches to overpopulation, that announce more restraining positions than those found in the major positions just discussed are very much in the minority. A few important illustrations will be valuable.

First, one can talk of the *drag of primal fertility interests on major religions*, especially in the so-called Third World. For example, in some southern European and Latin American settings the Virgin Mary seems to be culturally translated into a Mother Goddess (with connotations of fecundity). Especially in Third World contexts, these underground attitudinal pressures also include *fatalistic notions*, such as the resignation towards pregnancy or birth as happening always through 'divine will'. Other collective social statements in contexts of disadvantage are those stances which are *blatantly reactive against imposed measures of restraint.*

Another unofficial pressure related to social disadvantages is *socio-religious competitiveness for numbers*. This can occur *within* a tradition or else the numbers' competition can be an *interreligious* struggle.

In the industrialised First World, increased awareness concerning the population question has also brought *popular sentiment against Catholic inflexibility* over the birth-control issue.

Involvement for Solutions

Reflecting on this survey, it is quite unrealistic to expect from religions any real panacea. They are divided between and within themselves, and the world faiths are constantly at work against pressures that are contrary to fulfilment of their highest ideals - including those of self-restraint (which are crucial to decreasing population). Yet religions have an extraordinary capacity to move people's consciences and reorient their lives to work for a better future and this possibility will be vital for combating irresponsibilities towards both numbers and the environment.

The world is not only overpopulating but is practically 'bleeding to death', *inter alia* through misunderstanding between traditions, and both problems can be addressed by concerted efforts at interfaith (not merely international) cooperation.

Notes

1. This article is edited by 'Tricia Blombery from a much longer and more scholarly piece appearing as Chapter 10 in Nicholas Polunin and Mohammad Nazim (eds) 1994. *Population and Global Security (Environmental Challenges II)* The Foundation for Environmental Conservation, Geneva

2. Farrands, J L 1993. *Don't Panic, Panic!* Text Publishing, Melbourne

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EarthsKin[1]: towards a critical feminist ecojustice hermeneutic

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The seal issue challenges us in many ways, politically, philosophically and personally, to develop a new framework sensitive to the complex relation we bear to seals. The conventional theories of environmental philosophy are not adequate to this challenge...

What might make a better framework is a reclamation of the Celtic and Aboriginal conceptions of seals as our kin, related to us through a complex interplay of similarity and difference. This involves a rethinking of our own human identity. The dominant traditions in Western culture have made it difficult for us to recognise continuity and kinship with the other creatures...

Overcoming this alienation involves learning to recognise other species, neither as extensions of ourselves nor as inferior humans, but as 'other nations'. Recognising them as other nations involves meeting them as beings to be understood both in terms of their similarity to us as centres of desire or striving and in terms of their differences as beings-for-themselves, each with their own particular excellences and lifeways, and as especially mysterious others who are not to be known or encompassed in their entirety. It also means recognising them as fellow claimants on this earth [Plumwood, 1992b, p 54, 55].

Three critical feminist ecojustice hermeneutical principles

1. A critical feminist ecojustice hermeneutic seeks to promote **a non-dualistic approach** to the earth. Such a hermeneutic seeks to **deconstruct dualism**, and **celebrates difference.** It **emphasises mutuality** and displays a **reverence for all life,** both sentient and non-sentient. Its goals: acceptance and active enhancing of the life of 'the other', and a 'this-world' rather than an 'other-world' focus.

2. This hermeneutic **understands power as 'power-with'** rather than 'power-over'. It challenges and **deconstructs the 'logic of domination'.** Its focus: **power as partnership in a mutual relationship.**

3. A feminist ecojustice hermeneutic **values earth as subject and agent in its own right,** active **in partnership with God and human beings.**

[*NB: I am using 'earth' as an inclusive term that includes all plants, all non-human animals and birds, sea creatures, insects and reptiles..., all waters, the planetary and star systems; land is a major component of the concept; in the context of this thesis, it **excludes human beings.**]

Some definitions

hermeneutics:

'[H]ermeneutics is not comprised of method alone...It begins with a stance, a choice of hermeneutical key, a decision about whose eyes with which to see the world & whose voice with which to speak'[Camp,1987,p 110].

critical:

'[S]ocio-critical hermeneutics...[is] defined as an approach to texts...which seeks to penetrate beneath their surface function to expose their role as instruments of power, domination, or social manipulation...'The aim: 'to achieve the liberation of those over whom this power/social manipulation is exercised...[they achieve their aim by] establishing a metacritical or transcendental dimension distinct from the horizons of the texts or traditions in question, on the basis of which their manipulatory or oppressive functions and mechanisms can be made transparent'[Thiselton,1992,p 379].

feminist:

'Feminism, properly understood, is a movement to end all forms of oppression...the domination of women is of course central to the ecofeminist understanding of domination, but it is also an illuminating model for many kinds of domination, since the oppressed are often both feminised and naturalised'[Plumwood,1992,p 65-66].

'Feminist criticism is...engaged criticism...a mode of praxis.The point is not merely to interpret...the point is to change the world...Feminist hermeneutics stands over against patriarchal hermeneutics, an advocacy position for the male-oriented, hierarchically established present cultural power system'[Dewey,1992,p 167].

'What makes something a feminist issue is that understanding of it contributes in some important way to an understanding of the subordination of women'[Warren,1988,p 142].

ecojustice:

'[J]ustice as empowerment...[involves] a society which strives for equal power between competing groups by disempowering those structures which dominate weak groups in society'[Habel,1991,p 89].

'There is no justice apart from community...human beings...have distorted, disrupted, and undermined relationships with God, neighbours and all of creation...[J]ustice requires equal respect for all'[Brown,1989,pp 49-50].

'An ecological ethic must always be an ethic of ecojustice that recognises the interconnections of social domination and the domination of nature'[Plumwood, 1994, p 73].

'Ecological justice...is the basis of a symbiosis of humankind and nature capable of survival...So we shall no longer just want to know about nature in order to dominate it, but want to understand it in order to take part in it'[Moltmann,1989,p 14,15].

'Justice is concerned with the restoration of right relationships with each other and the earth'[Hammond,1991,p 66].

Introduction: why get your knickers in a knot now?

Lynn White Jr, writing in 1967, set the proverbial 'cat among the pigeons' with provocative statements like the following:

We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence,

save to serve [humans]...
Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious [p 1207].

Since then, Christians and non-Christians have been focusing their attention on the nature of, and solutions to, our ongoing declining world environment situation. My critical feminist ecojustice hermeneutic is my attempt to come to terms with White's critique of Christianity's interpretation of the creation accounts within the Hebrew Scriptures, and their significance for human-earth relationships.

Tim Flannery's book, *The future eaters* [1994], focuses on the 'encounter of humans with their environment' in Australasia. In this text - the 'first ecological history of Australasia'[inside front cover] - he makes the following observations:

Some humans have dreams...to make the deserts bloom and to make the depths of the sea and even Antarctica yield their bounty...With our dreams fulfilled we will, I fear, see a wave of extinctions so vast as to dwarf anything that has gone before. For we will have become the exterminator species that broke all the rules. The one that could take not only all the resources of rich lands, but of poor ones as well [p 101]...

Freed from the ecological constraints of their homeland and armed with weapons honed in the relentless arms race of Eurasia, the colonisers of the 'new' lands are poised to become the world's first future eaters [p 143]...

It is clear that an understanding of what powered the first great leap forward is critical to humans living today. If I am right, the first great leap forward was only achieved at the cost of the destruction of whole biotas, while the second leap [in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries] resulted in more destruction. We cannot afford to leap at such great expense again [p 163].

Flannery's book is an attempt to show what we have done -and how recently we have achieved these major dislocations, and what we are continuing to do. His aim: to inform so we can learn from our history and preserve some future for ourselves, our children and the rest of the earth. The urgency of the situation is apparent throughout the text of his book, and powerfully evoked by its title: *The future eaters.*

Anne Clifford, like many others, also focuses on the appalling state of the world:

In spite of the efforts of numerous concerned persons around the world, humans continue to inflict on our planet pollution, deforestation, ozone destruction, endangerment of plant and animal species and resource depletion' [1992, p 65]...[Nature is a] complex web of life in which we humans are a vital thread [p 90].

Dorothy Dinnerstein's language is more poetic, but her thrust is the same, and she points the finger without ambiguity at the human species:

Feminism is a crucial human project...only insofar as it moves us toward outgrowing the mental birth defect, the normal psychopathology, that makes us so deadly a danger, now, to the living realm that spawned us;the birth defect that makes us - clever, inventive, affectionate, tool-using ape-cousins who seem to have 'dreamed ourselves into existence'; sociable, playful mammals who laugh, weep, talk, talk, talk - an ecological cancer, and a

nuclear time bomb, in the body of the earth [1989, p 194-195].

So, what has feminism got to do with it?
(Or: what is the vital ingredient that feminism, specifically ecological feminism or ecofeminism, adds to the mix?)

Ecofeminists like Stephanie Lahar, Karen Warren, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Val Plumwood have demonstrated the significant connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of the natural world within the Western capitalist and patriarchal system. Philosopher Val Plumwood also demonstrates the resistance of western dualistic systems of thought to change, and many, including Victoria Davion, demonstrate that any change to the 'status quo' needs to be approached with great caution. What can be dreamed, according to many, notably Plumwood, is a new definition of human which spans what we know of both males and females, and what we are yet to discover. Plumwood and others also demonstrate that an ethic focused on relationship and mutual respect yields most promise for change that will affirm bounteous life for many, if not all.

Stephanie Lahar demonstrates the link between the domination of women and nature in her definition of ecofeminist theory:

ecofeminist theory includes a systematic analysis of domination that specifically includes the oppression of women and environmental exploitation, and it advocates a synthesis of ecological and feminist principles as guiding lights for political organising and the creation of socially equitable life-styles [1991, p 29].

Ynestra King [1989] is even more specific:

Without a thorough feminist analysis of social domination that reveals the interconnecting roots of misogyny and hatred of nature, ecology remains an abstraction [p 23]...misogyny [is] the deepest manifestation of nature-hating in [humankind] [p 24].

Val Plumwood also makes the point very clearly in her 1990 article, 'Plato and the bush. Philosophy and the environment in Australia' - an article that demonstrates contemporary attitudes to the natural world as a logical progression from the ideas of Plato, as seen in *Phaedo*:

According to Plato the world of nature is, quite literally, a hole, its condition and status linked to that of the feminine by the metaphor of the Cave and their mutual association with the body. It is also a dump, a place where refuse from the higher world accumulates [p 525; Clifford, 1992, traces our negative view of nature to Bacon].

Towards the end of her paper, she observes:

One key aspect of the Western view of nature...is the view of the natural sphere as sharply discontinuous from or ontologically divided from the human sphere. This leads to a view of humans as apart from or 'outside of nature', usually as masters or external controllers of it...As the passages from Plato illustrate, Western thought has given us a particularly strong division (usually gendered) between humans and nature. This human/nature division is part of a set of interrelated contrasts of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine /feminine, and there are important

interconnections between these contrasts [p 533].

Many other ecofeminists draw the same conclusions: the dominant group's willingness to see difference as 'other', and to separate themselves from this group, is the first step towards oppression of the inferior other [for example, Clifford, 1992; Davion, 1994; Dinnerstein, 1989; Haney, 1993]. In addition, Victoria Davion, using insights from the work of Karen Warren, sees this separation as grounded on a 'logic of domination'. This logic connecting the domination of women and the domination of nature, is based on the premises that(i) there are a morally significant differences between humans and the rest of nature, and (ii) that these differences provide the justification for human domination of non-human life forms and non-sentient nature [Davion, 1994, p 8, 10].

In her 1993 text, Plumwood spells out the nature, and practical implications, of this oppressive connection even more specifically. The woman-nature connection is the 'dynamic behind much of the treatment of both women and nature in contemporary society', and 'deeply embedded in the rationality of the economic system and in the structures of contemporary society'. The result: an 'inferiorisation' that results in 'backgrounding and instrumentalisation'.

One of the most common forms of denial of women and nature is what I will term backgrounding, their treatment as providing the background to a dominant foreground sphere of recognised achievement or causation...What is involved in the backgrounding of nature is the denial of dependence on biospheric processes, and a view of humans as apart, outside nature, which is treated as a limitless provider without needs of its own [p 21].

Traditionally, women are the 'environment' - they provide the environment and conditions against which male 'achievement' takes place, but what they do is not itself accounted as achievement [p 22].

It is easy to see the interlinking and interchangeability in the images depicted as integral to Plumwood's analysis of the 'backgrounding' of both women and nature!

Another quotation from Plumwood, concerning ideas linked with nature, also makes the women-nature connections insidious and obvious:

To be defined as 'nature'...is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture...take place. It is to be defined as terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed...to be conceived and moulded...It means being seen as part of a sharply separate, even alien lower realm, whose domination is simply 'natural', flowing from nature itself and the nature(s) of things [1993, p 4].

At the end of her article in Karen Warren's book [1994], Victoria Davion concludes:

However, while ecofeminist are correct in challenging dualisms such as human/nature, reason/emotion and masculinity/femininity, the solution does not lie in simply valuing the side of the dichotomy that has been devalued in Western patriarchal frameworks. Rather, traits associated with both sides of these false dichotomies need to be reconceived and reconsidered; if these traits are to be retained, totally new ways of thinking about them in a nonpatriarchal context are needed. Simply be-

ginning to value the devalued side reinforces harmful dichotomies [p 26].

This insight is vital, demonstrating that both sides of the existing dualities need to be addressed, critiqued, and reformed, while at the same time breaking the nexus of the oppositional duality. If only one side is critiqued, if only one side is reformed, the crippling nexus remains in place.

In her 1993 text, *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, Plumwood demonstrates the necessity of breaking western dualistic thinking to end oppression in all its forms, and highlights the reasons for its resistance to change:

[W]estern culture has treated the human/nature relation as a dualism...[and] this explains many of the problematic features of the west's treatment of nature which underlies the environmental crisis, especially the western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature. A detailed analysis of dualism also shows that its characteristic logical structure of otherness and negation corresponds closely to classical propositional logic...Moreover, the logic of dualism yields a common conceptual framework which structures otherwise different categories of oppression [p 2, 3].

Elsewhere, she observes that this will also involve developing a new concept of what being human means [1990c, p 534-535]. As being human has involved a negative definition in the west - what does not fit the criterion is outside the category - and as this has resulted in a negative evaluation of this other as 'non-human' [Plumwood, 1990c, p 533], changing the definition of human will also result in a changing idea of what defines this 'not-human' category.

This new construction of human characteristics involves taking the best of existing character traits and adding other qualities to customise a new definition to meet the new exigencies as they arise. Plumwood implies this is a process, not a finite achievement [1993, pp 22-24; 1992c, p 55; 1990c, p 534-535]: like many others, she recognises that we are all products of our history, and limited by what we know and have experienced. Even our dreams are tainted by our present realities.

In addition, Plumwood sees limiting the choice to one or other of the two existing options (existing masculine perspective or feminine alternative), thus involving a mere revaluing -devaluing unacceptable masculine traits and valuing feminine traits instead - as a false choice.

The rejection of the masculine character ideal does not imply acceptance of corresponding feminine traits[;]...a critique of both masculinity and femininity and their complementary characters is involved. Further, the rejection of both the masculine and the feminine character ideals is linked with the rejection of the traditionally associated dualisms of mind/body, rationality/emotionality, public/private...[T]he fact that the concept of the human is up for remaking does not mean that it has to be remade in the mould of either the masculine or the feminine [1988, p 22].

Ynestra King calls the ecofeminist approach 'two-handed feminism' because it involves a twin approach: a critique of all oppression, and challenge and support for transforming change in the direction of mutuality and respect, and power-sharing. In Barbara Deming's words, this involves the 'restraining hand' and the 'open hand' [Warren, 1988, p 153].

What is involved is a major shift in the way we humans do things, see things - ie both our ideology and our praxis.

Rosemary Radford Ruether also sees a new integration - 'a new synthesis, a new creation' [1989, p 150] - involved in the process, a process she describes as 'a historical project and struggle of re-creation'. Her claim:

Ecological thinking demands a different kind of thinking, one that integrates left-brain linear thought and right-brain spatial and relational thought...Nature is a product not only of natural evolution but of human historical development [p 149].

In an article discussing Carol Gilligan's insights into gender differences in moral development and ethical decision-making, Joan Tronto [1987] suggests an alternative to the dominant attitude to the environment: 'a relational ethic' [p 654]. (She uses the term, 'ethic of care', a term I choose not to use because it lends itself too easily to ideas of stewardship and paternal caring for, rather than working with, relating to as an equal, essential to my feminist notion of ecojustice.)

Her perspective represents an important feminist contribution to what she refers to as a masculine notion: justice. According to Tronto, unlike justice, a relational ethic is more concrete than justice, which she sees as 'abstract' and 'formal', and is activity-focused rather than based on a set of principles. Importantly for my perspective, this relational ethic involves a different style and perception of the self from that commonly held by the dominant group within western society:

[T]hose who viewed the self as 'separated' from others and therefore 'objective' were more likely to voice a morality of justice, while those who viewed the self as 'connected' to others were more likely to express a morality of care. Since men are usually 'separate/objective' in their self/other perceptions, and women more often view themselves in terms of a 'connected' self, the difference between justice and care is gender related [p 648].

In suggesting the difference is also social rather than simply gender-based, and linked to minority status or different worldview, Joan Tronto also refers to the research of Gerald Jackson and Wade Nobles, comparing European to Afro-American and African ways of thinking:

In contrast to the 'analytical, logical, cognitive, rational, step by step' thinking by Europeans and Euro-Americans, African thought relies on 'syncretistic reasoning, intuitive, holistic, affective' patterns of thought in which 'comprehension [comes] through sympathy'...Indeed, Wade N Noble relates this different, connected pattern of thought to the fact that black African Americans do not seem to have the same self-concept as whites. Noble characterises this view of the self, which stresses 'a sense of cooperation', 'interdependence' and 'collective responsibility', as the 'extendedself' [p 651].

Like Sharon Welch [1990], Val Plumwood and Joan Tronto are advocating a revolution in the way we see the world of nature, informed by feminist critical analyses of our Western ways of thinking and being.

Douglas Pratt, in a short article [1990] makes the following observation about the Judaic worldview, as discerned in the Hebrew Scriptures:

the world of nature is given its own value, and is not to be tyrannised or ruinously exploited by humanity...the conceptual approach is holistic and life in all its facets is experienced as interactive. A relational and transactional

metaphysic governs the dealings of human beings with both the transcendent realm of the Divine and also the immanent realm of the mundane. Ecological concerns would appear to find a natural and unambiguous place within the orbit of the Judaic perspective [p 258].

This comment, and the observations in Joan Tronto's article relating to different ways of thinking about the world, suggest to me that the Hebrew Scriptures hypothetically contain an ideological stance towards the world and nature that is grounded on different principles and ideas about human beings and their connection with the world around them and their God than those currently dominant within western society.

And so...

It is my contention that, for many centuries, our interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures has been skewed by our western 'analytical, logical, cognitive, rational, step by step' thinking [Tronto, 1997, p 651]. As Val Plumwood [1990c] asserts:

the human/nature contrast in particular, has been especially stressed in the rationalist tradition. In this account, what is characteristically and authentically human is defined against what is taken as natural, nature or the physical and biological realm. The authentically human nature is realised in terms of the exclusion and overcoming of nature, both within and without. Hence the prime human task is to overcome nature [p 533].

A culture that views the natural sphere as a mere instrument of its own ends, defined as separate from it, and as a field upon which to display human mastery and control, cannot treat it with care and respect...

My critical feminist ecojustice hermeneutic is an attempt to read these Scriptures from a new perspective, one that changes all the possibilities, and indeed gives us possibilities we have never seen or understood before.

Perhaps Ynestra King's [1989] observations are a chilling summary of the ecofeminist critique of dominant culture, and the danger inherent in doing nothing, in maintaining the status quo:

Without a thorough feminist analysis of social domination that reveals the interconnected roots of misogyny and hatred of nature, ecology remains an abstraction...

[T]he human species in its patriarchal form is the only species which holds a conscious belief that it is entitled to dominion over the other species and over the planet. Paradoxically, the human species is utterly dependent on non-human nature. We could not live without the rest of nature; it could live without us [p 23, 24]...

[W]hen women suffer through both social domination and the domination of nature, most life on this planet suffers and is threatened as well [p 25]...

It seems appropriate to end as I began, with a quotation from Val Plumwood:

The recognition of other selves in nature as different but akin, continuous, opens up a whole rich dimension of exchange, mutuality and dialogue with beings in nature...a personal challenge to escape the framework of domination...This requires the observer to develop a certain kind of receptiveness, a capacity to meet and listen to these others in the natural world..., to hear stories we usually cannot hear because Western frameworks have blocked them out [1992b, p 55].

Note

1. I wish to acknowledge a debt to Val Plumwood; my title is based on a similar line of thinking as that behind the title of her article: 'SealsKin'

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"A Big-Enough God": Towards an Ecological Natural Theology

A review essay of Sara Maitland's Big-Enough God, artful theology. London:Mowbray, 1995

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In recent years, we have become familiar with critiques of Enlightenment thinking. Critics have pointed out such presuppositions within it as anthropocentricism, dualism, the myth of pure objectivity and the positing of the transcendent and disengaged knowing self. In this context, Christian thinkers[1] have also pointed out that Enlightenment categories of thought which had been widely adopted to express Christian theological understandings have been inappropriate and even hostile to these understandings. For this reason, it is now important to re-think Christian orthodoxy outside of these categories.

Sara Maitland's book *Big-Enough God, artful theology* makes an important contribution to this process of re-thinking. Maitland does this in a highly original and playful way. She shows how modern, Enlightenment mindsets have shaped a great deal of the mainstream understanding of Christian notions, especially the notion of God and God's relationship with the world. For example, the Newtonian paradigm, with its mechanistic view of the universe, has given us a mechanically conceived view of God's providence as a kind of grand plan, and at its worst, as a kind of La Placean scheme of things that offers deterministic certainty. It is partly as a result of these mindsets, in Maitland's opinion, that Christian thinkers have tended to posit a functionalist God and to be persuaded by a functionalist view of life and of faith.

Big-Enough God suggests a different view of God and begins with creation as one of the sources of revelation about the nature of God. This has, of course, been

the concern of traditional natural theology and like traditional thinkers, Maitland begins with the relationship between science and theology and looks at what we can know of God from the natural world and with the light of natural reason. However, her approach departs from traditional approaches in major ways.

Maitland does not claim to be a theologian but describes herself as a Christian, a feminist and a writer, 'a fictionaliser, a liar in Plato's definition'(p4). Her desire is that theology should be 'more playful, more open, more giving..' and she confesses that her book is 'an unashamed and blatant attempt at seduction'(p4). This, however, does not detract from the seriousness of the book and I would agree with one critic who describes it as being full of brilliant observations which seldom fail to hit home.

In this essay, I will discuss ways in which Sara Maitland offers a fresh approach to Christian natural theology. I will look at the major areas in which this book contributes to the task of re-negotiating Christian orthodoxy in the light of the contemporary sciences. In the process, Maitland also has important things to say about other contemporary attempts, notably in Christian/New Age theologies, to incorporate ecology into the religious worldview. I will argue that what Maitland gives us is an ecological, new natural theology that has relationality and interconnectedness at its heart. As such, this work addresses some major contemporary concerns in philosophical theology and opens up exciting possibilities for further exploration.

Traditional natural theology tried to 'prove God' from scientific discoveries and philosophic methods, Maitland describes her approach as one of 'creative creation theology'. She does not look for evidence *for* God but the evidence *of* God. In chapter 1 & 2, entitled *'Dice throwing made easy'* and *'What am I?'*, she asks what we may learn of God by looking at the state of the art description of what God has revealed in the created order. She wants to look for 'the smudges of the divine fingerprints, the stray clues left in situ, the brush marks of a great artist ...'(p15).

When Maitland uses the word 'science', and refers to 'the created order', she does so 'in the widest sense', to include, not only what it says about the universe but also what its findings are with respect to human personhood and the question of what we understand by the human sense of identity. Indeed, she shows how we have found it very much against the grain to take to heart the view that human beings *are* part of the created order. Just as modern science used to promote the ideal of objectivity that assumed the knower to be an observer with a neutral, value-free stance, what has been described by Thomas Nagel as 'the view from nowhere'[2], so within much of post/Reformation Christian theology, the self that knows has also been understood as similarly disinterested, transcending the limitations of history, culture and body. In its most extreme form, this picture of the knower is presupposed in fundamentalist theologies and comes with the claim that the truth is unmediated and can be known outside of interpretation[3]. However, one does not need to be a religious fundamentalist to fall prey to the view of the self that it presupposes. Yet this view has been seriously challenged by developments in science, notably quantum physics.

Enlightenment science was based on the assumption that the world was

knowable since it was believed to be based on immutable laws. It was believed that the past and future could be discovered by knowing the present position of everything and the rules by which things changed. Maitland says that in 1920, quantum physics put an end to this grandiose expectation and the best known expression of 'that mortal wound' was the Uncertainty Principle. This meant, says Maitland, not only that you cannot predict what is going to happen next, you cannot even describe accurately what is happening now, because Heisenberg proved that 'the more tightly you focus on one of a pair of measurements, the vaguer the other necessarily becomes - it is impossible to know with any degree of accuracy at all both where a subatomic "thing" is and how fast it is going somewhere else'(p57). In the light of this, says Maitland, we will have to accept the fact that there is no deterministic power at work but that within the subatomic world, there is randomness and chance, that 'Matter, at least at this level, is itself high risk, creative'(p58). So it seems that even though Einstein could not accept it, God does play dice, in fact, says Maitland, God is a gambler and has put risk at the heart of things. She writes, 'God has built risk in, has created things thus, so that, not merely at the moral and individual level but at the cosmic level, the creation can participate in its own creativity'(p59).

This view of God is a far cry from the views of God found in traditional natural theology and Maitland comes to this idea of God, not only through the 'big picture' of quantum physics but also by looking at the small things, details of creation such as those written about by Annie Dillard[4]. Quoting the example of the horse-hair worm, Maitland makes the point that when we appreciate how many narrow escapes this worm has in its life cycle, and how survival of the species depends totally on a series of coincidences and entirely fortuitous happenings, we will have to conclude that God is not the bureaucrat and craftsman that God is often made out to be. Maitland writes, 'Pity the horsehair worm, and pity even more the vermicule theologian who has to wriggle up to a word processor and try to explain to horsehair worms what God's good purpose was in making *them*. Never forget that the God who made the worm made thee' , and draws this conclusion, 'It is true; it is perhaps the Truth. God is not careful, is not bound by rules. God is careless, profligate even'(p41).

When faced with countless examples in creation that point to a God who 'plays preposterous games', who is flamboyant, generous and ebullient, we will surely have to revise our view of God. Maitland says that such evidence in nature moves us to replace the functionalist, bureaucratic God of modern natural theology with an artist God, since creation, if it reveals God, points to one that loves beauty and risk, a beauty and risk that inspires awe. Given this, it is not surprising says Maitland, that many contemporary scientists are 'doing theology', for when faced with such wonder, they are naturally drawn to consider questions of ultimate meaning. If it wishes to benefit from their insights, their 'precious gifts of epiphany', the Christian church will have to overcome its historical fear of science, a fear that has been there since Galileo. Maitland says that contemporary science can play a truly liberating role in delivering Christian theology from a Newtonian 'God-of-the-Gaps sheepishness' by opening up for us 'a vision of God who is

opening up for us 'a vision of God who is infinitely greater, bigger, wilder than our somewhat stunted imaginations have allowed; a God who is not tamed and constricted by our definitions, a God who challenges us'(p50).

Such a line of argument from Maitland gives an idea of the extent to which much of modern Christian theology has been shaped by a Newtonian paradigm where order and predictability reigned. A consequence has been that the expression of God's attributes has similarly been influenced, so that the attributes that describe God's greatness are shaped by those same values of order, predictability and functionality. Yet, Maitland challenges us to understand God's greatness in other ways, in terms of beauty and risk, even in terms of wildness. However, from the point of view of orthodoxy, it may not be easy to reconcile the idea of a profligate and careless God with the idea of a providential and just one. What is there to distinguish such a God from the anthropomorphic gods of classical antiquity? Maitland partially addresses this by an appeal to orthodoxy. She argues that the cosmological paradigm she presents is one which enables us to properly appreciate the Incarnation, viz. the 'bizarre risk' that God took in entering the created order. She says that her more exciting picture of God, as one consenting to risk, is in fact more consistent with the God of the Hebrew scriptures who is 'A God of history, of time and of self-giving. A God of love'(p59).

In the light of these new ways of seeing, some will and do mourn the loss of a knowable world promised by Newtonian, modern science. But Maitland argues that we have only lost a servile science and an all-powerful deity. In return, we have gained an extraordinary universe that should stun us into awe, and a God who is infinitely greater and more loving than the God of Newtonian physics. By assuming the knowableness of all things, modern science helped also to project a presumption about the knowableness of God and this diminished an appreciation of the greatness of God. In contrast, contemporary science gives us a new paradigm to imagine a different God. Maitland points to Bohr's Theory of Complementarity as an example of its enabling effect. His theory tells us that two incompatible discourses can be needed to understand or describe something. Such a theory helps us to take in the idea of a God who is beyond our comprehension, who is mysterious, an idea that has proved difficult and incoherent to traditional logic. Bohr's idea of complementarity helps us 'imaginatively to consent to a God who is powerful and generous who is transcendent and immanent; who is three persons and one God'(p64).

The Newtonian paradigm could not accommodate such a God of beauty and risk, neither for that matter, a God of love since it was not possible to express within that paradigm the idea of love as risk and as generous self offering. That paradigm, Maitland also maintains, could not ultimately give us the joy that is at the heart of God and that should be a Christian legacy. Such joy is not based on certain knowledge and the capacity to control through knowledge, rather it is based on wonder, awe and mutuality. However, true mutuality is not possible, says Maitland, if we continued to hold a modernist view of the self.

Maitland says that in many ways, we find this area the most challenging of all. She says that we may be able to take in mind-boggling details about the universe, about indeterminacy, probability and complementarity, but we find it harder to accept the fact that *we* are part of the indeterminacy, that we are part of the co-creative activity of God.

Earlier on, I referred to the Enlightenment ideal of objective knowledge and its promotion of the knowing self as transcendent and possessing a kind of God's eye view of things. Philosophers like Charles Taylor have equated this drive to objectivity with the quest for spiritual purity[5]. Maitland advances a similar account of the view of the self as unique, pure and special, as disinterested knower and observer of the material universe.

In the chapter entitled 'What am I ?', Maitland discusses why it is no longer possible to hold this essentialist view of personhood. She says that this is because over the centuries, certain ideas have undermined the view of the human soul as pre-existent and immutable. Here she includes the idea of evolution which shows how interconnected we are, and how we are involved in our own co-creation, and Marxism which showed us another dimension of the co-creation of persons, viz. the insight that 'Economics .. did not just make people rich or poor, it made people', i.e. that 'Everyone's "experience of life", and therefore their consciousness of self and other, is radically affected by their relation to the means of production'(p89). Feminism has been another important influence on our changing view of personhood. It has given us the realisation that the self is created within the definition of gender. All three influences have contributed to our view of the made self, and have helped to destabilise the idea of the pure soul, the idea that the whole person, as Maitland puts it, is 'formed in heaven by God, draped in a rather trendy outfit called the body and shrunk small enough to fit into the uterus'(p94).

Psychoanalysis also has had a profound effect on our view of human identity. In fact, says Maitland, Freud's influence was as significant as that of Galileo as is evident in the church's reaction to each of these men. She says that while Galileo forced Christianity to abandon its anthropocentric universe, it never changed the model of anthropomorphism. The impact of psychoanalysis, on the other hand, has had an extraordinary impact on our understanding of personhood as from Freud's basic ideas 'springs coils of complexity and intricacy and co-responsibility' (p96).

We should not fear this understanding of personhood and human identity as something that forces us into the direction of determinism and passivity. On the contrary, says Maitland, such an understanding puts on us a greater sense of responsibility. By increasing our awareness of the intricacy and mutuality of our relationships, we can think of ethics in a more responsible and creative way, as a process of co-creation. The potential is increased to do good and to create in liberating directions. It *may* be that what we understand about our interdependence and connectedness detracts from the sense of our uniqueness as human beings but Maitland does not think that this is an occasion for loss and mourning. All that we have lost from abandoning the view of ourselves as 'dualistic ghosts in machines' is an

arrogance that has done us no good. On the other hand, our current view of personhood gives us a new sense of solidarity since we now realise that we are bound to each other more than we had acknowledged and that we are committed to the creating of each other's humanity. We also become more adult and responsible because we now know, in a new way, that all that we do really does matter. Above all, says Maitland, we have gained the possibility of a new and better expression of the mystery of the Incarnation for as the Logos took on human flesh, he also underwent the process of becoming a made self. We are therefore not alone because by becoming a person, God has shown a decided commitment to the project of human co-creation(p105).

Insights from the contemporary sciences enable us therefore, to abandon the dispassionate, clock-maker God, to embrace instead the idea of an immensely generous God who gives excessively in a way that is wildly beyond self-interest. In the chapter entitled, 'Artful Theology', Maitland moves on to discuss how we may adequately describe such a God. Certainly, the abstractions of traditional Christian theology will be inadequate because we need the words of poets and artists as well. Indeed, notes Maitland, the sources of Christianity are a collection of stories, sayings, letters and poems arising out of lived experience. However, the Church has preferred the abstractions of theology to the insights of poets because its approach to life and to the truth has been deeply functionalist but by rejecting artists and poets the church also rejects the gift of the imagination without which the people 'drift and die.' Logical expression limits God who cannot so be bound, but the poet's job is to speak the language of unlimitedness and thereby point to God . We need poets and artists to give us fresh tellings of our Grand Narrative which is necessary 'if theology is to measure up to the magnificent God whose gambling habits and sleights of hand boggle our simple minds. We need a deeply imaginative meditation on the narratives and symbols of our past if we hope to co-create a future'(p145). This is why theology needs to be 'artful'.

Traditional natural theology concentrated on arguments and rational justifications from the universe to God's existence and nature. The natural theology offered here is not so confined, for the 'artful theology' that Sara Maitland engages in is a seamless weave that joins cosmology to epistemology, physics to ethics and people to each other. In her final chapter entitled 'Angelic Woodlice and Other Delights', Maitland addresses the question of *how we live* believing in such a God, such 'a huge, wild, dangerous God.. a God of almost manic creativity, ingenuity and enthusiasm' a Big-Enough God, who is also a supremely generous and patient God; a God of beauty and chance and solidarity' (p150).

In God's artful world of beauty, chance and co-creativity, ethics becomes the creation of 'a brand new thing' since our connectedness with the universe, and even more with each other, means that it *does* matter what we do and what we hand on to others. At the centre of this ethics is the Incarnation which shows a God generous, loving and committed enough to become a made self like the rest of us and generous enough to affirm our finitude as well as our project of co-creation. The Newtonian universe offered certainty but our universe of contingency and risk offers us joy in the

light of the Incarnation. The risk to Godself of this gift enjoins us in a spirit of creative play and adventure. This engenders our sense of solidarity, a solidarity that is experienced not only across space but also across time, with those who came before and those who will follow us. This solidarity and connectedness is the basis of our faith because others, across space and time, offer us 'maps' and 'a hint of a path, the possibility of a safety net'(p174). Faith is the recognition that we are not alone and autonomous when we 'dance into the future, into the risk'(p172). Such a recognition is important, for if we try to go it alone, we reduce our personhood by cutting it off from its history.

The embrace of contemporary science is at the same time the abandonment of Newtonian certainties. We have come to accept that there is no unmediated, ahistorical knowledge such as was presupposed by modern science. Maitland's account shows that just as an epistemology of Newtonian certainties had sustained fundamentalist theologies, so a 'fundamentalist' reading of the universe had also sustained a mechanistic theology. However, she also shows that to reject fundamentalism is not necessarily to abandon truth and to embrace relativism. It is simply to acknowledge that truth is unavoidably historical and intersubjective.

I have described Sara Maitland's natural theology as 'ecological' because it emphasises relationality and connectedness. There is connectedness between human beings and the universe, human beings and each other and across space and time. God too, is implicated in relationality because Maitland understands the Christian God as one committed to the risk of matter and of human history. But Maitland's position can be described as 'ecological' in yet another, philosophical sense and I made earlier reference to this in the discussion about truth. That is, her view of truth and of epistemology is not based on the autonomous, disinterested and disembodied knower, but is built upon faith, human solidarity and intersubjectivity[6]. However, in describing Maitland's natural theology as 'ecological', I need to distinguish her approach from others that may be similarly described. Indeed, she is herself keen to make this distinction and in particular rejects what she refers to as the 'ecological ethics' evident within 'a good deal of contemporary so-called creationist theology'(p27). In this context, Maitland refers to the 'ecological utopianism' that is found in certain New Age theologies[7] in which the earth is identified not merely as belonging to God but as God and therefore deserving of worship. She finds several problems with the idealisation of nature within these theologies. To begin with, it makes it hard to explain how evil exists, especially in oneself. How, she asks, do we account for 'this tricky little number called sin' which has 'tucked itself into my "natural" experience'(p36). The claim that nature is perfect and divine is indeed counter-intuitive. Maitland says that just as I cannot disown my own sin, I must also realistically acknowledge the effect of sin on the created order. She writes, 'I know that volcanoes do not sin, but I do know that they are implicated in sin..... Hitler does not represent God's initial creative impulse, nor does the tsetse fly'(pp36-7).

Maitland says that the notion that nature is perfect is based on an idealist model of nature and of creation in which nature is seen 'as the static, time-free,

unmovable zone of God's self-revelation'(p32). In many ways this position is a revival of Platonism, the view that this world is only a shadow and only 'a flickering image of reality'. The Real is the unchanging, immutable world of ideal Forms. Implied in this, says Maitland, is the denial also of the reality of time, since for Platonists, the Real, the Ideals, are unchanging and immutable. Maitland says that these two claims together work against a truly ethical stance. Such Platonism is inconsistent with Christian orthodoxy within which time is a reality because it is a creative force in the process of redemption. Indeed, the reality of time is essential to a meaningful understanding of the Incarnation, for the Incarnation, far from showing the world to be a shadow of unreality, affirms it in its particularity, created by 'the fullness of times'. Maitland says that this part of the 'scandal of particularity' should not be underplayed, for 'Time, like gravity is for real and this should not come as a surprise to Christians'(p29).

Moreover, the reality of time and of the changing particular is vital for the maintenance of an ethical edge and of a critical stance for when the earth is equated with perfection, the reality of pain and injustice will be denied. This position leads to a quietist passivity on both the personal and social front which, of course, is contrary to Christian orthodoxy. Maitland argues that such a theology has no transformatory potential that is effective towards political and social change. She writes, 'A theology that accepts the world as it now is, is not worthy of the God whose bias is towards the poor, the oppressed, the *anawin*, the little ones'(p35).

In her rejection of the Newtonian paradigm, Sara Maitland constructs a natural theology that is both ecological as well vital. She does not pose the traditional Newtonian question of 'Why did God make ...?' but more appropriately the question of 'What sort of God made this sort of universe and does this sort of thing?' The first question reduces God to a clockmaker and a craftsman but the second allows her to be more, to be a God of generous love, and an artist. Maitland's natural theology is ecological because it is wholistic, revealing the vital connections between questions of cosmology, metaphysics and ethics. It reveals also the connections between human beings and matter, human beings to each other and the palpable commitment of God to a beautiful and risky universe. Maitland's *Big-Enough God* is also vital for while she rejects many presuppositions of modern thinking such as those outlined at the beginning of this essay, she does not leave us with the fragmentation and relativism of a postmodern position. Indeed, her address of the contemporary sciences opens up new ways for us to re-negotiate what truth, ethics and indeed God could mean in a post-Newtonian, postmodern world.

Notes

1. See for example, Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many, God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, The Bampton Lectures, 1992, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, The Full Wealth of Conviction, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); O. Guiness & J. Seel, (eds.), *No God But God, Breaking the Idols of Our Age*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992).

2. I allude here to the title of Thomas Nagel's book, *The View from Nowhere*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)

3. see Winifred Wing Han Lamb, 'Protestant Fundamentalism, Modernity and Postmodernity', *Zadok Paper, S 73*, March, 1995

4. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, (Picador, 1976) see esp. pp. 154-5

5. Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol.1, p. 112

6. It is interesting and significant that other feminists writing from the Anglo American philosophical tradition have interrogated the Enlightenment view of the knower and have argued that we should take subjectivity into account in epistemology. See for example, Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces*, essays on Gendered Spaces, (New York and London: Routledge,1995).

7. Here Maitland includes theologian Matthew Fox whose position she examines in some detail, see pp.34-38.

Capital and the Kingdom: Theological Ethics and Economic Order

Timothy Gorringe. 1994. Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY. pp.200+xii. ISBN 0-88344-944-7

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The thesis that Gorringe advances is that there is an essential relationship between ethics and economics. The hard and fast wedge that we have been accustomed to draw between fact and value is one which has had disastrous consequences for individuals and the world. Ethics has to do with the way one lives, but more than this, it has to do with the ethos in which one lives and which consequently shapes one's life and choices. According to Gorringe, every particular society will give rise to a certain ethical theory. Thus there is a relationship between economics and politics on the one hand and ethical theory on the other. Where pluralism becomes a factor in contemporary society, so contemporary ethics also bear the mark of pluralism, and this raises the question as to whether there can ever be such a thing as ethical consensus.

Gorringe argues that there is an ethical consensus and an ethical imperative: choose life. Following the work of Deuteronomists, and casting himself in the role of one of the new Deuteronomists, Gorringe suggests that we have a fundamental choice between life and death.

The imperative to choose life is not an ethic that is based on self interest; on the contrary, it situates the human being within the community. Levinas' notion of the 'face-to-face' relationship is employed to show that ethics is grounded in one's choice for life; a choice which is indissolubly connected to that primordial experience of going out of oneself towards the 'other'. These 'others' are not restricted to other human beings, but embrace all facets of creation.

Much of the book is then devoted to explaining why the hard and fast wedge

mystification. Nonetheless dangerous on that account though! A sympathetic dialogue is conducted with Marx, although not without some critical appropriation of his ideas. Careful and clear distinctions are drawn between 'work' and 'toil'; the former is positive and creative, the latter is not.

His analysis of the disparity between the North(first world) and the South(third world) showed the sympathetic and calculated efforts which are continually expended in ensuring that this injustice continues. More and more people are losing the power to choose life, and this is largely because those of us in the North who have the power choose to misuse it. But such choices eventually rebound on our own heads because we also become victims of a system which careers out of control. A glaring example of this is the ecological crisis, which, as Gorringe reminds his readers, is grounded in economics and ethics.

Is there any hope? While there remains a choice there is hope. Choices can be made and reversals can be effected, but no-one should underestimate the amount of effort that will be required. Liberal individualism will not be sufficient to achieve this: in fact it may be the largest obstacle. Instead we need to capture the vision that personhood is discovered and makes sense only within the context of the other. Correlatively, without the 'other' we perish. This is true both psychologically and physically. If we destroy the world through our politics and economics then we have made our choice. The choice of life and not death should be determinative for the way we do economics. Fact and value belong together.

The book has compendious endnotes and is equipped with an index to provide ready access to guiding ideas and people. As a non-specialist in this area I found it very readable and credible. I found the book profoundly disturbing, and was glad of that. The issues that it discusses will become more rather than less important. It also encouraged me to re-read Deuteronomy, and this time with new eyes.