

Nature, History and the Sacred — Judeo-Christian Motifs in Late Twentieth Century Environmentalism

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It is a common contention of late twentieth century environmentalist writers that the Judeo-Christian tradition, in creating a split between the human person and the natural world, and in valuing the former over the latter, can be seen as bearing a "huge burden of guilt" (White, 1967:1211) for the contemporary environmental crisis. Importantly, such assertions are often accompanied by the valorisation of a 'pagan' approach to the non-human natural world, over and against a Judeo-Christian one. The following discussion will be addressing this late twentieth century environmentalist opposition between a 'pagan' conception of the natural world and a Judeo-Christian one in two ways. Firstly, it will be shown that it is based on an inaccurate dichotomy between oversimplified conceptions of both 'pagan' traditions, and the 'Judeo-Christian' tradition. Secondly, in an ironic twist, it will be shown that the late twentieth century environmentalist framework within which such contentions are made actually employ and affirm central Judeo-Christian notions, even whilst such notions are ostensibly being critiqued and discarded. Finally, the implications of this irony for the theory and practice of the early twenty-first century environmentalist movement will be outlined.¹

Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except perhaps Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends...." (White, 1967:1208-09).

The Old Testament is the story of the triumph of monotheism over Astarte, Baal, the golden calf, and the nature gods of neighbouring "pagan" peoples. ... Ecstatic merger with nature is judged not merely as ignorance, but as idolatry...(Berman, 1981:156).

Judaic monotheism ... divorced ... man ... from his natural environment. [Thus] Man was licensed to exploit an environment that was no longer sacrosanct. The salutary respect and awe with which man had originally regarded his environment was thus dispelled,... (Toynbee, 1976:54).

The emergence of monotheism had as its corollary the rejection of nature; the affirmation of Jehovah, the God in whose image man was made, was also a declaration of war on nature (McHarg, 1969:24;26;27).

I. Oppositions Undermined. Polytheism and Nature before the Israelites, a Damaging Legacy

The best way to test the theory that a 'pagan' worldview values the non-human natural world more than a Judeo-Christian one is through an analysis of the 'pagan' cultures that preceded the development of Judaic understandings of divinity.² The three main non-Judeo-Christian religious cultures in existence before the rise of Israelite monotheism were the Ancient Near Eastern polytheistic traditions of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan. It is indeed the case that in these cultures the non-human natural world is divinised and imbued with spiritual power. However, the evidence does not show that this divinisation supported an unambiguous positive appreciation for the non-human natural world. Nor is it at all clear that such a divinisation of the non-human natural world guaranteed the protection of the non-human natural world. Indeed, ecological evidence points to the contrary.

A constant feature of the otherwise diverse elements of the cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan, is the persistent representation of the non-human natural world in their religious systems (Albright, 1968:96; Cooper in Eliade, 1987:36; Cottrell, 1963:8; Aldred, 1998:58;60-62). In Mesopotamia, for example, the three most important gods and goddesses include An, Anu or Anum, the god of the sky, his divine consort, Antum, the source of clouds and rain and Ki, literally the "earth," also one of Anum's divine consorts (Jacobsen in Eliade, 1987:453-63; Guirand in Graves, 1968:152-5; Pollock, 1999:46,78,125,86-88; Nemet-Nejat, 1998:182, 244-65).

In the Egyptian pantheon central divine figures correlate with these Mesopotamian ones; Shu, who was the god of the air, and believed to hold up the sky; Tefnut, Shu's twin sister, the goddess of the dew and rain, who helps Shu support the sky, and each morning receives the new born sun; and Geb, the son of Shu and Tefnut, considered to be the god of the earth.³ In Canaanite society, one of the three different gods known as Il or El and the first of the seven Baals were both known as the god of the Mountain Sapan, the latter also seen as a mountain and weather god (Viaud in Graves, 1968:11; Cooper in Eliade, 1987:37-38). Yamm was the god of the Sea, Ars wa – Shamen the god of heaven and earth, mountain and valley, and Athirat or Asherah, the goddess of the sea, and El's consort (Cooper in Eliade, 1987:39; Östborn, 1956:54; Mendelsohn, 1950:282; Albright, 1968:67). Each of these divine figures, it is clear, is connected to and representative of the non-human natural world.

Another constant feature of these otherwise different spiritual systems was the emphasis on the importance of the fertility of the land. This was expressed through particular myths and corresponding rituals that celebrated the fecundity of the earth, and its seasonal bounty. The threat of the infertility of the land was, correspondingly, also a constant feature of these myths and rituals. In Mesopotamian culture such concerns were expressed through an annual ritual of the marriage of the god and goddess of the Date Palm, Dumuzi and Inanna (Viaud in Graves, 1968:11-48; Cottrell, 1963:33-42). In this ritual, the 'en,' or 'ruler' of

Mesopotamia would represent the figure of Dumuzi, or Amaushumgalana, carrying the recent harvest as a wedding gift to the storehouse of the temple. A representative of Inanna (usually the ruler's wife) would open the door and let Dumuzi into the storehouse, accepting the harvest and completing the exchange. Once 'Dumuzi' had entered the temple, he would have sexual intercourse with 'Inanna.' When his penis rose in sexual excitement before the act of sexual intercourse, it was believed that plants, flowers and general vegetative growth emerged from the earth (Nemet-Nejat, 1998:261; Jacobsen in Eliade, 1987:464). This ritual was believed to encourage and protect the generative power in the Date Palm, as represented by Inanna and Dumuzi, and thus to ensure the bounty of the next year's harvest.

Further to the number of gods and goddesses intimately representing the natural world, and in addition to the importance attributed to the bounty of the land in the various fertility myths of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan, certain animals were considered intrinsically sacred and thus worshipped. In ancient Egypt these included Apis, a sacred bull and keeper of the Nile, Mneuis, Buchis and Onuphis, also sacred bulls, Petesuchos, a sacred crocodile, Ba Neb Djedet, a ram divinity and Bennu, a bird divinity (Viaud in Graves, 1968:29–38,41–48). Furthermore, animals, or parts of animals were often central to the figurehead or dressing of different gods and goddesses in each of Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Egyptian religious concepts. Each of the bull, cat, cow, crocodile, ape, donkey, falcon, frog, hippopotamus, ibis, jackal, lion, lioness, ram, scarab, scorpion, serpent, vulture and wolf were all partly represented by different divinities in the Egyptian pantheons (Viaud in Graves, 1968:48).

These recurring examples of the presence of the non-human natural world within the spiritual ideas and practices of the pagan cultures that preceded the rise of Israelite monotheism clearly indicates a religious appreciation for an affirmation of the non-human natural world. This is emphasised by late twentieth century environmentalists such as White (1967), McHarg (1969) and Toynbee (1976). There is then an assumption that such a strong link between the sacred and the non-human natural world must have ensured the development of a protective and conserving environmental ethic. There are two mistakes with this argument. The **first** is that they ignore the **type** of spiritual power attributed to the non-human natural world, simply assuming that any spiritual power attributed to the non-human natural world must simply affirm the natural world as good, and thus as inviolate. The **second** problem, which will be explored more fully here, is that such an argument is not supported by ecological evidence, to the contrary — the non-human natural world simply was **not** preserved in these cultures. Indeed both Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies experienced severe environmental decline and damage as a direct result of human actions.

Hughes' research supports this assessment. He argues that the development of settled city-states in Mesopotamia corresponded to the development of "an attitude of confrontation" towards the non-human natural world, an attitude that is very evident in the repeated use of the "image of battle to describe the new relationship with nature" (Hughes, 1994:33). The Mesopotamian *Epic of*

Gilgamesh (Shabandar (trans), 1994) illustrates this new relationship very well. In this story, King Gilgamesh of Uruk befriends Enkidu, a wild man who has entered 'civilisation.' Once tamed, Enkidu's former animal friends abandon him, reflecting the strict split that was held between the 'wild' and the 'city' in Mesopotamian society. Together Gilgamesh and Enkidu set out to gather some cedar wood. They triumphantly slaughter the wild giant Humbaba, the protector of the sacred forest, and then proceed to cut down the sacred grove, returning to the city to begin the building of a new palace for the King — Gilgamesh himself. On Hughes' assessment, and in agreement with the arguments outlined above, the divinisation of the non-human natural world did not necessarily ensure a positive appreciation for and thus protection of that same world. Indeed, in addition to Hughes' enlightening research, the following evidence indicates that the opposite was the case.

Perlin argues that the heavy and continuous deforestation practices of different Mesopotamian leaders, such as Gudea, Ur-Ka-Gina, Enannatum, Naram-Sin and Sargon led to both heavy military campaigns (to gain more land and timber) and to the gradual development of siltation and salinity in important harvesting lands in Mesopotamia (Perlin, 1991:28,39,40,42-43). These environmental changes, it is further asserted, even led to the decline of barley yields, a central factor in the decline of Sumerian civilisation as a whole. It is highly ironic to note that the deforestation undertaken by Gudea was to provide wood for the building of a temple to Ningursu, the god of rain, irrigation, and **fertility!** (Perlin, 1991:43). Jacobsen and Adams' study of salinity and its relationship to the size of harvests supports Perlin's contentions, and argues that between 2400 and 1700 BCE, barley yields suffered because of increasing salinity of the irrigation water (1958: 251-58, 253). Earthscan's research also indicates that in the early to mid second millennium BCE, Sumerian cities were being abandoned because the use of irrigation had led to increased siltation and waterlogging of river systems (1984:22-23). It was in the seventh century BCE that this same Mesopotamian irrigation system collapsed, due to overwork and mismanagement.⁴

Egyptian civilisation suffered from similar environmental problems. Hughes argues that the deforestation of Egypt's surrounding lands led to soil erosion (Hughes, 1994:43). Land pockets along the Nile River held species of Fig, Jujube and Acacia. As population increased, and the spread of urban civilisation grew, however, these were gradually cleared. Ironically enough, the god Amun-Re was believed to have "loved" cedar wood, and expeditions were organised to collect that specific species of tree (Hughes, 1994:43). In addition, the clearing of Egyptian land for animal grazing led to the depletion of the soil's fertility. Moreover, even though Egyptians considered animals sacred, they were still hunted. In fact such hunting led to massive habitat destruction and even species extinction (Hughes, 1994:45,47). The elephant, rhinoceros, wild camel and giraffe became scarce in the fourteenth century BCE, and the number of antelope species was also severely reduced (1994:48). Interestingly, temple sacrifices seem to have accounted for the reduction of particular bird species, such as the waterfowl. Inscriptions say that

Ramses III offered 9350 waterfowls to the Temple of Amun at Thebes (1994:53). Whilst these species fluctuations and land clearing illustrate that the ancient Egyptians happily exploited and used the natural resources around them, the civilisation did not collapse as a result of its resource use, as Mesopotamia appears to have.

It seems then that late twentieth century environmentalists' assessment of 'pagan' spiritualities as affirming, celebrating, and worshipping of the non-human natural world, and thus as seeking to preserve it, is quite simply mistaken. This mistaken view stems from the belief in the *non sequitur* that simply because the non-human natural world was often divinised, it was therefore seen as worthy of preservation. However, thinkers such as Berman (1981), White (1967), McHarg (1964) and Toynbee (1976) overlook the ecological damage experienced in these cultures. Thus, it appears that the opposition maintained by late twentieth century environmentalists between a 'pagan' and a 'Judeo-Christian' approach to the non-human natural world is questionable.

Ironically enough, whilst this questionable opposition is promoted within late twentieth century environmentalist rhetoric, one can easily discern the presence of central Judeo-Christian motifs that colour and shape such a narrative. The presence of such motifs, I would contend, has emerged in late twentieth century environmentalist discourse because the movement itself is intellectually and culturally indebted to the Romantic philosophical tradition of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century — a philosophical tradition which itself was influenced by and adhered to a notion of history that was biblically based, that is, Judeo-Christian. The Romantics viewed history as a re-enactment of the biblical myth of an original innocence, a fall and a hope for redemption. Late twentieth century environmentalism, having been influenced by the Romantic ecological vision has also accepted a Judeo-Christian notion of history, and imported central moral prescriptions of the Judeo-Christian heritage as well. The following discussion will illustrate this contention.

II. The Garden of Eden, the Fall, Original Sin, Repentance, the Apocalypse and Redemption in Late Twentieth Century Environmentalism.

Late twentieth century environmentalists offer a reading of human history that matches the Judeo-Christian notion of history in the following ways: it has its own conception of the Garden of Eden (a pagan, or pre-historic worldview); the Fall (the development of agriculture or civilisation, or the development of a modern scientific-technological worldview, or the rise of monotheism, or all three); Original Sin (human's desire for knowledge or *scientia*, like Adam's and Eve's desire to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, has led to the Fall); Exile (because of these Fall events, human beings are alienated, separated and exiled from their proper at-one-ment with the natural world); Salvation History (there is, however, a process by which this situation can be rectified — History); Renunciation of the World (within History one must abandon the worldly pursuits of wealth, power, and the satisfaction of bodily appetites,

otherwise the sin of the Fall is repeated and exacerbated); Eschatology (because of Original Sin and the sin of the 'world,' the fate of humanity and the earth hangs in the balance; indeed the world could come to an end, any time soon); and finally, universal Redemption (ultimately, through faithful renunciation, one's individual life, and the life of the cosmos as a whole, can be redeemed).

The Garden of Eden and the Fall.

Late twentieth century environmentalists envisage the Fall event, as having occurred at three different historical junctures. The first is the development of agriculture, or what Earth First! calls 'civilisation' (Manes, 1990:15). Previous to these developments Earth First!ers, and other deep ecologists, argue that human beings lived in a state of harmony with the natural world, that is, in a Garden of Eden. With the increase of technical knowledge that could foster maximum agricultural growth, it is argued that the Garden of Eden began to be misused, and the prelapsarian state of human-nature harmony was thus destroyed (Manes, 1990: 17). It was the gaining of technical knowledge about the natural world that led to its mastery, and thus to humanity's alienation from the natural world, just as Adam and Eve's desire for more knowledge led to their Fall, and their exile from the Garden of Eden.

The second is the development of an Israelite monotheistic consciousness, and its elaboration in Christian thinking. As we have seen, thinkers such as Toynbee (1976), Berman (1981), White (1967) and McHarg (1969) assert this. Israelite monotheism, and its elaboration in Christian thinking proposed to understand, or 'know' divinity better than other religious communities, and on this basis sought to assert power over them. This spiritual shift, for these writers, **alienated** the human being from the natural world. As we have seen, however, the 'pagan' worlds that preceded the rise of Israelite monotheism are viewed as positive spiritual sources for the preservation of the natural world. That is, pre-Judeo-Christian societies are viewed as environments akin to a Garden of Eden — where the human and natural worlds were conceived as an organic whole. The result of the Israelite assumption of greater knowledge and awareness of divinity is exile from the ideal Garden of Eden conditions of the pre-Israelite worldview, and the consequent derogation of the natural world.

The third historical juncture that has been characterised as establishing a Fall is the growth of a modern scientific consciousness and the technology it consequently spawned. Berman and White argue that a Judeo-Christian understanding of the world led and contributed to these intellectual developments. For instance, White argues, "Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes towards man's relation to nature... . We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim" (1967:1213).

The acceptance of the notion of the Fall in late twentieth century environmentalism is accompanied by a consciousness of 'sin' in human nature, and leads to the proclamation of a particular type of morality, one that is essentially suspicious of the 'world' and its self-esteem, in similar ways to the prophetic and monastic traditions of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In both of these moral

critiques the same concept or idea is being rejected — the ‘world,’ or ‘worldliness.’ For this reason similar moral values are promoted by these ostensibly different moral discourses. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, ‘worldliness’ is represented by the world’s estimation of itself as the measure of all things; the ‘world,’ in forgetfulness of God, affirms and celebrates what it sees as its own miraculous nature, its own material wealth, its own prestige, and its own independent self-sufficiency. It also appears that it is the rejection of the ‘world’ and ‘worldliness’ that is the basis for the development of late twentieth century environmental ethics and praxis. This is clearly illustrated by the following four features of late twentieth century environmentalism — the emphasis on sin, the notion of Repentance, the belief in a coming Apocalypse and the hope in universal Redemption.

Original Sin

A comprehensive notion of ‘sin’ is clearly apparent in late twentieth century environmentalism. Stemming from the notion of the Fall of humanity, late twentieth century environmentalist rhetoric is based on the concept that certain human beings, or humanity generally, are intrinsically deficient. For instance, the Sierra Club handbook of *Ecotactics* defines ‘ecotactics’ as “the science of arranging and maneuvering all available forces in action against **enemies of the earth...**” (Mitchell and Stallings, 1970:5, present author’s emphasis). This strong language reflects the belief that there is something wrong, or sinful, with these ‘enemies,’ as if they actively seek to destroy the planet. The editor’s note goes on to state that:

To maneuver earth forces against **the enemy**, the tactician first indoctrinates the troops. But the polemics herein are brief and early, for we already know that the earth is going to **hell** in a wastebasket, and what we really need now is to know how we shall **save this earth**, not to mention **saving ourselves**. (Mitchell and Stallings, 1970:5, present author’s emphasis)

Again, the ideas that there is an ‘enemy’ to contend with, and that deep conflict could develop between this enemy and the ‘troops,’ is highly suggestive of a sense of moral impurity in the ‘enemy’ and innocence in the ‘troops.’ It also directly suggests that a moral conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of good has developed, and indeed, could decide the fate of the earth. This accords well with the concept of a ‘Holy War’ that is central to Judeo-Christian historiography and eschatology. It is not surprising, for instance, that a central motif of the Judeo-Christian concept of Satan, or the Devil, was the ‘enemy’ of humanity (Stanford, 1997:32–4).

In the first essay in *Ecotactics*, Mitchell states that “we are fouling our nest at an alarming rate and with a multitude of pollutants. And finally, on a global scale, we ... are exporting ... our genius for **destruction...**” (1970:27, present author’s emphasis). He muses:

from our present perspective one wonders now why Noah even bothered to take aboard passengers in the Great Biblical Flood. ... Since the Pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving, at least 22 species of mammals, birds

and fishes have forever disappeared from this continent ... they did not go the way of the Jurassic reptiles, by eating their own eggs. They were exterminated by man (1970: 28).

The use of such words as 'destruction' and 'exterminated' conveys strongly a sense of the gravity and deeply injurious character of particular human acts. There seems to be a belief that there is some major flaw in the human species that would seek and succeed in 'destroying' and 'exterminating' the earth and its inhabitants.

Another example of such late twentieth century sentiments can be found in the Friends of the Earth handbook called *The Environmental Handbook. Action Guide for the UK* (Barr, 1971). Interestingly, White's essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," which argues for the opposition between a pagan and a Judeo-Christian worldview being scrutinised here, heads the articles in this handbook. Allsop begins:

The Environmental Handbook is a consumer's guide to the full range of methods available for the extinction of the human race and life at large on this planet, a death-**Which**. Or it is the blueprint for an ecological Sentinel System: the final ABM defence network against the incoming technological missiles bringing instant **apocalypse** (Allsop in Barr, 1971:xiii – xvi, xiii, present author's emphasis).

He goes on to state that:

It is a THEM and US situation. THEY are governments, industrial complexes, corporations public and private, monolithic officialdom and orthodox 'hardened' authority in its modern central executive form. Although they are **strong, cynical, ruthless and psychopathically suicidal**, WE are greater in number and finer in spirit. Given the energy and determination, the meek shall thwart the caparisoned brutes and yet inherit a sweeter earth (1971: xiii, present author's emphasis).

These "caparisoned brutes" are to be "vanquished," along with the "pig-greedy and the purblind and the vandals, ...[to]... win the battle for the survival of the decencies" (Allsop, in Barr, 1971:xiv).

The clearest assertions of the belief in the presence of a deeply flawed human nature and its dangerous effects on the biosphere have been expressed by several members of the radical environmental group Earth First! Particular members of this group have argued at different times that the best thing for the natural world would be a massive cutback in the world's population. Consequently, the African AIDS epidemic and famines can be viewed as "a necessary solution" and "not a problem." These 'problems' will 'naturally' reduce the world's population, and thus restore "ecological sanity" (Scarce, 1990:91–92). It is human beings that are creating environmental degradation, therefore the reduction of the number of human beings can only be a positive thing for the environment. Dave Foreman, one of the founders of Earth First!, argued in an interview that "the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid — the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve" (Scarce, 1990:92).

Repentance

This emphasis on the sinfulness of the human race provokes the need for repentance, and the embodiment of such repentance in new behaviours. Two forms of repentance are argued for by late twentieth century environmentalists: the first concerns the idea of 'consumption' and related issues of material wealth and accumulation; the second is the emphasis in environmental rhetoric on the idea of justice, and just behaviour. Most late twentieth century environmentalists argue that, in order to save the earth, each person should replace their wants with their needs, and seek only to fulfil the latter, even at the expense of the former, if necessary. That is, one should live by an ethic of necessity, rather than desire. This ethic of necessity requires that one live justly, always asking whether one's own actions unfairly restrict the existence of other living beings. Such a concern with consumption and its relationship to just behaviour reflects the concerns of the monastic and prophetic traditions of the Judeo-Christian narrative.

In *Ecotactics*, for instance, an Activist's Checklist states, "Consume less. If we begin by reducing our personal overconsumption, we may, one day, begin to live in harmony with the land" (Mitchell and Stallings, 1970: 255). Further:

Save water. Put bricks in the tank of your toilet so it uses less water when flushed. Don't leave the faucet on when brushing your teeth. ... Don't buy beverages in *one-way* (no deposit, no return) containers; save the two-way bottles and return them to the store. Use as little tinfoil and plastic wrap as possible. They are non-biodegradable. ... Avoid using electrical appliances ... do you really *need* [necessity] an electric toothbrush? An electric can opener? An electric carving knife? Whatever happened to *muscle-power*? (Mitchell and Stallings, 1970: 255 – 57).

Blair, in the similar guide put out by Friends of the Earth, suggests the same, "Action is required to replace the throw away consumer philosophy with a way of life based on sound ecological principles" (in Barr, 1971:325). Holliman, in an article entitled "Ideas for Action" (1971) states that the "trouble is we consume too much. ... So consume less. Your household motto should be: make your wants your needs" (in Barr, 1971:220). Beckwith states:

We're going to see a decline in consumption amongst the youth of this country in the next four or five years. ... They realize they're essentially consuming their own future. This doesn't mean rejecting everything and **living like a monk**. But you just don't **need** to consume a new car every four or five years. You can keep the old one running for 20 years (in Mitchell and Stallings, 1970:62, present author's emphasis).

The emphasis on lessening one's consumption carries with it judgments about having excess or 'too much.' Interestingly, and similarly to the moral arguments of the prophetic and monastic traditions, poverty is viewed as something of a virtue within the late twentieth century environmental movement. Scarce notes that "many radical environmentalists are poor to the point of destitution. This is by choice. ... Radical environmentalists also choose lifestyles that have minimal impact on the environment" (1990:25). Particular men and

women judged as forerunners of the environmental movement, and indeed its exemplars, are also noted for having lived happily on little. For instance, Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862), a major forerunner of the American late twentieth century environmentalist movement, left the city of Boston in 1845, retiring to the woods to live in solitude for two years, two months and two days. In his work *Walden* (1854) he reflected upon the significance of his experiences there, arguing that:

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind ([1854] 1997:23).

and

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in ([1854] 1997:15).

Wanting to live “deliberately” and “suck all the marrow out of life,”[1854] 1997:27) Thoreau states that his time at Walden allowed him “to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself ...[to]... spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing that fall on the rails” ([1854] 1997:25).

These assertions of the taint of the love of money for its own sake, and the corresponding affirmation of a life lived in relative material poverty recur in the late twentieth century environmentalist’s writings that argue that the structure of global capitalism directly contributes to environmental degradation. Indeed, a group called Jubilee 2000 has been campaigning to have the debts from the world’s fiftiest poorest countries cancelled by their donors, mainly the USA, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The canceling of massive debt by the wealthier industrialised nations it is thought, would allow poorer countries to properly develop their own economic infrastructure, leading to environmentally sustainable practices. The wealthier industrialised nations, it is argued, have a moral obligation to make such an economic sacrifice. In fact, it is the excessive accumulation of wealth on behalf of the modern Western countries that, it is believed, has led to such an unjust situation in the first place. Significantly, the concept of a ‘Jubilee’ year, where debt is gracefully forgiven every fifty years actually comes from biblical writings.⁵ Reflecting the concerns of the prophetic narrative, two of the suggestions of the Global Justice 2000 group to remedy this unjust global situation is “Faster, deeper debt relief,” and “Increased aid from Northern governments, [to Southern states].”⁶ That is, the wealthy should give their money to the poor, in the name of justice.

The Apocalypse

Another central Judeo-Christian motif, that of the eschaton, the Apocalypse, or the end of the world, also emerges as a particularly important element of late twentieth century environmentalism. In Judeo-Christian thinking, because of the Fall, sin is present on the earth. Through history one can be saved. Before redemption is secured however, there will be a period of judgement, the end of days, a Doomsday, where time will come to an end, and all souls will be judged according to their deeds and faith. Significantly, during this period, there will be a proliferation of natural disasters, where the earth will appear to be on the brink of total destruction. The seven angels, with seven trumpets, sent by God during these times would sound the death knell for the natural world.

The first angel blew his trumpet. There came hail and fire mingled with blood, and this was hurled upon the earth; a third of the earth was burnt, a third of the trees, and all the green grass....

and the third of the sea was turned to blood, a third of the living creatures in it died,...

A third of the water turned to wormwood, and great numbers of people died from drinking the water because it had been made bitter.

As I looked, I heard an eagle calling with a loud cry as it flew in mid-heaven; 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth ... Book of Revelation (Carroll and Prickett (eds), 1998:8, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13).

Locusts are sent out upon the earth to kill those who have not repented. They are instructed not to "do damage to the grass or to any plant or tree" (9:3). The sun is blackened in the sky (6:12; 8:2) earthquakes destroy living settlements, lightning, thunder and hail rain down on the earth (8:5,7; 11:19), the sun scorches sinners (16:8-9), rivers dry up (16:12) and famine extends across the earth (18:18). An angel flying "in the midst of heaven, [preaches]: ...worship him that made heaven, and earth and the sea and the fountains of the waters" (14: 7). The natural world suffers such grave punishments because of the sins of the human being — those who are "filthy," (22:11) the "merchants," (18:3, 11) devil worshippers, those who worship the "idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: ..." (9:20); and those who have committed "murders, [and] ... thefts..." (9:21).

Such depictions of the imminent destruction of the earth, due to human sin, are also dominant in late twentieth century environmentalism. The Sierra Club's 1970 Handbook *Ecotactics* argues that "we already know that the earth is going to hell in a wastebasket" (Mitchell and Stallings, 1970:5). Wagner, in the same volume argues that:

The most fundamental question facing us today is whether or not life will continue on this planet. ... we haven't come to grips with immediate planetary reality — the fact that we are rapidly running out of such daily necessities as air and water (in Mitchell and Stallings, 1970:43).

Taylor's aptly titled *The Doomsday Book – Can the World Survive?* also first published in 1970, asks whether the “technological skill [of humanity] will... enable him to postpone the **apocalypse**, so that he flies higher, only to **fall** further?” (1970:11, present author's emphasis). He further states:

So if we have problems of crowding, pollution and a disturbed balance of nature now, what shall we have in thirty years or so? It is plain as a pikestaff that unless something drastic is done, the situation will be literally intolerable. ... It could disturb the balance of nature so radically as to make life impossible for man in anything like his present numbers. ... [This is a warning]... of a major disaster (1970: 12–13).

In describing such a world as a “horror story” (1970: 121), Taylor also contends that “Time is the enemy” (1970: 25), and that his apocalyptic vision of the future, where water and air are overly polluted, where soil has become degraded through overuse, where pesticide use has infiltrated and marred, at the cellular level, all living beings, and where wars are waged over resource scarcity, will be realised within the next thirty years, i.e. by the year 2000 (1970: 14). A supporter of Earth First! and radical environmentalist philosophy states that:

Eco-warriors are convinced that if we do not all act soon there will be little else in our lives but ecological catastrophe rooted in human action and inaction. Personal involvement is the key to this struggle. We can no longer ... [let] ... someone else save the world (Scarce, 1990:55).

Lee (in Palmer and Robbins, 1997:124) notes that “a belief in an imminent apocalypse” is a central part of Earth First! rhetoric. She observes that members of this radical environmental group believe that when oil supplies run out, “the eastern United States would run out of food, farmers would no longer be able to depend on irrigation or fertilizer, and steel production would cease” (1997: 125). In addition, an impending “biological meltdown” would consist of “a mass extinction so severe that it would destroy one-third to one-half of the planet's species and therefore result in the probable extinction of an exponentially greater number of animal species” (1997: 125).

Redemption

The fear of a coming Apocalypse and the suggestions to act justly and reduce consumption each fuel a hope for (re)establishing paradise on earth. Such an aim is in direct accordance with the Judeo-Christian understanding of history where the final telos of universal judgement and redemption as recorded in the Book of Revelations looms as the *raison d'être* of all being. Recording the natural cataclysms and disasters just referred to, and after the account of a battle with the enemy of the earth, Satan, the Book of Revelations climaxes with John's sighting of:

a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,.... And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I

heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away ([1998, 21:1-4).

A "river of the water of life" courses through this new city, "sparkling like crystal," on either side of which blossoms the originally forbidden "tree of life, which yields twelve crops of fruit, one for each month of the year. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (1998, 22:1-2). The curse of the earth made by God as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Book of Genesis is revoked at the end of the Book of Revelations. Symbolically these images represent a restored relationship between the earth, the natural world, and humanity.

It is such a restoration that forms the central motivation for the imaging of an ecological utopia, or a redeemed world, in late twentieth century environmentalist writings. The fictional accounts of such a utopia, or ecotopia, including Huxley's *Island* (1966) the first of its kind in late twentieth century environmentalist discourse, and Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1978) are inspired by the Franciscan monk Thomas More's work *Utopia* ([1516]1989) written in the sixteenth century (Cousins and Grace, 1995:67-9). Both of these works attempt to portray what human existence would be like if it followed ecological principles, and its depictions of such societies are paradisiacal. That is, each of them propose that human beings can recreate the conditions of the Garden of Eden, as the Book of Revelations promises.

In Huxley's *Island*, for instance, the inhabitants of the island of Pala are living in a relatively undeveloped, unspoiled tropical paradise, in good health and enjoying long lives. This contrasts drastically with the 95% level of poverty experienced in a neighbouring state, where the military-industrial complex has free reign. Will Farnaby, a Western journalist sent to investigate the problems and dangers of its neighbours is shipwrecked on Pala, welcomed into the community, and taught about the spiritual beliefs and practices that have created the ideal natural conditions in which the Palanese live. Although 'paganism' is not offered as the spirituality that best values the environment, the Christian tradition is most certainly dismissed as ecologically unsound. For instance, St Francis is criticised by a member of Pala for preaching to the birds:

'Just imagine,' ... 'preaching sermons to perfectly good thrushes and goldfinches and chiff - chaffs! What presumption! Why couldn't he have kept his mouth shut and let the birds preach to him?' (Huxley, 1966:21-2).

It is the combination of the Tantric Mahayana Buddhism of the Raja and the western scientific medical knowledge of the doctor that is presented as providing the best conditions for societal transformation and enlightenment, ensuring the development of a paradisiacal state on earth.

Callenbach's *Ecotopia* also argues that one can create a heaven on earth. In the novel, the nation of 'Ecotopia' is created in 1980 by seceding from the United

States, in an effort to escape the overly polluting, industrialised, exploitative and militarised polity being created there. In 1999, William Weston, also a journalist like Will Farnaby, is given an assignment to explore and report back on Ecotopian society. The book is made up of his diary entries and reports. The Ecotopians differ from mainstream American people because of one important reason — they are committed to reducing their consumption. As a result, their food is unpackaged, communal living is encouraged as the norm, clothing is kept to a simple minimum, requiring the least amount of materials and resources, and cars have been abolished. The inhabitants of Ecotopia own very little, and share the little that they own. In addition, it is considered best to keep conflict and differences to a minimum, and interventionist activity based on communal consensus is promoted as the best way to resolve conflicts. The non-human natural world dominates the human landscape, creating an environment where idyllic natural conditions prevail.

Sessions and Devall (1985:162), two prominent ecologists, argue that the development of ecotopian visions stem from “an ideal which may never be completely realised but which keeps us focussed on the ideal.” Furthermore, the aim should be a “direct transition from our own culture” (1985: 162) to an ecotopian one. Interestingly Sessions and Devall cite St Augustine’s *City of God* as a precursor to the development of utopian and ecotopian visions (1985:163). The emphasis on the future, and thus the concept of a coming redemption is matched in environmentalist groups understanding of their goals and aims. The Sierra Club’s mission statement, for instance, argues that its actions will allow future generations to “Explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth” through its plans to “Educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment.”⁷ Greenpeace Australia argues that “Greenpeace is an independent organisation campaigning to ensure a just, peaceful, sustainable environment for future generations.”⁸

III. A Romantic Legacy – Where to From Here?

The late twentieth century environmental movement, it seems, is structured on and guided by particular intellectual, spiritual, ethical and practical notions that resonate strongly with, if not accord entirely with important Judeo-Christian notions. Again, the irony is that, in the main, prominent late twentieth century environmentalists reject the Judeo-Christian as highly anthropocentric and derogatory towards the non-human natural world, and argue for a reappropriation of a pagan spiritual worldview as more soundly ecological. This, as we have seen, is not an accurate assessment of the different religious approaches to the non-human natural world. In addition, I have noted that because late twentieth century environmentalism has been so influenced by the cultural heritage of Romantic ecology, it has not been able to discard the Judeo-Christian symbols embraced in such an ecology. Thus, there are repeated recapitulations of central Judeo-Christian motifs throughout late twentieth century environmentalism.

Indeed, it is this interconnection between Romantic philosophy, art and spirituality, the Judeo-Christian tradition and its conception of history, and the

thoughts and practices of late twentieth and early twenty-first environmentalist rhetoric and recommendations that will need to be reassessed by supporters of the environmentalist movement. I would argue, indeed, that two central guidelines need to be considered as a result of the investigation undertaken here. Firstly, early twenty-first century environmentalists will need to reassess their dependence upon a mistaken vision of 'pagan' spirituality that incorrectly attributes to it an environmental ethic that environmental evidence does not support. Secondly, in recognising and accepting the cultural, intellectual and spiritual importance of the Romantic tradition, and thus the Judeo-Christian tradition, upon the development of late twentieth century environmentalist philosophy and aims, a reworking of the relationship between early twenty-first century environmentalists and the Judeo-Christian tradition needs to be attempted.

These two suggestions are offered for the following reasons. Firstly, the characterisation of an ecologically beneficial spirituality residing in 'pagan' religions is, on the evidence, mistaken. Encouraging such a characterisation, therefore, could only frustrate contemporary environmentalists' goals. Secondly, 70.73% of Australian people identify as Christian, as does 34% of the global population. To reject a religious tradition as fundamentally antagonistic towards the non-human natural world (particularly if it isn't) is to alienate a large number of people both within Australia and internationally from the aims and objectives of early twenty-first century environmentalist goals, thus further frustrating the laudable goals of such a community. Clearly, this would be detrimental to the progress of early twenty-first century environmentalist goals.

Endnotes

1. All late twentieth century environmentalists do not share these opinions but, as the introductory quotes above, and the following discussion will explore, such notions are common within the movement. Scheffer has pointed out that early twentieth century American environmentalism was dominated by two schools — the preservationists, who argued for the intrinsic value of the non-human natural world, and the conservationists, who argued that the natural world should be protected because it provided resources for human beings. Proponents of each view often rejected the opposing view with great vigour. Such debate and ideological tensions have been present in environmentalist discourse ever since. This is also true of late twentieth century environmentalism (Scheffer, 1991:43-45).

For the positive characterisation of 'pagan,' polytheistic and indigenous cultures see also World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (1987:115); *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilisation* (Manes, 1990:28); IUCN, UNEP, WWF *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living* (1991:61); United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3 – 14 June 1992, Volume II: Proceedings of the Conference* (1993:50); *The Rio Treaties of the Global NGO Movement: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Sutherland, 1992:132). It must also be noted here that late twentieth century environmentalists use the words 'pagan' and 'paganism' very loosely and, in fact, inaccurately. The word 'pagan' comes from the Latin 'paganus' which means 'country dweller', or 'rustic,' but in late twentieth century environmentalism it is usually used to describe any spiritual system that is not Judeo-

Christian, or monotheistic. However, not all non-Judeo-Christian traditions were based in the country, or in a rustic environment. This is especially the case with Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Canaanite cultures, which were settled and urban societies, even though they were not Judeo-Christian, as we shall see. Furthermore, it is mistaken to characterise all non-Judeo-Christian cultures as 'pagan' and therefore suggest that they are fundamentally similar to each other. It is not accurate, for instance, to equate ancient Mesopotamian society with African Zulu peoples, simply because neither were Judeo-Christian, and the non-human natural world is worshipped in both of them. It is important to keep this in mind throughout the following discussion (Simpson and Weiner, 1989).

2. Again, one must keep in mind the characterisation of these cultures as 'pagan' simply because they were not Judeo-Christian. I will refer to them as 'pagan' because that is how they are conceived of in late twentieth century environmentalism, but repeat that such a characterisation is not accurate.

3. Two major pantheons constituted the core of the Egyptian deities — that of the Upper and Lower kingdoms, the Ennead and the Ogdoad respectively, but there were also many other gods and goddesses which emerged from separate and local communities. The Ennead concerns us most here, as it is these gods and goddesses that are closely linked to the natural world (McLeish, 1997:170-71).

4. There are a number of other cultures that had not been exposed to Judeo-Christian ideas, so would be described as 'pagan' by late twentieth century environmentalists, and yet still negatively affected the non-human natural world they inhabited. These include Ancient Greece, of which Plato lamented the erosive effects of overgrazing and deforestation on the hills of Attica; ancient Mayan civilisation, where over population led directly to its own collapse in the tenth century BCE; and first century Rome, where Pliny the Elder supposedly warned that poor grazing practices would negatively effect crop production and soil fertility. This evidence further undermines the assertions of White, McHarg, Toynebee and Berman being explored here — a 'pagan' worldview does not necessarily foster and maintain a positive environmental ethic. The Judeo-Christian tradition cannot, therefore, be characterised as the first source of a negative environmental praxis (Darby in Thomas, 1956: 86); (Hughes in Thomas, 1956:97); Deevey, Rice et al, 1979:298-306).

5. See website for Jubilee 2000 campaign in Australia: <http://www.jubilee2000.org.au/>

6. As above: <http://www.globaljustice2000.com/dec.html>

7. See website: <http://www.sierraclub.org/policy>

8. See website: <http://www.greenpeace.org.au/index.php3>

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