University of Cape Town

Department of Religious Studies

PANDORA'S BOX REOPENED
An Essay on Death, Darkness and the Meaning of Nature

Graeme Cowley
January 2000

Presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, under the supervision of Prof. C. Villa-Vicencio.

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

CONTENTS

PANDORA'S BOX REOPENED

An Essay on Death, Darkness and the Meaning of Nature

ABSTRACT

PANDORA'S BOX REOPENED

An Essay on Death, Darkness and the Meaning of Nature

This study seeks, as its primary objective, the formulation of a genuinely ecocentric hermeneutic. It consequently incorporates an argument against those "shallow" schools of ecological philosophy which assess the ecological crisis as simply an issue of enlightened self-interest, or of more effective resource management. More significantly, however, we have sought to deconstruct the *mythos* of contemporary ecocentric philosophy, itself, in order to demonstrate that its ideological underpinnings are not consistently ecocentric in nature. This polemical task serves to reframe the ecological crisis as, above all, a crisis of affirmation, and comes to yield a threefold problematisation of (ecocentric) meaning: the problem of *methodology*, or that of the relation between truth and representation; the problem of *morality*, or that of the relation between truth and value; and the problem of *Immanentism*, or that of a full-bodied divinity. Such problematisation has been negotiated by the systematic application of ecocentric precepts to an understanding of the relationship between Self, Nature and God. Particular recourse has been made to the category of organic "*interdependence*" – or the idea of the profound kinship of the human and the non-human – and the notion of the primacy of "*becoming*" over "*being*" – or the idea of the fundamental temporality of all existence. The implications of these principles are extracted through a critical dialogue with the thought of Darwin, Freud and Nietzsche – an intellectual lineage which, it is argued, most fully embodies the ecocentric ambition. The dialectical discourse which emerges from such a critical engagement is grounded in both a proper *physio-psychology*, in which is accommodated the idea of the psychosomatic unity of the human individual, and a *psycho-genealogy*, through which history is revisioned as the narrative of concealed identities and conflicting dispositions towards life, itself. Indeed, it is argued that the paradigm, thus fashioned, is alone able to facilitate the transcendence of the epistemological dilemma of objectivism and subjectivism, and to give articulation to the reconciliation of truth and value. This ecocentric hermeneutic culminates in the advocacy of a posthumanistic approach to ecological philosophy, and a postmoral, post-theistic conception of an earth-centred divinity.

Graeme Cowley
January 2000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges with gratitude the assistance he has received from many quarters in the completion of this thesis. I am indebted, first and foremost, to my supervisor Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio for his infectious enthusiasm, his patience and for the unflinching confidence he has displayed in my ability to produce work of a high quality. Further thanks should be extended to the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town for creating a favourable working environment, especially to Professor Charles Wanamaker and Professor David Chidester for their guidance and encouragement, and to Dr David Field and Steve Martin, who were ever-willing to offer friendly advice. The staff of the University libraries should be equally commended for their invaluable assistance in the acquisition of obscure resources. I am further indebted to Gillian Dürr whose impeccable typing and proof-reading skills have proven indispensable in the completion of the present work. A more informal acknowledgement should be made to the budding classical scholar, David van Schoor, who patiently spent long coffee-table hours listening to an exposition of ideas at once subtle and suggestive, and whose company served as a springboard for fertile conversation. Finally, I should reiterate my profound indebtedness to the Centre for Science Development, without whose generous financial support this project would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

Truth lies at the bottom of a very dirty well.

Aldous Huxley

Logical consequences are the scarecrows of fools
and the beacons of wise men.

T H Huxley

For Beauty is nothing
But the beginning of terror, which we are just able to endure,
And we are so awed by it because it serenely disdains
To annihilate us.

Rainer Maria Rilke

The compendium of geo-physical scenarios which together have been assigned the generic label of "Ecological Crisis" confronts the contemporary First World consumer as a disconcerting, doom-laden list of symptoms headed by the infamous ozone depletion, rainforest destruction and the ever-present nuclear threat. Much has been done in recent years by both independent and government-affiliated lobbyists – indeed even by transnational corporations (TNC's), with their blemished ecological records – to bring both the public's attention and pockets to bear upon the manifold character of this crisis. Such efforts at ecological agitation range from the understated to the flagrantly exaggerated, yet, together, they have succeeded, at varied times, in pricking the conscience and sparking the imagination of a consumerist public already subject to the sensory excesses of the technological age. Yet, though the idea of the death of Nature has been admitted to the first rank of First World urban mythology, and has instilled itself in the consciousness of the global citizenry, progress has been confined to minor fronts, and the possibility of a summary redefinition of civilisation's physical relationship with the natural environment remains, as ever, a dim and distant one.

The ineffectiveness of such attempts to break the inertia of contemporary society is perhaps in part attributable to the rigours of a postmodern age which is defined by its lack of any single authoritative voice, and which suffers a keen awareness of the limitless play of human self-definition. The keynote of the postmodern, and indeed of the consumerist age, has become the creative expression of the desiring subject, and to a society which is spoilt for choice - whose needs and desires are fictionalised attributes defined by market forces - necessity is simply meaningless, compulsion is an illusion. In a "virtual" age, experience is virtually, but not quite fully, real, for such an age has succeeded in blurring the distinction between the real and the unreal, and between subject and object, within the contemporary drama of self-experimentation. The artifices of consumerist culture, it would appear, threaten to demote all experience to a series of histrionic sensations in which a responsible subjecthood is increasingly obscured. Consequently, life is left to imitate itself in irreverent parody, while art, its handmaiden, can do little more than perfect its own derivative pantomime.

It would seem that once we augur our potential independence from the rigours of our environment, the natural world can be regarded as little more than an object of contemplation, a novelty to be praised and "communed with", but always from a distance - a distance measured by our awareness of human power and potentiality in precedence over the non-human world. This is the unhappy dilemma of an ecologically post-lapsarian humanity, of a species that has, by its own self-assertion, fallen from grace with its environment. We are able to commit ourselves ethically to the stricken biosphere, but it remains a commitment born of condescension.

However much we subscribe to notions of interdependence and inter-relatedness, and attempt to imbibe their deeper significance, we cannot altogether smother an unsettling, but not entirely unpleasant, sense that we have, or will shortly have, outgrown "Mother Nature". And the accompanying sentiment regrettably, is that our grand conservation schemes amount to little more than taking pity on a redundancy. Indeed, the contemporary age has engendered a remarkably accurate,

albeit symbolic, rendition of that archetypal narrative of Prometheus and his sibling, Epimetheus, who, through a combination of human arrogance and imprudence, succeeded not only in pilfering a holy brand of fire from the Olympian gods, but also in submitting themselves to the charm and beauty of the perfidious Pandora and her box; and thereby, unleashing divine retribution upon the world. The unmistakable themes of the Promethean cycle are appropriate enough to render it the most poignant mythological depiction of the modern age.[1]

From such a perspective, it is clear that the sensationalist rhetoric with which much ecological literature toys is counterproductive, and that alarmist assaults on the consciences of those considered responsible for the process of ecological degradation merely detract from the desired effect. Not only is the extraordinary complexity of the crisis trivialised, but the public profile of "green consciousness" is in danger of encouraging its own caricature. The dynamic and shifting context that is the age of the postmodern suggests equally that the eco-ideological endeavour is destined to perish by its own deadweight unless it pursues an ongoing quest for novelty in an intellectual climate characterised by restless innovation and a fickleness of temper, and does not rest content with its present repertoire of buzz-words and slogans. There exists every danger that, having finally established its niche in the popular imagination, ecological thought will begin to lend itself to easy, unchallenging categorisation; that, having gained widespread currency, its vocabulary, once enlivening, will begin to lose its poignancy through overuse and misuse; and that, in the process, what ought to be the definitive *leitmotiv* of the new millennium be relegated to a topical side-issue among many.

This danger is especially prevalent in those schools of ecological thought with a strong humanistic and philanthropic bent. It has long been realised that the ecological quandary possesses both a holistic and a composite character, and that it

[1] The appropriateness of this myth to the modern age is even more far-reaching than initially seems. The mastery of fire is a symbol commonly associated with human initiative, while, at a literal level, it is this same mastery that fuelled the engine of the Industrial Revolution, an event with dire environmental repercussions. Moreover, the ambiguous character of Pandora, who conceals insidiousness beneath her charm, resonates strongly with the dual disposition of Nature, embracing friction and accord, creation and destruction in its whole.

would be entirely inappropriate to tackle what is a genuinely international problem in a fragmentary, piecemeal manner. Slogans such as "global vision, local initiative" suggest that a co-ordination of effort at a global level is required, but that such a broad-based, planetary approach needs to be translated further into a finely-grained pattern of action at a local level. The result is an integrated system of effort grounded in specific socio-economic contexts, yet spiralling upwards in an ever-widening gyre to include concerned parties at a continental and global level.

It has become equally apparent, however, that concerted global reform will remain a white-paper notion until the vast economic imbalance that exists between countries and continents, and the economic process which underpins such an imbalance, is redressed. The monolithic multinational conglomerates, buoyed by the increasingly more extravagant tastes of the First World consumer, remain a law unto themselves, and with predatory zeal continue to strip the world of its natural resources. The alarming rate of such large-scale, systematic degradation has, for some time, begun to outrun any possibility of a full recovery by the ecosystems of the planet. These economic juggernauts have found an unlikely, but all too helpless, ally in the rank and file of the Third World labourer. Forced to eke out a meagre living in appalling conditions, communities of under-developed nations have been employed as a point-blank workforce by their foreign economic superiors.

At the behest of their employers, they denude their own homelands, offering up the harvest in exchange for trifling wages, thereby cementing their condition as poverty-stricken (both financially and ecologically) enclaves. The pattern is evident and has prompted many ecologists to identify an untenable status quo as one of the leading factors promoting ecological disharmony. The First World consumes, while the Third World reaps, a cycle which is ultimately self-perpetuating. The situation is notably worsened by the sheer ecocidal policies of those nations which, having recently acquired the status of "developing", relish the opportunity to escape the socio-economic purgatory in which they had languished

for so long. The allure of a free market,[2] consumerist and regrettably, eco-destructive, economy, it appears, is proving more and more irresistible.

Thus, the obvious ecological perils of a global society which incorporates exploitative power relations have prompted a plethora of responses which marry traditional concerns of socio-economic justice to those of environmental conservation. Some are flagrantly Marxist in nature, and assert accordingly that any ecological corrective is compelled simultaneously to remedy the vast gulf that exists between classes within any one society, and, more broadly, between classes of nations. Still others offer feminist critiques of the ecological crisis, and discern in the patterns of gender domination in Western patriarchal society a dangerous prototype for patterns of Earth-domination. Such arguments are appealing ones and it is unreservedly true that the goal of sustainable development will forever be frustrated by the entrenched systems of socio-economic exploitation. Yet, by the same measure, the ecological quandary is certainly not reducible to an issue of class antagonism and economic impoverishment. The crisis necessarily implicates the politics and ethics of resource distribution, but it is certainly not exhausted by it. That countless propagandising groups, each taking its own narrow, partisan approach to issues of socio-economic justice, have begun to appropriate the vocabulary of ecological liberation, may lend it wider application and broader appeal, but it also represents a harmful atomising influence which threatens to obscure the full import of the ecological challenge. Too often, the issue of humanity's relationship with the natural world has been treated as a simple addendum to the canon of socio-economic justice – apportioned its due place, but only to bolster a chorus already sung. At some point, therefore, it must be asked whether the issue of the environment indeed represents a singular, or *sui generis*, challenge to our understanding of our human personhood, and to the conceptions of world and deity which imbue it; and if so, how such a challenge ought to be

[2] This is not to assert that capitalist, commodity-driven economies are alone responsible for environmental depredation. The catalogue of ecological ills perpetrated behind the Iron Curtain has been well documented; a lamentable environmental legacy which continues to weigh heavily on the lives of Eastern Europeans. As Theodore Roszak so aptly puts it, "A society like Stalin's Russia, willing to exterminate its own people by the million, was hardly apt to fret for the well-being of the nation's lakes and forests". Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the* Earth (London : Transworld Publishers, 1993), p.36.

articulated. Our quest, then, is for a genuinely ecocentric hermeneutic, and it is one that urges a renegotiation of older philosophical problems in the light of the dictates of an ecologically mindful age.

What should be immediately apparent from the numerous context-specific interpretations engendered by the environmental crisis is that the continuing destruction of planetary ecosystems is not merely a logistical challenge in which the management of natural resources is at stake. At one level, the ecology is a *physical resource* to be either preserved, utilised or transformed; at another, however, it is an *ideological resource*, a locus of contested meaning in which charges of culpability are laid and defences mustered. For a morally indignant public, the assignment of blame is imperative and contemporary ecological literature has engaged such a task with eagerness. Ecological sleuthhounds have in recent decades identified a host of ideological culprits; by turns, capitalists and Western imperialists, soulless materialists and sterile rationalists, misogynistic patriarchs and world-denying Christians have all been accused of ecological bankruptcy.[3] All such attempts to expose the ideological roots of eco-destructive behaviour can with all reasonableness be grouped under the rubric of *Deep Ecology*.

Coined by Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, Deep Ecology[4] prompts us to view the ecological solution not merely in terms of more efficient resource management and sustainable policies. Far from being simply a logistical problem, the ecological crisis is perceived to require a fundamental paradigm shift, a deep-seated transformation of world-view, attendant values and ambitions.

[3] This may give some indication of the diversified nature of the Deep Ecology venture, one which raises doubts about the theoretical consistency of its position. Such a criticism is succinctly articulated by Joseph Des Jardins: "... the claims of deep ecology are so sweeping and general as to become empty. A 'movement' that can claim inspiration from such diverse sources as Taoism, Heraclitus, Spinoza, Whitehead, Gandhi, Buddhism, Native American cultures, Thomas Jefferson, Thoreau, and Woody Guthrie is certainly eclectic at best. At worst, it becomes unintelligible." Joseph Des Jardins, *Environmental Ethics : An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy* (Belmont, California : Wadsworth, 1993), p.231.

[4] For an exposition of Arne Naess' deep, long-range ecology, see his work *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle,* trans. David Rothenburg (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989).

These sentiments, regarded by many as representative of the radical wing of the ecological movement, are succinctly expressed by Ethicist, John Rodman:

> The attempt to produce a "new thesis" by the process of extension perpetuates the basic presuppositions of the conventional modern paradigm; however much it fiddles with the boundaries ... [the rights movement], while holding out promise of transcending the homocentric perspective of modern culture, subtly fulfils and legitimizes the basic project of modernity – the total conquest of nature by man.[5]

In the light, hereof, it would not be unreasonable to regard this thesis as an exercise in Deep Ecology. It harbours a similar suspicion of what Deep Ecologists label "mental-rational" systems, and which rely on ethical injunction and legislative prompting to channel human volition to favourable ends. This all-too-appealing outlook, as exemplified by the rights movement, would have us believe that human life is shaped by a conscious act of will, that humankind is, for all intents and purposes, a supremely self-defining creature. Consequently, the resolution of wrongdoing is as simply understood as the source of wrongdoing itself: each is a case of unmitigated choice, of unconditional volition. The reality of the situation, however, is that human behaviour is more fully orchestrated from behind the veil of the conscious mind, from the virtually unfathomable depths of the human psyche. Thus, it is entirely inappropriate to assess an act of wrongdoing, especially one of the magnitude of ecological exploitation, as merely a conscious ethical failure, as a shortcoming of the benevolent will. The psychological forces at play in such cases are indeed manifold and representative of all levels of the human psyche, and the simple dismissal of such psychological complexity is, from the perspective of a radical ecophilosophy, a vestige of an arrogant and antiquated humanistic tradition. The Deep Ecology enterprise, or, more broadly, proponents of an ecocentric world-view, warn against the anthropocentric conceit that regards the production of human meaning in isolation from the natural environment that is its living medium, and serve to remind one that both the physical and non-physical

[5] John Rodman quoted in Daniel A Kealy, *Revisioning Environmental Ethics* (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1990), p.27.

domains of human life are characterised by robust qualities of interdependence and reciprocity with the natural universe.

This study, then, takes upon itself the initial task of analysing, for better or for worse, the present position of contemporary ecophilosophy, its presuppositions, its hermeneutical context, its theoretical objectives, however clandestine, and indeed, the manner in which it has drawn from the prevailing intellectual climate in the pursuit of such objectives. Its most significant object of critical analysis, however, is less those understated schools of ecophilosophy which are labelled "shallow", than the philosophical mythology of ecocentrism itself, for there is little that is novel in a diatribe launched against perfunctory approaches to a profound crisis. It is for the very reason that this present study is written within the compass of ecocentrism and that it seeks a more penetrative application of its founding principles, that it is called upon to scrutinise trends in ecological thought which have similarly annexed for themselves the label of "ecocentric". Such a project is rendered doubly provocative when one considers Deep Ecology's self-perceived role as ideological watchdogs of the ecological community, as radical iconoclasts dismantling the homocentric mould of the urban-industrial mind, and, above all, as purveyors of a resurgent culture centred on the value of the systemic universe. Thus, it is not simply its willingness to take to task the most ardent champions of ecocentrism that renders this work innovative, but that it does so in the service, and not in contradiction, of the formative precepts of the ecocentric paradigm itself.

The present work, then, seeks, in the first place, to unravel the complex conceptual circuitry of contemporary ecophilosophy (anthropocentric and ecocentric alike), to expose its hackneyed phraseology, decipher its mythology, deconstruct its oblique machinations, and finally to cast judgement upon it. Such a judgement necessarily implies an alternative model for understanding the human-Nature encounter, one which is intended to liberate the ecophilosophical debate from the dead hand of mere rhetoric. In the spirit of *post-environmentalism* this study employs a multi-disciplinary approach to subvert accepted notions of the meaning of Nature and human personhood, and to problematise the degree to which the ecological crisis,

as a crisis of human meaning, actually lends itself to a solution. Such a critical project has been approached through a three-pronged problematisation of (ecocentric) meaning: the problem of *method*, or that of truth and representation; the problem of *morality*, or that of truth and value; and finally, the problem of *Immanentism*, or that of an earth-centred spirituality. Each is, at times, addressed explicitly and individually, but all are integral and implicit to the development of this thesis, and, taken together, comprise its thematic fibre. None can be considered in isolation for each is necessarily suggestive of the others, and the exfoliation of a responsible ecocentric hermeneutic demands the critical treatment of all three.

The problem of method becomes a necessary complement to our deconstructive task at the point where it becomes clear that ecocentric agitators are themselves engaged in the process of reinventing "Nature". Thus, the ideological content of ecocentrism is itself predicated upon a particular perception of Nature. Such hermeneutical considerations, then, serve to problematise a field of ecophilosophical inquiry which up until now has always been accepted on its own terms. Such problematisation is compounded by the manner in which ecocentrists have sought to reconstruct the equivocal identity of "Nature". The call for an altered sensibility, for a fundamental paradigm shift recognising the *"interrelatedness"* of all life, is indeed a reasonable one, but the open-endedness of such a paradigm has yielded some unreasonable conclusions. In what is a perplexing demonstration of intellectual *laissez-faire*, much ecophilosophy has indiscriminately seized upon ideological resources which may be of use in bolstering the nascent culture of ecocentrism. In their eagerness to propound a new sensibility founded on respect and reverence for the sanctity of life, ecocentric propagandists have frequently sought to straddle divergent realms of discourse. Alas, the result is all too often a curious admixture of pseudo-science and mythico-religious speculation, in which scientific theory is mythologised as narrative, and mythological narrative is objectified as science. Such forays into the realm of moral metaphysics have more often than not rendered a rather demure portrayal of "Nature", a "Nature" which exudes a benevolent harmony and a relationality

founded upon mutual respect. Such docile qualities are embodied in that oft-used, but much misused, term of endearment - "Mother Earth". More significantly, what has been achieved through such a mythologising scheme is the transformation of Nature from provider of rich bounties and bearer of beauty into the foundation of a social charter, an inviolable model for proper human relations. And it is here that the problem of the relation between truth and representation (or that of method) gives rise to the problem of the relation between truth and value (or that of morality). In the case of contemporary ecocentric philosophy, it will be shown that the mythologising trend to which it is prone is equally its moralising trend, so that once its mythology is deciphered, its position comes in fact to resemble that of less radical ecophilosophies which treat the ecological crisis as simply an issue of ethical action.

Although this study stands in defiance of the established terminology of the environmentalist movement, it does share with it the insight that a particular understanding of what constitutes human nature and the character of the world underpins any serious-minded consideration of the ecological quandary. We affirm the view, then, that at the heart of an ecocidal pattern of behaviour lies a hazardous alchemy incorporating both *cosmology* (world-view) - embodying a consciously defined set of beliefs and values - and *psychology* - the unconscious content of obfuscated, yet supremely influential, fears and desires. This, of course, may raise certain difficulties for the theoretical cohesion of this work, employing as it does insights gleaned from a host of academic disciplines in order to address a number of distinct, yet related theoretical issues. Such methodological challenges have been met, however, by gathering these diverse and varied thematic strands around a central organising principle, that is, a recognition of the *ambivalence of Nature.* Such an ambivalence serves as the thematic overture of this present study, one which will be used to both expose the inadequacies of contemporary ecophilosophy and to guide our proffered reinterpretation of an eco-destructive culture. The natural world, it is argued, is not merely a *hortus deliciarum,* a garden of bountiful delights in which life, light and beauty proliferate effortlessly. For all that modern eco-ethicists appeal to such a glamorous portrayal, the history of the human

experience has largely been an ambiguous one, in which the domain of Nature has been associated with notions of death, chaos, amorality and even, at times, immorality. After all, the realm of Nature is one in which flourishing life coexists with abrupt death, meticulous creation with sudden and irreversible destruction. Such is an insoluble ambivalence, an authentic interdependence of polarities. Consequently, as shall be demonstrated by a process of close critical inquiry, the beauty and benevolence of the natural world which is so fervently eulogised by much contemporary ecophilosophy, constitute, in fact, little more than nature denatured by the distorting spectacles of our appetites and revulsions, a nature exorcised of any disagreeable elements. Consequently, the notions of "nature" and "natural interdependence" have been reduced to hollow abstractions to be bandied about recklessly, justifying facile diagnoses of the ecological crisis. In short, they have become tools of convenience.

Our overarching project, then, is the reaffirmation of what could be described as Nature's *"darkness"* – that domain of shadow, death, decay, impish instinct, even mindlessness, which is the contested ground upon which humankind has battled "brute creation" for the greater part of its history. Such a project is indeed new, but it does acknowledge its intellectual precursors; for, although contemporary ecophilosophy balks in the face of this challenge, it is betraying an intellectual tradition that has yielded three rich and relevant veins of thought: *Darwinism* and the theory of evolution, *Freudian/post-Freudian* psychoanalytic theory, and the postmoral philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Flagrantly neglected by contemporary exponents of *"green"* consciousness, such an intellectual lineage represents successive attempts to reconceptualise the human-Nature interface in as frank and forthright terms as possible. Thus, although Darwinism expressly seeks to trace the process of organic development, while Freudianism engages the issue of psychological development, both share a common matrix of concern, each informing crucial insights in the other. Nietzsche, in turn, serves as their astute interlocutor, seeking as he does to measure the human capacity for linguistic and symbolic self-definition against the fundamental recognition of the organic creatureliness of our species. In concert, they furnish a vocabulary which is able to

lend expression to both the darkness of Nature and the myriadic forces which have shaped the ecological history of our species. Although not without controversy, this composite and newly-wrought paradigm allows a reformulation of the terms of the ecological debate which is simply more convincing and which will resuscitate points of contention which have up until now been consistently overlooked.

Moreover, a revisionary analysis of this provocative intellectual tradition will be enlisted to explore avenues beyond the methodological morass with which much contemporary ecocentric philosophy is afflicted. The language of ecophilosophy, it will be argued, should, by necessity, be the language of paradox and dialectic, not the staid discourse of polarity and binary opposition, for it alone can lend expression to the organising principles of an ecocentric sensibility – that is, the idea of the world as a systemic unity marked by interdependence and reciprocity, the fundamental kinship of the human and the non-human, and the primacy of becoming over being. Much contemporary ecophilosophy betrays its guiding intuitions precisely because it lacks a conceptual discourse with which to articulate them, and, by extension, a procedural logic with which to apply them. Nor is it aided by its ongoing appropriation of the deconstructionist idiom of postmodernism with its penchant for socio-linguistic analysis, which threatens to engulf any responsible selfhood within a creeping relativism, and which serves as a particular target of rebuke in this study. Rooted in the idea of human identity as a *physio-psychology* and of human history as a *psycho-genealogy*, the ecocentric paradigm which is fashioned in the following pages, promises a dual transcendence of both the traditional epistemological dilemma of objectivism/subjectivism, and of the naturalistic fallacy, to which ecocentric thought is especially susceptible. But more than this, it serves to demonstrate that, at the dawn of a new millennium, no final realignment of "truth" and "value" can be proclaimed, nor any intellectual or spiritual probity attained, without recourse to a genuinely ecocentric hermeneutic.

If, however, the ecological issue is to be construed as a problem of epistemology and morality, or, more succinctly, of "truth" and "value", then it represents equally a problem of the highest "Truth" and the highest "Value" – that is, of

religious authority and spiritual meaning. For indeed, having conceptualised the human-Nature encounter as a symbolic nexus incorporating both cosmology – a consciously-held set of beliefs about oneself and the world – and psychology – the current of latent fears and desires underpinning such beliefs – we have made of the ecological controversy an overtly religious issue, for it is precisely in the symbol-forming realm of sacred narrative and art that the streams of consciousness and the unconscious find their most profound confluence.

Such an insight has long been acknowledged by Deep Ecologists who recognise in religion a powerful sacralising resource with which to revision our bearing towards the natural world and to instil a consciousness of ecocentrism. Religious traditions which have for so long borne mute witness to the *via dolorosa* of environmental destruction, have themselves been stirred from their languid complacency and have rallied their spiritual resources to the cause of ecological redemption. Since the initial broadside fired by Lynn White Jr's noted paper,[6] Christian and non-Christian dogmatists alike have rallied to a hasty defence-at-all-costs in order to preserve moral credibility and restore tarnished reputations.

Regrettably, where ecophilosophy has relied on brittle argumentation and emotive sloganism, religious responses to the ecological dilemma have followed suit, drawn along in the wake of this rhetoric of ecocentricity: Christian theology, a discipline previously noted for its lack of eco-friendly content, has begun spouting the same predictable formula. Those of a more eclectic temperament even suggest the wholesale translation of Native American or some such primal consciousness into urban-industrial society. The results at the final count are the same: for the large part, contemporary approaches to ecotheology have tended to cast the natural world in the unhelpful role of benign and passive victim, and to promote a sentimental and moralistic naturalism, which, at times, approaches a tenuous utopianism (or

[6] Historian Lynn White Jr's controversial paper, "The Historic Roots of our Ecological Crisis" (*Science*, 155, 1967), perhaps triggered the anti-Christian diatribe and the subsequent habit among ecologists of scrutinising the metaphysical cosmologies. In it, White argues that it is more than coincidence that the final Christian victory over paganism was paralleled by the emergence in the Middle Ages of an exploitative, utilitarian stance towards Nature.

should that be *outopianism*?).[7] Its professed obstacles include "individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism and utilitarianism" and a veritable assortment of other "-isms". Systematic in criticism and protest, such a paradigm is, however, decidedly skittish when confronted with the need for affirmative, reconstructive thought.

This essay, then, endeavours to bracket the impulsive, emotionally-fired response of such apologists in favour of a more incisive, no-holds-barred consideration of the philosophical and spiritual dilemmas spawned by this unprecedented crisis. For it would seem that a frank and thoughtful assessment of the problem would allow secular and religious traditions alike to make a far more telling contribution to its resolution than merely paying lip-service to the ideas of a changing intellectual climate. For the sake of thematic coherence, our critical focus is confined to recent approaches to ecotheology from within the religious traditions of the West – particularly, popular Earth-spirituality, Trinitarian, Process and, to a lesser extent, Kenotic theology. Against the deficiencies discerned in each respective paradigm, and in consolidation of the ecocentric hermeneutic explored in the following pages, we advocate a postmoral conception of divinity and a posthumanistic approach to the ecotheological project as a whole.

The hypothesis which finally emerges from the composite process of inquiry outlined above is really the product of much theoretical strategising and critical reflection, and consequently, involves a high level of abstraction. It is therefore necessary at some point to ground its heady distillations in the soil of living experience, to translate its "written script" into a "spoken tongue" as it were. In this regard, history serves as the ideal interlocutor. Historical analysis is an enlivening tool which brings to life the hidden nuances of a philosophical thesis, showcasing its strengths while exposing its weaknesses. Moreover, it serves to substantiate a crucial sub-argument of this thesis – that a mature understanding of one's "*being-in-relation*" requires an appreciation of one's place in the

[7] 'Outopia', meaning "no place", is an amusing variation on 'utopia', and indicates the spuriousness of many lofty utopian projects.

psychosomatic history of the species, and therefore that historiography is integral, and not incidental, to the formation of an ecocentric hermeneutic. Indeed, we have urged throughout this work that the mode proper to any ecocentric inquiry is that of the psycho-genealogist. It is for this purpose, then, that the historical narrative of the *Age of Enlightenment* has been employed. What renders the Enlightenment a particularly poignant case study is the way in which it has been made into something of a cardboard villain by ecocentrists. Undoubtedly, the Enlightenment was a watershed epoch, a *moment critique,* in the ecological history of Europe, and indeed of the world, and it customarily invites either feelings of staunch admiration or strong disapprobation. If we are to believe the diagnosis propagated by ecocentric ideologists, the Enlightenment inaugurated an aeon of godless materialism and exploitative utilitarianism, an age which spawned rapid industrialisation and the emergence of a technocracy in whose throes we continue to languish. For the discerning eco-ethicist, the Enlightenment is a figurehead for that exploitative paradigm in which rampant progress and burgeoning self-interest are mirrored by a radical de-valuation of Nature and the non-human.

Abandoning the bloated rhetoric of ecocentrism, however, we are driven less to a condemnation of the Enlightenment, than to an acknowledgement of its intrigues and subtleties, its paradoxes and ambiguities. If indeed, the Enlightenment marks the fall from grace with the natural environment, as ecophilosophies claim, then we wish for little more than an understanding of its *psychopathology* and, by extension, the psychopathology which continues to inhabit the present age of unprecedented environmental degradation. The reality remains that, if we are to avoid branding humanity as a superfluous aberration, as in some way an unsightly "unnaturalness", then is it not probable that our species is inadvertently wayward – that in many cases our encounters with the natural world have been of such a quality so as to unleash forces of a sinister, "dis-eased" nature within the human psyche? The proud Promethean paradigm of unflappable progress may yet be shown to have a soft underbelly. Indeed, this study entertains the possibility of confirming such a suspicion – that the engine of humanity's imperious taming of

the rigours of its environment is in fact fuelled by a sense of lingering insecurity and fear.

This essay, then, seeks to avoid the ideological extravagances of the contemporary ecophilosophical movement – in fact, it dismisses its characteristic approach as, at best, a simplistic stop-gap measure, the application of which ultimately rests on an irresponsibly utopian foundation. And, as will be demonstrated, utopian schemes have more frequently than not, widened the perceived chasm between culture and nature. In fact – and this is a pivotal motif of this study – the self-awareness of the human species as a moral agent, as being above all a moral creature, can serve to accentuate the alienation felt in dwelling within a seemingly amoral (at times, immoral) world. Expressed differently, the disjunction between culture and nature is frequently mirrored in the pervasive sense of moral refinement experienced and promoted by any human society. This observation is perhaps most distinctly substantiated by the case of Enlightenment Europe, in which the ideal of progress first became prominent and which identified the acquisition of knowledge and technological advancement with increasing human contentedness and moral upliftment. Perhaps, the contemporary ecocentric paradigm, with its thinly-disguised moralising impulse, draws unwitting sustenance from the soil of Enlightenment thought, though it may simultaneously disown its unfashionable ideological predecessor.

For all the truculence of its critiques and forcefulness of its assertions, this work remains an exercise in innovation, an attempt to lift the ecological paradigm from the impasse in which it finds itself. It is an attempt to revitalise a stale ecological idiom which has outworn its usefulness and which flatters to deceive with its weathered clichés and sentimentalities. At this point, it ought to be stressed that the objective of this study is less to cry foul at the process of ecological decline and to propose a short-term blueprint for the cure of environmental ills, than to subject contemporary ecophilosophy to measured scrutiny and, with it, to offer a challenging reinterpretation of the ecological history of the Western world. This process of revolutionising problems instead of formulating decisive solutions will

undoubtedly test the patience of pragmatists, who are stirred by the urgency of the ecological crisis. Yes, the rainforests do require protection, pollution levels do need to be controlled, non-human life ought not to be exploited, and environmentalists will rest more easily if the physical symptoms of the crisis are attended to; but it does not require a scientific paper such as this to show that such remedial measures ought to be implemented. Indeed, it has never been and perhaps can not be the task of this study to submit a "five-point plan" for ecological survival. To be sure, contrived solutions are not difficult to find, nor do they ever achieve much – they ease consciences, but little more. Our species might well survive ecologically, but it is quite probable that it will never prosper. Should we be successful, however, in our attempts to redirect the fateful impetus of civilisation, we shall yet be faced with a revolution in understanding – nothing short of a re-reading of history and a radical re-evaluation of human identity. It is in anticipation of such a revolution, that this paper has been composed.

Indeed, in this paper, I have vented the full vitriol of deconstructive thought upon such a rhetoric of "eco-sensibility without eco-sense". But, with equal vigour, I have sought to fashion a constructive or revisionary leaf in the hitherto brief chapter of contemporary ecophilosophy. Nevertheless, I do so with caution and circumspection, fully aware that my own penchant for polemical writing accords me no immunity from like-minded criticism. As a pre-emptory defence, let it once again be stressed that it is neither my intention to provide an inscrutable diagnosis of the ecological crisis, nor to provide a thorough-going panacea with which to cure all environmental ills; that is a project the expanse of which exceeds the scope of the present study. The intended harvest is the theoretical groundwork for an innovative approach to the ecological issue which is intellectually more feasible, while lacking neither a creative openness nor controversy.

CHAPTER 1

THE SCIENCE OF DISCONTENT

The old religionists tortured men physically for a moral truth.
The new realists torture men morally for a physical truth.
G K Chesterton

Cultures of all ages, it seems, are characterised by a need to contextualise their present experience within a narrative structure either in relation to some providential order and purpose, or within the no less colourful stream of a purely human history. And whether one is located within a narrative of metaphysical or humbler proportions, the resultant sense of unbending purpose and alluring destiny is the same as that invoked by a dramatic performance. It is this sense of *cognitive rootedness*, or dramatic centredness, that is required to ward off the vertigo of disorientation, to avert that crisis of meaning that reveals our grand ambitions and monumental achievements to be full of "sound and fury" but ultimately "signifying nothing". This curious malady of the spirit, rarely glimpsed in previous aeons which have banished it through a profundity of creative inspiration and single-minded naïveté, has for the first time become the scourge of an entire consciousness – one that first stirred the ground of European thought, but which has evolved by grades to impinge upon the very formalities of day-to-day life throughout the contemporary world. Its symptoms are manifold – a spiritual lethargy, crass materialism, a growing disillusionment with grand metaphysical narratives, and a culture of irresponsible experimentation with both self and world. Max Weber labelled such a case of post-classical antipathy as "*disenchantment*", the prophetic Nietzsche compared it to a loss of a divinely-circumscribed horizon, while that eminent psychoanalyst-cum-mystic, Carl Jung, described it as a *loss of soul*.

It has been argued that the first stirrings of this condition can be traced to the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In one fell swoop, the new astronomy of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo had scragged the indomitable heavens themselves and toppled the bastion of previously unquestioned moral authority. The centuries-old Ptolemaic spiritual hierarchy of church dogma was irredeemably discredited by the bold Copernican hypothesis of heliocentrism.

Decentred and displaced, the European mind was compelled to wean itself from its staple diet of dogmatic infallibility and ancient lore. Not merely did this revolution represent a transmogrification of cosmology, but more significantly it introduced a new way of philosophising – a sharp, uncompromising methodology with which to apprehend a world perceived to be increasingly mechanistic in its movement, atomistic in composition, and therefore fundamentally inert in its overall character. All assertions of truth, old and new, were subjected to the rigours of rational inquiry, while existing knowledge submitted itself to systematic arrangement according to scientifically organised categories. Probable truth supplanted absolute truth as a matrix of concern; an epistemological shift promoted by a new awareness of degrees of certainty, of the graded reliability of evidence. Approximate and provisional hypotheses superseded infallible assertions as the key to decoding a world of increasing complexity, yet diminishing opaqueness. The supremely rational, knowing subject began to dissect, vivisect and scrutinise its passive, discrete object in an epistemological equation that was to endure for centuries.

While the metaphysically-based morality of the age survived such early tremors intact, its foundations would begin to falter in the face of subsequent secular-scientific onslaughts. The scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was largely inaugurated by inquisitive, but God-fearing, men – members of the community of faith with a penchant for experimentation. Yet, the not too distant progeny of this new empirical consciousness would not share the same sentimental loyalty to a religious institution cloaked in unsophisticated superstition.

The historical evolution of this new paradigm of rational-empirical inquiry reads like an epitaph to reverential religiosity – Deism,[1] Newtonian physics, Cartesian dualism, logical positivism, reductionistic biology. As a consequence, the world had been deprived of its dramatic vividness; having shed the mysterious depth of personality, the expanse of the universe now began to mark time with cold, even hostile, indifference. Haunted by the ungodly silence, the unresponsiveness of its cosmic environs, the European mind sought refuge in the finer textures and qualities of its immediate environment to find solace in aesthetic and sensory pleasures and to forget the loneliness of bland infinity. In its cruder form of the commodity cult, this aesthetic flight translated desire into need, mere dabbling into entrenched habit, before finding its culmination in the rapacious consumerism of the modern era. The resultant crisis of affirmation had been temporarily averted by the Enlightenment tradition of rational optimism, which imputed a latent moral purpose to the natural order, and proffered a buoyant vision of history as the grand chronicle of advance, in which the progress of knowledge was accompanied by a maturation of moral consciousness. Increasingly confronted with a natural universe which appeared to lack moral design, and which apportioned weal and woe with a randomness peculiar to the amoral, this one-eyed tradition was destined to die from a lack of reasonable support.

Yet, even amidst the preliminary challenges issued by the sixteenth and seventeenth century scientific vanguard, a few acute minds perceived the portents of an oncoming age of godlessness, and in so doing, pre-empted the great existential ennui of the modern era. The epoch was imbued with all the wide-eyed anticipation of a coming of age, but some foresaw the perils of a premature arrogance and an accompanying alienation from the world. John Milton described the new universe as "a wide, gaping void", while the ensuing metaphysical crisis prompted John Donne to utter "Tis all in pieces, all coherence, gone".

[1] The presence of Deism in this philosophical inventory may be questioned, for it possesses a decidedly theistic bent. Nevertheless, it was permeated by the scientific spirit of the age in its postulation of a world of predictable regularity – one that operates according to its own internal logic, in its own terms, although ultimately created by God. Thus, although Deism asserted the existence of God, it served to diminish divine presence in the world, and anticipated later systems of thought that would find any recourse to a supernatural agency entirely redundant.

But the most poignant premonition of despair was issued by the incisive genius of Blaise Pascal:

> What is man in nature? A nothing in comparison with the infinite, an all in comparison with the nothing, a mean between nothing and everything. Since he is infinitely removed from comprehending the extremes, the ends of things and the beginnings are hopelessly hidden from him in an impenetrable secret; he is equally incapable of seeing the nothing of which he is made, and the infinite in which he is swallowed up.
>
> What will he do then, but perceive the appearance of the middle of things in eternal despair of knowing either their beginning or their end?[2]

If the possibility of knowing some illustrious "beginning" or some epic "end" has been exposed as an intoxicating illusion, then paradise – or at least some semblance of one – must be sought in the immediacy of the "middle of things".

Thus, disillusionment in glories, both temporarily and spatially distant, is usually compensated for by the establishment, through human effort and by the human will, of such otherworldly glories in this world. Thus, the perspicacious theologian could not help but shudder at the renovated universe, and not without cause. For, as the "beginnings and ends" began to recede from view, so the imminent presence of God began to diminish, until creation at last resembled the ordered, monotonous complexity of a clock, and the divine mind, standing apart from the object of its contemplation, possessed all the systematic aloofness of the clockmaker. And in time, such a divine artisan would itself prove to be redundant – the intricate workings of the cosmic machine could be understood in its own terms without recourse to some Prime Mover.

The relatively naive position of the seventeenth century Deist, however, yielded a further corollary which would outline the century and those to come, and which would drain the natural world of any moral significance, thereby providing an

[2] Cited in R Olson (ed.), *Science as Metaphor* (California : Wadsworth Publishing, 1971), p.10.

ideological buttress for the ecological devastation to follow. The legacy in question is the bifurcation of the epistemological ground into two domains of knowledge. For, if a great cosmic divide separates the watchful, but mute, creator from his finely-tuned creation, the clockmaker from the clock, then surely each should become the object of their own idiosyncratic and exclusive brand of knowledge. Hence, the segregation of the domain of pure and applied science from the province of theology and, by extension, ethics. The business of the soul was to be regarded as a mere adjunct to, and not encapsulated in, an adequate knowledge of this world, until it eventually came to be seen as less than desirable to the scientist of profession, as an injudicious impediment to the pursuit of knowledge.

The scientific imagination of subsequent centuries conjured up images of a world, by turns, static and manageable, dynamic and uncompromising, and worse, one caught in an entropic decline and which would finally expire in a heat death.[3] By degrees, the universe had been drained of moral depth; the role of value and ethical integrity in the intellectual apprehension of such a world had been eclipsed. It would only re-emerge a full four centuries after the first monumental discoveries of the great astronomers.

Measured against the sweeping hypotheses of its predecessors, the scientific harvest of the present century is a curious brand: radical specialisation and the revelation of a world which, on all frontiers, is marked by a complexity that mocks the simple-mindedness of earlier models, have conspired to produce an age of incessant chatter. Scientific inquiry in the twilight of the millennium has certainly produced a host of innovative theories, but little, it seems, of portentous significance. The language of pure science has become rarefied to such a degree that, to the uninitiated, it has come to resemble some glass bead game, some lofty intellectual pastime accessible only to the intelligentsia. The applied science of the modern

[3] For a poetic characterisation of an entropically declining universe, see T S Eliot's "The Hollow Men". T S Eliot, "The Hollow Men" in *Collected Poems 1909 – 1962* (London : Faber and Faber, 1963).

"This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper"

era, however, in contrast to its more refined cousin, is one that smacks of a hard-nosed realism. To its countless beneficiaries – the privileged First World masses – it is the great provider, the sustainer of the urban dream, and the tangible security it affords serves to obviate the noetic uncertainty of "being-in-the-world".

Yet, just as the present century has witnessed an increasing obfuscation in the field of scientific inquiry, so too has it testified to the extensive popularisation of the conceptual resources of this discipline. In this age of supply and demand, the almost occultic concepts which underpin contemporary scientific models have been prodded and parried, inverted and interpreted, simplified and romanticised in order to render them more palatable to the lay person. Literature abounds which makes facile use (or abuse!) of an abstruse nomenclature, in order to promote some novel, but artless theory of human life, experience, origin, destination – in fact any fanciful sentiment which appeals to a large enough audience.

The problem, it appears, first gave root some decades previously with the popularisation of the revolutionary new science, quantum physics. Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle*, which served as the keynote of quantum theory, asserted that an absolute limit existed on the accuracy of measuring the position and momentum of a body in space. Accurate knowledge of position resulted in a corresponding uncertainty over momentum, and vice versa. The solidity and predictability of Newtonian space appeared wholly inadequate when confronted with the new quantum unit which, evasive and undecided, resembled more a fluctuating wave than a fixed particle in a spatial medium. Ambiguity became the cornerstone of the quantum system, endowing the tiresome classical model with innovative possibility.

More significantly, however, the *Uncertainty Principle,* having eroded the simple subject-object paradigm of earlier epistemologies, postulated the essential wholeness of all quantum systems. In short, "when a scientist attempts to observe the quantum world, the experimental apparatus used must interact in some way

with the quantum system".[4] The scientist and his accompanying analytical instruments – even any preconceived theory he might bring to the exercise – have effectively become a constraint in the experimental situation. Accordingly, the sacrosanct objectivity of the scientist has been abridged, but, more importantly, the principle demonstrates that attempted objectivity in any act of observation, however clinical, flatters to deceive. This is, of course, an inference; one which has been derived from the intricacies and subtleties of sub-atomic physics, but it beckons to be applied to all disciplines of human knowledge. Consequently, we can understand the admixture of curiosity and excitement engendered by the new paradigm. With that uncompromising bedrock of objectivity dissolved – and dissolved by its very taskmaster, science[5] – the sluice gates of the imagination opened, spewing forth a deluge of responses employing what was in fact a delicately nuanced theory with reckless naïveté. Arguments for the role of imagination in scientific enquiry[6] and the formulation of truth proliferated, fortified by such assertions as "we constitute existence through our perception; the observer is inseparable from the observed". The *principle of complementarity* – the reciprocity of subject and ambiguous object – has frequently been uprooted from its contextual discipline, atomic physics, and indiscriminately applied to other fields of human inquiry. Niels Bohr, himself one of the patriarchs of quantum thought, entertained the possibility of applying the principle of complementarity as a general epistemological model to biology (mechanistic vs organic), philosophy (free will vs determinism), psychology (behaviourism vs introspection) and even theology (divine love vs divine justice).[7] Accordingly, the tension-filled ambiguity existing between schools of each discipline is reminiscent of the wave-particle unity-in-duality of quantum matter. C A Coulson, extending Bohr's inference, goes so far as to propose that, in the light of the wave-particle model, science and religion can

---

[4] F David Peat, *The Philosopher's Stone* (New York : Bantam Books, 1991), p.62.

[5] This sentiment is echoed by the pathfinding physicist, Karl Popper, who asserted that through quantum physics "materialism has transcended itself".

[6] See Renee Weber's collection of transcripts entitled *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages* for an example of such speculation. In it, she argues for the extensive use of "imaginative models" in scientific inquiry, drawing on the enigmatic insights of mystical illumination. Renee Weber, *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages : The Search for Unity* (London : Arkana, 1986).

[7] See Henry Folse, *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr : The Framework of Complementarity* (New York : North Holland, 1985).

be viewed as "complementary accounts of one reality".[8] It is beyond the scope of this paper to contend his conclusion, but Coulson's methodology deserves critical comment. Ian Barbour, in his erudite and comprehensive *Religion in an Age of Science*, warns against such "extended use of the term [of complementarity]"[9] and offers a three-fold criterion for the sound employment of the quantum principle.

First, the concept of complementarity should only be applied to models referring to "the same entity and which are of the same logical type".[10] The unqualified juxtaposition of science and religion does not satisfy such a condition as each of these disciplines differs from the other in terms of context, function and language, and therefore are of a different "logical type". To blend each by dint of complementarity into a quasi-religio-scientific pot-pourri is simply erroneous. Second, when employed outside physics, such use of the principle is "analogical and not inferential".[11] Quantum thought cannot, by mere extension, yield any precise axioms in another field of inquiry, especially where the methodology employed is vastly divergent from that of physics. Finally, "complementarity provides no justification for an uncritical acceptance of dichotomies";[12] a mere appeal to quantum ambivalence, then, accords no immunity from the usual constraints of logical coherence of thought, nor does it nullify the quest for systematic unity.

Despite the cautionary word issued by more circumspect thinkers such as Barbour, poeticised treatments of the quantum idiom are rife. Fanciful comparisons have been drawn between the new physics and the principles of Eastern mysticism, imbuing the former with some grand psycho-religious significance.[13] The quantum culture even infiltrated the thought of such notables of the psychoanalytical

---

[8] C A Coulson, *Christianity in an Age of Science* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1953), Chap 3.

[9] Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1990), p.100.

[10] Ibid., p.100.

[11] Ibid., p.100.

[12] Ibid., p.100.

[13] See, for example, Fritjof Capra's trendsetting work, *The Tao of Physics* (London : Flamingo Books, 1988).

profession as Carl Jung, who entertained a connection between the unitary field of a quantum system and the *unus mundus*, the mystical awareness of ineffable unity. In the early Jung, quantum physics serves to verify theoretically the bond between the psyche and physical nature:

> If these reflections are justified, they must have weighty consequences with regard to the nature of the psyche, since as an objective fact it would then be ultimately connected with physiological and biological phenomena, but with physical events, too – and it would appear, most intimately of all with those that pertain to the realm of atomic physics.[14]

Understandably, however, in years to come a more circumspect Jung would discard such conjecture in favour of a fervently *non-physical conception of the psyche*.[15] The revolution in thought heralded by the dawn of the new physics, however, has persisted in one form or another, through to the dawn of a new century. It has culminated, most notably, in a postmodern epistemology which attests equally to an awareness of the interpenetration of subject and object, and which, consequently, evinces impatience with the totalising discourses of earlier systems. Echoing the principle of quantum indeterminacy, the postmodern hermeneutic has abandoned the quest for monolithic truth and univocal meaning, and prefers instead to locate the "real" within an active process of truth-manufacture. Thus, where the quantum universe is endowed with a creative ambiguity, the postmodern multiverse is similarly an undecided and polymorphous constellation of symbols which acquire their significance through the interplay of text and context. Both the new science and the new epistemology it has engendered, then, admit a necessary interpretive bias in the construction of meaning, and therefore implicate all assertions of truth in the politics of perspective. Such insight into the intersubjective nature of truth-production is indeed a compelling one, but, as shall become increasingly apparent in the course of this study, it is, in equal measure, a hazardous one. At best, it

[14] Jung quoted in Victor Mansfield, "The Opposites in Quantum Physics and Jungian Psychology", *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, February 1990, p.1.

[15] This, however has not discouraged later Jungian theorists from resuming a similar line of thought. Both Victor Mansfield and J Marvin Spiegelman suggest that the ambiguous relationship of particle to wave in quantum physics is analogous to that between the conscious and unconscious mind.

invites a poetic licence which tests the constraints of paradigmatic thinking; at worst, it suggests a crude subjectivism in which one can no longer speak intelligibly of the "world", and in which allusions to "truth" are simply rhetorical tricks employed by propagandising agents.

It is in the context, then, of such a perspectival approach to all matters epistemological – and it is with some irony, too – that many now look to scientific authority, the great iconoclast of former ages, to undertake the pre-eminent project of postmodernity – *the re-enchantment of the world*. This however, is no longer science in its classical and conservative guise, nor is the universe which it depicts any longer a drab and dour matrix. This, supposedly, is a science which has outgrown its paradigm – it is a postmodern science, a multidisciplinary affair, which, instead of dissecting dead matter, seeks to forge life-enriching connections with the philosophical, theological and moral arts.

Where, then, does contemporary eco-ideology stand in this conceptual menagerie? It too purports to seek the re-enchantment of the world and to offset the estrangement of the modernist mindset through the formulation of an inclusive sacralising discourse. To the extent that the ecocentric paradigm endeavours to induce a scientifically-compatible religiosity, and to lend articulation to the ultimate concordance of mind and matter, it, too, is indebted to the principle of complementarity, that insuperable, almost mystical, interpenetration of subject and object, emphasised by quantum thought.[16] Yet, the ecological philosopher writes principally to a didactic purpose, and, in the spirit of an opportunist, actively seeks out symbolic resources with which to fortify such a purpose. Consequently, the ecocentric propagandist does not merely replicate the postmodern aspiration, but lends it sharper focus through a more pointed application of its formative

[16] In many ways the outstanding implications of quantum thought have been echoed by that other, equally illustrious, revolution in twentieth century physics: Einstein's theory of relativity. Its assertion that length, mass, velocity and time, once thought to be intrinsic or primary properties of objects, are in fact relative to the observer, discredits the universality and uniformity of the Newtonian world. Like the quantum paradigm, the relativity theory allows for a prodigious diversity of observational perspectives in the same space-time continuum. This could quite reasonably be interpreted as a corroboration of the variable unity-in-diversity of the quantum system. Similarly, relativity theory is subject to the same perils as its quantum counterpart when approached with too great an imaginative licence.

principles. Yet, if such principles may be thus elucidated, so too may the methodological frailties which are their frequent accompaniment, and indeed, many such frailties are displayed to an inordinate degree in contemporary eco-ideological thought.

The philosophy of the ecocentrist, then – much like that of the postmodernist – seeks, as its primary theoretical end, to obviate that state of normative alienation imposed on our species by what is perceived to be a mechanistic, divisive and reductionistic paradigm. In truth, this theoretical end is composed of two chief objectives: First, the restoration of human consciousness to a position of supreme meaningfulness in the universe, and an avowal of the profound kinship that exists between self and world. And, second, an accompanying revival of a culture founded upon reverence for life and ethical obligation to the living environment – in short, a biocentric culture in which the dual commitments to "truth" and "value" are reconciled. It is to the pursuit of this two-fold agenda that we next turn our critical gaze, in particular the manner in which the ecological movement has appropriated and, indeed, misappropriated, the scientific, philosophical and theological resources at its disposal.

With the enigmatic revelations of quantum thought and relativity theory, it would seem that 'mind', for so long considered an anomaly in a robustly physical universe, has been re-accorded a significant and intelligible cosmological status. The palpable universe of the modern physicist and biologist renders itself more and more inaccessible and opaque without recourse to some organising metaphysical principle. The result is the anticipation – perhaps premature – of the reinstatement of consciousness as the hub around which the wheel of the cosmos spins, with an accompanying rejection of the self-imposed metaphysical privation of mechanistic science. On this count, the ecological movement aligns itself with the changes in its contemporary intellectual climate, frequently snapping up potentially eco-friendly theories and stretching them to a favourable end. Yet, while the resourcefulness of the ecophilosophical fraternity cannot be doubted, the logical consistency of its teleological thought can.

The richness of the eco-movement's myth-making faculties is nowhere more evident than in its appropriation of James Lovelock's *Gaia Hypothesis,* which seems to have become something of an ecological institution. The hypothesis derives its name – perhaps misleadingly – from the Greek mythological figure, *Gaia*, the deep-breasted personification of the Earth from whom all things issued. The reverence and adoration with which the Ancient Greeks approached this benevolent Mother Earth is expressed by the Homeric hymn in which the poet sings "I shall sing of *Gaia*, universal mother, firmly founded, oldest of divinities". This rousing mythological allusion, however, perhaps belies the scientific, non-poetic seriousness of the *Gaia* of twentieth century fame.

In short, *Gaia* is a biochemical thesis – Lovelock describes it as an exercise in "geophysiology" – which, by a close analysis of the relationship between atmosphere and biosphere, has revealed the global environment to operate according to the principles of a feedback mechanism.

Previously, scientific orthodoxy had ingrained the view that life is "a passive dependent riding the planet, just fortunate enough to find a niche and survive".[17] Survivability, then, was entirely determined by accommodating the impersonal constraints imposed on living organisms by their non-living environment. In contrast, Lovelock's hypothesis suggests that there exists a reciprocity between life and its environment, that in a sense "the totality of life [biota] affects the physical environment to its advantage. The new emphasis is that the biota is not just a victim, but in part a conqueror of its environment".[18] Understood in this way, the world can be likened to a self-regulating organism, "a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil"[19] – in turn, the feedback mechanisms of such an integrated system ensure that global homeostasis is perpetually restored. The corollary of this view is an interesting variation on the Darwinian theme. The notion of competition and natural selection at the level of the species is supplanted by, or at least understood in terms of, the more significant evolutionary survival of the biomass as a whole. The integration of species and environment, engaged in such a symbiotic relationship, is seen as the *sine qua non* of the continued "livability of the global network".

What then should we make of such a theory, couched in scientific precision, yet almost coaxing a poetic interpretation? At one level, we are presented with a complex analysis of atmospheric composition (of nitrogen and carbon dioxide), acting in concert with the influence of cloud reflection, an influence ultimately generated by biological activity. Through symbiosis of atmosphere and biosphere, the living environment not only regulates itself, but is capable of self-repair. Yet, even at this level of sound scientific ratiocination, the *Gaia Hypothesis* has been subject to scrutiny on two grounds: first, there may be alternative explanations of the phenomena in question and, second, the "difficulty and partial results of testing".[20] It is not the intention of this paper to ascertain whether the hypothesis is

---

[17] Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (London : Transworld Publishers, 1993), p.147.

[18] Colin A Russell, *The Earth, Humanity and God* (London : UCL Press, 1994), p.113.

[19] James Lovelock, *Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1979), p.11.

[20] A difficulty cited in Russell, *The Earth, Humanity and God*, p.120.

indeed verifiable or not, but merely to confirm that even in its most understated, or 'weak' form the theory represents contested ground.

The volatile response accorded *Gaia* by the orthodox scientific community may be in part due to the manner in which the theory encourages the worst kinds of philosophical opportunism and sentimental dramatisation. The vitriol of the scientific fraternity is unmistakably directed at the 'strong' form of the thesis, which, with its poetic lustre, is the configuration of the *Gaia* theory which has been most easily marketable. Regrettably, mythological appellations can be counter-productive when exposed to an audience that suffers from "symbol-blindness". Thus, notwithstanding Lovelock's frantic attempts to explain that "*Gaia*" is merely a metaphor, an analogical embellishment, the outer fringes of the hypothesis have been snapped up by popular interest groups and framed as literal truth. According to such a view, the biophysical processes are not merely akin to those of a living organism, but the Earth itself is a living organism, and further, possesses a deified consciousness of its own. In fact, this emergent planetary consciousness has already been assigned a designation: *Gaiafield*. In the not too distant future, it is supposed the consciousness of millions of individual galaxies will merge to form the Supergaia, "the perfect cosmos".[21]

Whatever the spuriousness of such a response, however, the *Gaia* theory has stirred interest in the notion of a re-deified world, reviving a panentheistic world-view and its accompanying tenet, the *anima mundi*. This development indeed represents a revival and not a novelty, for, preceding the mechanistic revolution of the late Middle Ages, an organismic conception of the universe held sway over the minds of the educated and unlettered alike. This cosmology was dominated by a sense of integrated wholeness, a brilliant harmony in which the realms of universe, the earth, society and the human person all reflected one another while embodying the divine spirit. Symmetrically arranged between realms and within each realm, a hierarchical and immutable order existed, emphasising the systemic unity-in-

[21] For a sardonic appraisal of such tenuous mythologisation, see Russell, *The Earth, Humanity and God*, p.130.

diversity which characterises the conceptual map in its entirety. This, then, is a representation of the *Great Chain of Being*, matching microcosm with macrocosm in a sublime symmetry, yet avoiding homogenous collapse by postulating an equally systematic, divinely-sanctioned hierarchy. Such a pre-Copernican cosmos as depicted by the alchemist extraordinnaire, Robert Fludd, portrays the *anima mundi* as a mediating figure spanning the divide that exists between the divine and the human, between the heavenly and the terrestrial spheres. Of this voluptuous, benevolent meta-persona, Fludd remarks: "She is not a goddess, but the proximate minister of God at whose behest she governs the sub-celestial worlds".[22] Yet, despite this personification of the earth in majestically maternal terms, despite a *weltanschauung* that accommodated the interlocking complexity of the universe, the Medieval-Renaissance mind experienced discomfort at accepting Nature in her own terms, preferring to intervene "benignly and constructively", but in a manner which insinuated the imperfections of the natural world. This attitude of tilling and toiling the imperfections out of existence is most aptly illustrated by the literary classic of the Middle Ages, *The Vision of Piers Ploughman*. Such a discontinuity between conceptual vision of the world and pragmatic action in the world is perhaps attributable to the Medieval proclivity for anthropocentrism – humankind was cast as the pivotal beacon of the sub-celestial realms; spatial proximity to the human domain was understood as a yardstick of value.

In the shadow of its post-classical disillusionment, it would seem that the modern age has fostered something of an antiquarian fixation – a relentless nostalgia for some long-forsaken Golden Age. Ecologically, and in view of the Medieval reverence for the *anima mundi*, one would expect a Western audience to locate such an age in Europe, four centuries distant. Yet, its cultural and religious familiarity merely serves to deflate the utopian pipe-dream; consequently, the dreamers of modernity have sought gratification in more exotic, albeit imagined, climates. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage" is alive and well in the modern psyche, whose penchant for the romanticisation of primal, indigenous consciousness is alarming. Although Native American and other such pre-

[22] Cited in Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.206.

industrial cultures represent examples of a sound, but not infallible, ecocentricity, the modern obsession with stone-age psychiatry can be seen more as a statement of disillusionment with the present than one of admiration for the past. This issue of the eulogisation of primal culture, and the utopian restlessness which it belies, shall be returned to at a later stage, but it suffices to say that it betrays a yearning for a renewed, mythopoeic intimacy with the universe, one much reminiscent of Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship.

The impatience for such a vibrant vision has been demonstrated by the manner in which the *Gaia Hypothesis* has been prematurely and single-mindedly interpreted. The difficulties that exist above and beyond those already prevalent in the scientific nature of the thesis, have been compounded by the mutual suspicion that exists between the scientific and mythological mindsets. Vacillating between the respective mindsets, as has been the case in the licentious interpretation of *Gaia*, merely leads to the confusion of two discrete languages and the destabilisation of meaning to the point that any significance whatsoever can be derived from one's subject matter.

In the present context, this is nowhere more apparent than in the unscrupulous expositions of the eco-feminist movement (which, it seems, is composed more of feminists appropriating ecological categories, than of ecologists lending a sympathetic voice to the feminist cause).

> The priority of the female principle [in Gaia] may partly explain why the Gaia theory finds a sympathetic audience amongst feminist writings wishing to re-image our understanding of God and creation according to feminine characteristics.[23]

Such an unashamedly eristic statement illustrates what hermeneutical misadventure occurs when two distinct methodological languages are confused, when paradigms are permitted to slip, slide and break into one another. Thus, what began as a

[23] C Deane-Drummond, "God and Gaia - Myth or Reality?", *Theology*, 95 (1992), pp.277-85.

creative designation for a biochemical thesis, has been construed by a group of gender-intoxicated protagonists as in some way an unmitigated reference to a female principle. Symbolic allusion has given way to literal statement, broad analogy to direct inference. What is further disturbing is that what is so fervently identified as "the priority of the female principle" is in fact sharply inconspicuous in the altogether genderless body of the thesis, if not to the point of being entirely absent. Indeed, it appears likely that this reading of a feminist import into the *Gaia Hypothesis* is in fact a selection effect, engendered by the feminine associations of the theory's cognomen. One wonders if the same effervescent reaction would have been forthcoming had Lovelock accredited his theory with a title exuding masculine overtones.[24]

What is certain, however, is that unbridled interpretations of the kind examined above, have induced scientific purists to question the validity and value of the *Gaia Hypothesis*. One particularly caustic retort was produced by John Postgate in his sardonically titled essay, "Gaia Gets too Big for Her Boots". In it, Postgate lambastes *Gaia* as being a piece of "pseudoscientific myth-making", "almost medieval", that smacks of "obscurantism, wishful thinking and mysticism".[25] Such a harsh indictment appears justified in the light of such thoroughgoing anthropomorphic depictions of *Gaia* as "stern and tough, always keeping the world warm and comfortable for those who obey the rules, but ruthless in her destruction of those who transgress".[26] One would certainly not be at fault in mistaking such a description for a female re-casting of the intractable Judeo-Christian deity.

His scientific credibility tarnished by repeated salvoes from the scientific community, parodied by the misdirected attention of well-wishing ecological extremists, the embattled Lovelock has sought to dispel the ghosts that haunt his work. Our earlier critique of scientific popularisation is buoyed by Lovelock's

---

[24] In fact, Lovelock indicated that if he had not given his thesis a mythological appellation – which he probably now regrets – he would have assigned it the designation, *Biocybernetic Universal System Tendency*. This would surely have stumped any feminist or similarly anthropomorphic reading of his theory.

[25] John Postgate, "Gaia Gets too Big for Her Boots", *New Scientist*, April 7, 1988, p.60.

[26] James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia* (New York, W W Norton, 1988), p.212.

suggestion that the term "*Gaia*" was employed merely to avoid the "precise but esoteric language"[27] in appealing to an uninitiated lay-public. The most telling statement issued by Lovelock, as apologist, and one which is most damning to the cause of the merry myth-makers, is to be found in his 1979 work, *A New Look at Life on Earth*:

> ... there are passages ... which may read as if infected with the twin blights of anthropomorphism and teleology ... I have frequently used Gaia as a shorthand for the hypothesis itself ... Occasionally it has been difficult, without excessive circumlocution, to avoid talking of Gaia as if she were known to be sentient. This is meant no more seriously than is the appellation "she" when given to a ship by those who sail in her.[28]

Intended projects to use *Gaia* in the name of animism or panentheism, eco-terrorism or eco-feminism, will, if prudence is to be heeded, have to be shelved then. More significantly, Lovelock's thesis, in the absence of any undue conjecture, is unable to bolster any attempt to restore (human) consciousness to a meaningful place in the universe. If approached without any preconceived agenda, it is clearly seen to resist the all too natural tendency to anthropomorphise. Certainly, the theory seems to endow seemingly inanimate processes with goals, purposes and intentions, but then, as indicated by Lovelock himself, such personification is merely semantic residue, a linguistic circumstance or convenience that never in fact transcends the level of language. Metaphorical images frequently serve to supplement and enrich the meaning of a scientific exposition, but they should not be mistaken, especially in the case of such a discipline, for the precise content of such a meaning.

What is certain though is that Lovelock's thesis, if accepted on its own terms, lends weight to the notions of interdependence and symbiosis, not merely between species but between living organisms and their environment. As such, *Gaia*

---

[27] Lovelock quoted in Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.152

[28] Lovelock, *Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth*, pp.ix-x.

encourages the consideration of the natural world in terms of whole, integrated ecosystems, rather than in the reductionistic terms of its constituent parts. Moreover, the theory bears compelling testimony to the precarious position of an ecologically negligent humanity, a reminder to an imperious species that "in the natural evolutionary competition, there is no guarantee that we will find ourselves the survivor".[29] For what is immediately apparent about the *Gaia* process, above and beyond its life-fostering disposition, is an almost impersonal, implacable efficiency in its extirpation of ecological reprobates. In this case, there can be no appeal to grace or compassion, no admission of extenuating circumstances; merely the cold and hard harvest of one's actions.

Theodore Roszak is visibly mindful of the ambiguity of Nature's ways when he warns of too etherealised, too romantic a conception of "Mother Earth", of the *anima mundi*:

> In the classic metaphysical use of the word, this is what 'soul' meant: the principle of bodily life which only God could create, but which functioned at some lower level than the demands of mind or spirit. In Latin 'anima' suggests a closer connection with animality [instinct] than intellect.[30]

Of the gamut of quasi-scientific attempts to endow human consciousness with some cosmic significance, only one other warrants our consideration – the *Anthropic Principle*. As its designation suggests, the theory, although not full-bloodedly anthropocentric, does feed off the egocentricity of a species fixated with its significance in the grand narrative of the universe. Nevertheless, consensus over the precise meaning of the Principle has not by any stretch of the imagination been achieved. Like its more sensationalist Gaian counterpart, the *Anthropic Principle* is susceptible to both 'strong' (mytho-poetically liberal) and 'weak' (scientifically conservative) interpretations, and remains contested in both forms.

---

[29] Joshua Lederberg cited in Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.60.

[30] Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.160.

Simply stated, the theory represents a recrudescence of the argument for creation by design, yet in a manner which, it appears, is in keeping with the methodological secularism of sound science, and not theological dogma. The Principle stems from the observation of the most finely-tuned cosmic "coincidences" which, in concert, have facilitated the evolutionary unfolding of life. Such remarkably fortuitous occurrences include, among others, the rate of expansion of the universe after the Big Bang, the strength of nuclear force required to produce elements crucial to the formation of life, and the ratio of particle to anti-particle.[31] Taken together, the simultaneous emergence of such features – which, even when considered independently, are highly improbable – urge one to believe in a universe guided by some teleological principle; in short, a grand conspiracy to make the cosmos habitable. Paul Davies, an eminent populariser of scientific esoterism, explains:

> It is hard to resist the impression of something – some influence capable of transcending spacetime and the confinements of relativistic causality – possessing an overview of the entire cosmos at the instant of its creation, and manipulating all the causally disconnected parts to go bang with almost the same vigour at the same time, and yet not so exactly co-ordinated as to preclude the small-scale, slight irregularities that eventually formed the galaxies, and us.[32]

What appears to be postulated hereby is some metaphysical tendency that precedes, yet expresses itself through, the physical mechanism of matter and energy. This seemingly indwelling formative predisposition represents an 'original property' not dissimilar to the Aristotelian prime mover, an informer of natural processes which is itself beyond empirical investigation. This post-physical conception of the universe invariably leads us to marvel at the extraordinary sequence of probabilities choreographed by this sublime organising intelligence, especially in producing its *magnum opus*: self-conscious matter, or, more specifically, humankind. After all, this unashamed teleology, this drive towards some preconceived goal, certainly

---

[31] For a more detailed analysis of such factors, see Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, pp.135-6.

[32] Paul Davies, *The Accidental Universe* (Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.110-111.

tempts one to consider that, in a sense, "the universe is adapted to man",[33] that humanity, that unprecedented package of self-conscious intelligence, is the very culmination of a maturation process that has followed its predetermined course since the explosive inception of the universe. By some enigmatic blueprint, matter has been endowed with a longing for consciousness, for some deliberating awareness of itself; in the acumen of the human mind it has attained just such an apotheosis.

According to such a view, the *telos* sought by the physical universe is the observorship of itself or, as George Seielstad puts it, "a discerning consciousness rescues a universe from non-entity by recognising that universe's existence".[34] Thus, according to such a cosmology, mind is regarded as the *raison d'être* of the biographical narrative of matter, as it perpetually strives for its own dematerialisation.

The curiously paradoxical, almost circular, logic underpinning such conjecture is unravelled by physicist Fang Lizhi:

> We are only capable of understanding a universe in which beings capable of understanding it could evolve.
>
> The only kind of universe that is understandable is one that is able to evolve beings capable of understanding it.[35]

With little difficulty, such interpretative twists and turns can be construed as a crude selection effect, an outcome distorted by the very act of observing it. Thus, our highly improbable, but clearly possible, existence in the universe may have tinctured our observation of that universe; through hindsight, we may have falsely imposed the authority of the present on the physio-chemical conditions of the distant past. Therefore, what the 'strong' version of the *Anthropic Principle*

---

[33] John Wheeler's succinct phrase cited in Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.127.

[34] George Seielstad, *At the Heart of the Web : The Inevitable Genesis of Intelligent Life* (Boston : Harcourt, 1989), p.271.

[35] Fang Lizhi cited in Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.122.

regards as evidence for a teleological universe, may in fact be little more than the haphazard product of a purely random cosmos. We are entitled only to submit to the quirky nature of the laws of probability, to marvel at the splendid progeny of blind chance, but not to use such an astounding coincidence as a springboard into the heady heights of metaphysical speculation. By analogy, the 'weak' Principle beckons us to "imagine the wonderment of a species of mud worms who discover that if the constant of thermometric conductivity of mud were different by a small percentage they would not be able to survive".[36]

The lesson is unequivocal: limited perception might lead a species of no exceptional significance to imagine wrongly that it was the consummation of a goal-orientated universe. It is inevitable, then, that in a scientific discipline where Ockham's razor still holds sway and economy of explanation is paramount, the metaphysical tease of the 'stronger' *Anthropic Principle* is to be dismissed in favour of its more understated, 'weaker' counterpart.

In the present chapter, we have remarked on the first of the two fundamental projects of an ecological age: in general, the marriage of mind and matter in some unified conceptual theory; in particular, the rehabilitation of human consciousness, of the living, thinking, feeling psyche, to a position of importance within an evolving universe. The respective forms of the *Gaia Hypothesis* and the *Anthropic Principle* which have been labelled as 'strong' and which have been extensively appropriated by the ecological imagination, serve precisely this agenda. That these mythico-poetically augmented versions have little in common with the original forms of such theories is of little consequence. For our present purposes, it is unnecessary to affirm or deny the veracity of their truth-claims.

It is paramount to our interests, however, to scrutinise the methodology and evidence from which such assertions have been derived. For all we know, the earth might indeed be a living organism, but this notion cannot as yet be bandied around as if it were an incontrovertible fact – still less, can it be regarded as a

[36] John Earman cited in Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, p.133.

corollary (intentional or not) of the *Gaia Hypothesis*. In short, such assertions are *non sequitur*: the conclusion reached has simply outrun the evidence used. This much has already been confirmed.

The unwarranted rampancy with which these biochemical theses have been transformed into a pseudo-scientific muddle has already been well documented in the present chapter. What such precipitate emotionalism reveals however – apart from simply unsound logic – is a remarkable, almost desperate, proclivity for anthropo-centrism. Both theories have been installed as front-line weaponry in the ecological arsenal; yet above and beyond any ecocentric significance derived therefrom, there exists an abiding preoccupation with (human) self-consciousness, with (human) sentience, with human peace of mind. The liberal interpretation of the *Anthropic Principle* wallows in disguised speciesism – the value of planetary life is indeed raised but only by the bootstraps of a supremely elevated humanity.

The 'strong' form of *Gaia*, meanwhile, has served to console those who, failing to see themselves reflected in the vastness of the universe, have languished in cosmic loneliness. To accept the literal translation of *Gaia* is to be initiated into a new global community of beasts and bugs, people and pebbles, headed by the supreme matriarch herself. At a purely cerebral level, this would be the case, but, emotively, the maternally human nature of *Gaia* would seem to accord us humans a preferential status among the creeping, crawling denizens of her kingdom. Thus, at a conscious level, the 'stronger' variants of each thesis parade as theoretical resources for a new biocentric culture; yet, the very spuriousness of such formulations would suggest that the constraints of reason have been ignored by slapdash emotive forces, forces which now seek re-articulation in the ecological neo-romanticism of the present day. These resemble the mythopoeic, religio-poetic energies which, tapping into the vibrant archetypal terrain, ensured the psychological health of pre-industrial communities. But, denatured and uprooted by contemporary urban-industrial society, the character of such energies in such a context is more akin to an expression of neurosis, of psychological "dis-ease". Thus, the unbridled appeal to the mythico-poetic faculties examined in the 'strong'

theories above is unmethodical and impetuous, but nevertheless attempts to express a point and to satisfy a need. The undisciplined vacillation between the languages of myth and science attests to such a lack of composure, but it also bears testimony to a deeply felt need to re-establish a dynamic and life-nurturing rapport with the vast non-human cosmos. The aspiration underpinning this attempted alignment of divergent discourses, and mythopoeic re-enchantment of human "being-in-the-world", is certainly not an ignoble one, and nor are its half-formed insights into the interrelatedness of all life erroneous, yet passion alone does not afford licence to skirt the constraints of sound methodological reasoning, and abstract allusions and dim intimations simply cannot be passed off as an ideological bedrock upon which to found a responsible culture of ecocentrism.

In conclusion, then, there is an air of desperation about this pseudo-scientific enterprise, not so much for the preservation of Nature as for the preservation of the portrait of human importance. The humanity gesturing through this series of misdirected ideas is not one convinced of its prominence; rather, it is one yearning, at an emotional (perhaps spiritual) level, for evidence of its significance within an unresponsive universe. Clearly, where such assurance is not readily apparent, it is to be manufactured. In their essence, the popular versions of the *Gaia Hypothesis* and *Anthropic Principle* serve to repudiate the "ultimate Copernican idea" that "not only are we of no conceivable consequence, but even our universe is of no conceivable consequence".[37] As one, their rejoinder rings out: "the universe, in all its subtle complexity is of more consequence than might appear ... but only in so far as humanity is of supreme importance". Apart from any ecocentric value that might be derived from it, and though animated by an authentic desire to reintegrate our prodigal species into the folds of organic Nature, such a notion, when married to an unsound methodology, comes to yield a furtive narcissism. In fact, together with the ethical beautification of the modern world – the subject of the following chapter – they represent an anthropocentric seduction of the Western mind unprecedented in its subtlety. On this count, we are compelled to regard much of contemporary ecophilosophy as accomplice to such imposture.

[37] James Gunn quoted in Alan Lightman and Roberta Brawer, *Origins : The Lives and Worlds of Modern Cosmologists* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1990), p.34.

CHAPTER 2

ETHICAL HUMANISM AND THE REDEMPTION OF NATURE

Through the characterisation of something as a 'value' what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for man's estimation.

Martin Heidegger

Thus far, we have seen that the attempted ideological reformulation of ecological science has generated a bundle of tensions, ambiguities and contradictions. Of these, three have been most prominent: first, misrepresentations of what are in fact finely nuanced hypotheses have resulted in fanciful interpretations which claim for themselves the persuasive label of *bona fide* science. In such cases, ecological ideology has outrun the verifiable limits of ecological science. Second, an apparent symbol-blindness has culminated in the confusion of mythico-poetic embellishment (symbolic language) with scientific-empirical description (literal discourse), and of analogical assertions with those that are inferential in nature. And finally, although purporting to be ecocentric in nature, the ideological configurations examined exhibit a homocentric preoccupation with human consciousness, origin and destiny that exceeds concern for the biosphere as a whole. Accordingly, the conception of the natural is subordinated to that of the human, from which it derives its symbolic significance.

Yet, despite the discredited scientism with which the ecological movement adorns itself, eco-ideology can claim to have appropriated conceptual resources which survive scrutiny, most notably the notions of "interdependence" or the "inter-connectedness of all life" – ideas which have become the catch phrases of

ecocentrism. Previous chapters have already examined the scientific validity of an interpenetrative world; amidst their tangled offshoots, the more understated forms of quantum physics, the *Gaia Hypothesis* and the *Anthropic Principle* all bear testimony to the reality of such qualities. According to the new systemic or organismic depiction of the planet, constituent parts only reveal their full significance when understood in terms of the dynamics of the whole. Thus, the part can be compared to a mere strand in an inseparable, integral web of relationships, and the world, regarded as a system of mutual dependencies.

Such a biocentric paradigm has been qualified by a host of descriptive terms – "*individuals-in-community*", "*unity-in-diversity*" – each conveying a sense of the complementarity of parts and whole which exists at the heart of global homeostasis. The new matrix of concern, then, has become the tapestry of connections between centres and not the interests of any one centre. This is in contradistinction to the classical models which depicted the world with machine-like precision and simplicity as the sum of its discrete parts; consequently, knowledge of such a world was conceived of as a compendium of individual, frequently unrelated, dogmas.

A universe, whose meaning emerges from the spontaneous and harmonious interaction of manifold causes, holds special implications for an understanding of human personhood and its affinity with the natural world. Whereas previously humankind pursued its self-interest with the imperious assumption that it represented an enclave distinct and independent of natural processes, present knowledge of the fragility of the biosphere and the precariousness of humanity within it, show such an arrogance to be self-defeating. This dramatic – indeed tragic – irony is well encapsulated by E F Schumacher's sentiment:

> Modern man does not experience himself as part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature,

> forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side.[1]

Yet one does not necessarily win the battle by abandoning it (although Schumacher's point is clear). In fact, such competitive talk of winners and losers breeds an attitude of "enlightened self-interest" towards the environment – a stance in which humankind subscribes to a preservation ethic, not in deference to the inherent value of the natural world, but merely because it is expedient to do so. In such a case, a human victory, albeit one of compromise, is the *raison d'être* of an ecological ethic.

Such a rampant anthropocentrism can only be obviated by a recognition of human embeddedness in nature, a recognition which, at a communal level, dissolves the boundary between nature and culture, and which, at a personal level, frames the individual within a broader field of relatedness. The holographic universe, in which each part reflects the whole, urges us to understand ourselves as a living system-within-a-system, as a tide within a great electromagnetic ocean of sound waves, smells and mechanical vibrations. That the mere flapping of a butterfly's wings may change tomorrow's weather is an astounding testimony to the delicate sensitivity of living systems,[2] so much so that "... we can never know how wide a circle of disturbance we produce in the harmonies of nature when we throw the smallest pebble into the ocean of organic life".[3] Thus, the physical discreteness of objects, animate and inanimate, belies the field of relationality in which they are implicated. The physical self can be understood atomistically as "... an arrangement of organs, feelings and thoughts – a 'me' surrounded by a hard body boundary: skin, clothes, and insular habits", but the more complete portrait is of

> ... a self as a centre of organisation, constantly drawing on and influencing the surroundings ... The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond

[1] E F Schumacher cited in John Seymour, *The Ultimate Heresy* (Hartland : Green Books, 1989).

[2] For an account of such infinite sensitivity, see F David Peat's description of the "butterfly effect" : F David Peat, *The Philospher's Stone* (New York : Bantam Books, 1991), p.199.

[3] George Marsh cited in Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1991), p.285.

> surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. It reveals itself ennobled and extended ... as part of the landscape and the ecosystem.[4]

At a physical level, then, the human person is a manifestation of a complex, novelty-producing universe, yet the web of relatedness reaches far beyond the "epidermal" layer of human identity to its more profound depths of consciousness. To the responsive psyche, the natural world is replete with meaning, perpetually shaping human self-awareness in relation to its environment, impinging even upon the cognitive and emotive lives of those who ignore it. The *terra natura* is the supreme reference point in any holistic consideration of personhood. Without it, the centre falls out from one's anthropology, leaving no roof overhead, no firm ground underfoot:

> If the world is one's body and one's consciousness not only images in its specific content the world around, but the very structure of one's psyche and rational faculties are formed through adaptive interaction with the ecological organisation of nature, then one's self, both physically and psychologically, gradiently merges from its central core outwardly to the environment.
>
> One cannot, thus, draw hard and fast boundaries between oneself, either physical or spiritually, and the environment.[5]

This notion of the all-pervasive immersion of the human within the natural is one that is difficult to argue against. Its resistance to scrutiny and corroboration by scientific inquiry has resulted in its elevation to ecological dogma and it is now employed to bolster the cause of ecocentrism – systems of thought that seek to overcome the collusive madness of anthropocentrism by contextualising the human species within the web of life.

---

[4] Paul Shephard cited in J Baird Callicott, "The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology", *Environmental Ethics*, 8 (1986), pp.301-16.

[5] Ibid., p.310.

Thus far, despite the twitching of our deconstructive instruments, we can in all reasonableness champion the principle of radical interrelatedness. As a descriptive assertion it rests upon a sound base, bearing methodical testimony to the remarkable fragility of the planet without resorting to metaphysical conundrums or mythopoeic embellishment. Difficulty arises, however, when the notion of "relationality" is abstracted and decontextualised, and used as a conceptual vessel to be filled with a content that has little in common with its original import. Such a difficulty is prevalent in the modern ecologist's use of the term, stemming in part from the natural teleological bent of ecological thought.

As a generic constraint of earthly life, the idea of "interconnectedness" is beyond reproof; what is under scrutiny are the finer textures, the subtler meaning of such relationality. At this point, it is important to keep in mind that what evidence there is for such interconnectedness of life is derived largely from observation and analysis of natural process – it is an inscrutable reality of physical life in this universe and it remains so without recourse to human meaning. What extraneous meaning, then, has humanity derived from this empirical reality?

The tendency among ecologists – and quite disturbingly so – has been to translate the category of interdependence into one that has an unambiguous ethical significance. Expressed differently, the greater number of eco-ethicists have attempted to derive a prescriptive "*ought*" from what was intended from the outset to be a descriptive "*is*"; and the normative valency so deduced concurs (quite remarkably!) with the tenets of ethical humanism. Thus, the rhetoric of eco-ethicism is couched in the language of the moral imperative – to love, to respect, to affirm life – a language, it is purported, which is spoken quite eloquently by Nature herself. Such a strong claim is consolidated by eco-ethicist, Thomas Colwell, who asserts that "human values are founded in objectively determinable ecological relations within Nature".[6] Embellishing his position, Colwell goes further in

[6] Thomas B Colwell cited in Tim Hayward, *Ecological Thought : An Introduction* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1995), p.33.

equating the homeostatic connectedness of natural systems with the moral interpretation of such a reality:

> The balance of Nature provides an objective normative model which can be utilised as the ground of human value ... The balance of Nature is, in other words, a kind of ultimate value ... It is a natural norm, not a product of a human convention or supernatural authority.[7]

Such a sentiment is perplexing in the least, and by the very nature of its rhetoric, represents the affliction which has all but consumed contemporary ecophilosophy. That an "objective" model can be rashly transmitted into a bulwark for "human value" which is by nature subjective, is in itself an indictment of Colwell's theoretical consistency. The absurd nature of his assertion is compounded by the description of this "ground of value" as being simultaneously human and not human. The reality is that Colwell's so-called "natural" values of balance and harmony are little more than the supremely human values of beauty and goodness trussed up in the attire of verifiable fact. It is of little consequence to retort that, when communicating with Nature, the is/ought dichotomy dissolves, allowing natural values to shine through of their own accord. To do so would amount to openly and unashamedly endorsing the use of the naturalistic fallacy; for indeed, Colwell's exposition and others of its kind are paragons of such fallacious reasoning.

In the light of their duplicity, the professed biocentric value of such eco-ethical formulations must be doubted. On a purely theoretical level, such responses seem to pay obeisance to that long-standing biocentric adage, issued by Aldo Leopold: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise".[8] Again as a broad theoretical configuration, the thought of eco-ethicists professes to subscribe to a transpersonal conception of the ecological self, one which "extends beyond one's

---

[7] Ibid., p.34.

[8] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1949), pp.224-5.

egoistic, biographical, or personal sense of self to include all beings".[9] This ecocentric paradigm is swiftly dissolved, however, when this complex web of living significance is construed to be little more than the manifold, ubiquitous reflection of ethical humanism. Effectively, what such eco-ethical casuistry concedes in one breath, it overrides in the next.

An authentic ecocentricity – which is the goal of any sound ecological vision – indeed arises out of the recognition that "the balance of nature is the ground for human values", but it does so without imprinting preconceived human values – as Colwell does – upon this natural terrain. Yet, the question remains: can any self-evident moral truths be extrapolated from the simple observation of natural processes?

The philosophical category of "interdependence" may suggest so, but then such a notion remains an abstract generality until contextualised within the complexity of natural structures. Once contextualised thus, "natural interdependence" acquires a strangely ambivalent quality that seems to confound any moral imperative; for, in reality, the interrelatedness of Nature hinges as much on conflict and competition as it does on symbiosis, or co-operation. To speak of harmony in Nature is not to speak of some uniformly benevolent relationship between all parts; it is to speak of an overarching coherence, a holistic order that emerges as a direct result of the ambiguity that exists between parts.

The insights of *Deep Systems Theory*[10] serve to corroborate such a sentiment. According to its formulation, a truly systemic world exhibits multiple levels of complexity, each of which is a discrete pattern, but which in unison constitute an integrated world system. Although each level of such a system displays its own peculiarities and while each represents a separate rung in the hierarchy of complexity, such levels or strata can only be understood in association with others

[9] Warwick Fox cited in Hayward, *Ecological Thought : An Introduction*, p.72.

[10] For a comprehensive account of Deep Systems Theory, consult Mario Bunge's *A World of Systems* (Boston : Reidel, 1979).

of the system. More precisely, each level simultaneously draws upon and yet transcends those below it, while informing those above it. By way of illustration, one can depict biospheric life as a system, which ranges at its least complex levels, from atoms and molecules, through to cells and organs, and further to individuals and societies until finally culminating, at its highest level, in the complete planetary ecosphere.

If one is to draw some ethical conclusion from such an organismic portrayal then the ultimate moral referent is undoubtedly the highest level of complexity – the planet itself – for it is the pinnacle of the systemic hierarchy that supplies the internal logic of the entire system, and therefore subsumes all subordinate levels without neutralising them. Now, authentic biocentricity would urge us to locate the human species at a prominent but ultimately relative level of importance on this systemic map. As such we are subject to the dictates of the complete system, which, by virtue of the system's manifold and dynamic nature, are situational, and therefore inherently ambiguous. That at one moment, a certain level may exhibit the most symphonic symbiosis, while another may appear chaotic and volatile, attests to this. What is important is harmony in the whole, a harmony which might manifest itself as conflict at a local level. Simply stated, anything is permitted in the interests of holistic harmony. Nature, red in tooth and claw, is as crucial to the maintenance of such a balance as is nature, benign and placid. In the light of the insoluble ambivalence of natural interdependence, the ecological quandary can be viewed less as a moral crisis than as a *crisis of moral authority*.

Ignorance of the finer points of natural relationality is almost certainly the mainspring of recent attempts to marry ecological concerns to the traditional ethical preoccupation with human emancipation and enlightenment. Once the foundation of natural interrelatedness is wrongly homogenised as uniform benevolence and goodwill, it then becomes the lapdog to the most saccharine of ethical systems. Thus, liberation from coercive and exploitative human relations is seen not only as a favourable end, but one that Mother Nature herself commends. After all, so the logic runs, human exploitation and oppression does not share in the spirit of

interrelatedness and is therefore out of tune with the very fabric of reality itself. This matching of standardised human relations with a standardised conception of natural relations has spawned responses which claim themselves to be ecocentric in nature while rallying to the cause of the marginalised sectors of human society. Thus, the plight of under-privileged classes has been fused with that of underprivileged species in the pressing voice of eco-socialism. Socialism, it is claimed, is not only a more viable option in pragmatic terms in that it curtails the extravagance of capitalist economies, but, that at an ideological level, Marxist social theory resonates with the very principles of natural interdependence. Thus, much has been made of such Marxist assertions as the following:

> In tearing away the object of his production from man, estranged labour therefore tears away from him his species-life, his true species-objectivity and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him.[11]

As an ecological statement, the preceding passage is problematic. In it, socio-economic emancipation is clearly understood as a re-acquaintance with humanity's lost "body", "nature" and with what Marx labels as "his species-life". Such naturalistic discourse appeals to the harmonious order of the natural world, which is epitomised by the "naturalness" of the Marxists' state, but which is ruptured by estranged labour relations. Difficulty arises, however, in that Marx intimates that humanity's "species-life", its indwelling organicism, accords it a superior position to that of animals. What Marx laments, then, is the loss of this "advantage", a term which by its utilitarian connotation, evokes a power relation in which the non-human world is subordinated to human interest. What such ecological duplicity demonstrates is the extreme difficulty with which the ethics of human self-interest is able to be allied with an ecocentric ethos in which human interests are not only balanced by countless others, but are subsumed by the interests of the whole, of the planet at large.

[11] Karl Marx cited in Peter Dickens, *Society and Nature : Towards a Green Social Theory* (Hertfordshire : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.68.

Some with Marxist leanings recognise the thorniness of the issue and, rather than approach it tentatively, provoke controversy by their unapologetic frankness. Eco-socialist David Pepper[12] acknowledges that socialism, as a political ideology, is not, and should not pretend to be, ecocentric. Its concerns are traditionally humanistic, its aims, the end of socio-economic subjugation and the attainment of material welfare for all humanity, "through growth of productive force via the domination of nature".[13] Such brazenly exploitative discourse would make the doughtiest of ecologists shudder, but Pepper is careful to qualify his "domination" as "collective conscious control by humans of their relationship with nature" which implies stewardship rather than mastery.

The tenacity of Pepper's exposition is admirable. Where others have spuriously attempted to read ecocentric significance into socialist tenets at the expense of theoretical integrity, Pepper has unashamedly pronounced such human liberation projects to be homocentric with little regard for the dictates of a biocentric world-view, except where expedient. This of course does not altogether refute the ecological value of socialism, but it does cast a sobering light upon it, especially with regard to its supposed affinity with the ideology of interdependence. The greater ecological value will undoubtedly be derived from an ideological formulation that emphasises the proximity that exists between nature and culture, and not one that is founded upon the differentiation of the human and the non-human realms.

Such an ideological formulation has purportedly been found in the principles of *Process Philosophy*, which, since its inauguration by Alfred North Whitehead, has been wielded with enthusiasm by the ecophilosophical enterprise, and which now exists in the forefront of its intellectual repertoire. Such appropriation is with due cause, for process thought undertakes from the outset the pre-eminent ecocentric task of reconceptualising both human and divine identity in terms of its profound kinship with the living cosmos. Yet, process thinking pays little

[12] David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism : From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London : Routledge, 1993).

[13] Ibid., p.221.

deference to the categories of traditional sacred and secular cosmologies. Instead of the classical emphasis on inert substance, inflexible structure, and separate particle, such as in the Newtonian billiard ball model or the Leibnizian theory of monads, such a philosophy postulates the primacy of interdependence, interprets reality as a series of interconnected events and dynamic relationships, and describes the world as one comprised of "finite actualities".[14] In keeping with the tenor of the *New Science*, much of which has been assimilated by process thought, such a paradigm seeks both to assert the primacy of time by describing reality as an experiential and organic process, and to subvert dualistic and reductionistic dogmas by affirming the interpenetration of individual and environment. Similarly, the monarchical model of God with its associated attributes of immutability, impassibility and omnipotence, is rejected and supplanted with a more inclusive theology in which God represents an emergent and "persuasive"[15] creative purpose which manifests itself through the process of evolutionary change. In short, the central process doctrine is in every way an ally to the ecocentric propagandist, who faithfully recapitulates its formative precepts.

What renders this doctrine particularly relevant to our present analysis is its problematic treatment of the principle of natural "interrelatedness" which serves as a keynote of the position. That it applies this principle inconsistently is perhaps attributable to the reality that the process ideology attempts simultaneously to be a natural philosophy and a metaphysical doctrine – that is, it attempts to marry both a respect for the natural sciences and a propensity for metaphysical speculation within an uneasy and awkward alliance. On the one hand, the principle of (organic) interdependence is expatiated through astute and consistent commentary on the idea of the historicity of all existence, through the recasting of experience as an event, and by a delight in the rugged, unmediated, and indeed, unmeditative, playfulness of the organic universe. In the true spirit of ecocentrism, process philosophy begins by attempting to take seriously a world fully incarnate. In this,

[14] John B Cobb and David R Griffin, *Process Theology : An Introductory Exposition* (Belfast : Christian Journals Limited, 1977), p.63.

[15] Ibid., p.29.

it largely makes good, but, by its end, it has succeeded only in sublimating those coarser dimensions of physical existence which it had earlier invoked. This etherealisation of the organic universe is facilitated by frequent forays into speculative metaphysics. Thus, having threatened to forge too close an identification of humanity and God with organic Nature, process philosophy endeavours to extricate itself from the perils of such thinking by positing God as not merely the "ground of novelty"[16] but as a "persuasive" drive towards the enhancement of "enjoyment"[17] – an enigmatic quality which is realised through "freedom and self-creativity".[18] "The direction of the evolutionary process is", it is asserted, "... toward more complex actualities, resulting from God's basic creative purpose, which is the evocation of actualities with greater and greater enjoyment".[19]

Thus, what initially appeared as the purposeless play of the living universe is here subsumed by a nuanced teleology, some incipient divine purpose which both manifests itself in, and is described by, the process of evolutionary change, but which "persuades" that process towards a particular end. By such a scheme, the category of interdependence begins to lose its descriptive bent, and is, by grades, transmuted into an evaluative concept. "Enjoyment", the maximisation of which is the *raison d'être* of evolutionary change, is accorded both aesthetic and moral value, for, at varied times, it is associated with "beauty",[20] "harmony"[21] and the ethos of altruism.[22] By the same measure, evil, which hinders the realisation of "enjoyment", is identified with qualities of "discord"[23] and "triviality".[24] In a theodicy which is not altogether novel for it has precedents in the tradition of

---

[16] Ibid., p.28.

[17] Ibid., p.17.

[18] Ibid., p.29.

[19] Ibid., p.64.

[20] Ibid., p.65.

[21] Ibid., p.64.

[22] "..., an occasion of experience in creating itself does not aim solely at its own private enjoyment; it also aims to create itself in such a way as to make a definite contribution to the enjoyment of others". Ibid., p.27.

[23] Ibid., p.70.

[24] Ibid., p.70.

humanistic theology, process philosophy considers such evil to be a natural and necessary, though undesirable, accompaniment to the creative outpouring of the divine reality. In other words, this position seeks to avoid the dilemmas of traditional theistic theodicies by holding God responsible, but not indictable, for the presence of evil in the created order. But even this theodicy is an unsatisfactory one for it relies too fully on a metaphysical buttress - the *a priori* and, from the perspective of the naturalist, largely groundless, claim that God is the *demiurge* of recalcitrant matter, and yet has simultaneously endowed such matter with an intrinsic leaning towards some noble purpose. The result is a rather unconvincing attempt to ennoble "matter" by explaining away its ruder qualities in terms of some divine and moral purpose which can be neither empirically verified nor intellectually corroborated. At the final count, the process metaphysic displays an increasing unwillingness to accommodate the insoluble ambivalence encapsulated in the category of interdependence and reciprocity, and, for this reason, it represents a problematic resource for an ecocentric ethos which endeavours to prioritise a vision of a God and a humanity fully immersed in the natural universe.

The same ethical misappropriation of the category of natural relatedness is prevalent in recent Christian thought, particularly in the revival of Trinitarian theology. This renaissance of Trinitarian reflection has evidently been quickened by the advent of secular interest in relationality, and may even have been prompted by the ground-breaking paradigm of the new science (see Chapter 1). The same weaknesses of thought are readily apparent.

The theological formulation in question centres on the Trinity as the superlative embodiment of *perichoresis*, or active interpenetration of persons. The relationship shared by the triad of divine persons is an eternal communion without hierarchy, an equilibrium in which each person implies the personhood of the remaining two, yet which does not dissolve the individuality or particularity of each. Their union, it is argued, presupposes their differentiation. Moreover, the profound relationality that characterises the three-fold godhead can be perceived in the pattern of existence in

the natural "created" world. Thus, Colin Gunton, a noted Trinitarian theologian, is able to write that:

> ... the eternal being of God can be shown to correspond to the structures of universal human relationality. By this is meant that because the Trinitarian concepts reflect the being of God, we should be prepared to find them echoed in some way in human thought and in the structures of the created world ... [for] there should be no absolute distinction between revelation and reason ...[25]

In this passage we are presented with an attempt to forge a direct link between the relationality of the natural world and that supposedly displayed in the unity-in-diversity of the Trinity. Gunton suggests that they are of the same type, that the Trinity is the apotheosis of the pattern of interconnectedness to be found in the "created" order of Nature; indeed, that a blurred distinction exists between revelation (divine order) and reason (created order). As a theological statement, this may avoid reproach – any particular understanding of divine revelation is difficult to counter from outside the tradition; but it is Gunton's conception of reason and its findings that are perplexing. As before, the difficulty stems from the misrepresentation of natural or "created" interdependence. What qualities of the created order, then, has the "reason" of Gunton and others descried? Leonardo Boff, undertaking the same Trinitarian project, proposes that the "*union-communion-perichoresis*" revealed in the Trinity and consolidated in the natural order is in fact the "co-operation and collaboration among all to produce the common good",[26] is "union, love, hypostatic relationships".[27] Employing similar rhetoric, Boff goes further to suggest that:

> ... the Trinitarian communion between the divine Three, the union between them in love and vital interpenetration, can serve as a source of inspiration,

---

[25] Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.211.

[26] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Tunbridge Wells : Burns & Oates, 1990), p.119.

[27] Ibid., p.5.

> as a Utopian goal that generates models of successively diminishing differences ... It speaks to the oppressed in their quest and struggle for integral liberation.[28]

A disturbing duplicity exists in such Trinitarian usage of the category of interdependence. At opportune times, the communion of the Trinity is construed as the very paragon of the relationality that underpins the structures of the created world. At other times, the Trinity is advertised as the blueprint for a utopian goal, for a social relationality that has not yet been achieved. This is a puzzling dichotomy, for at a basic level of understanding the two truth-claims are irreconcilable. The former is a descriptive statement, a characterisation of what already exists; the latter is a prescriptive statement, a characterisation of what ought to exist.

In all frankness, however, we would have to regard the latter interpretation as embodying most fully the substance of such Trinitarian thought. At the final count, what it seeks is some better dispensation, a perfection of the human creature and a refinement of moral purpose. As such, the Trinitarian *perichoresis* is little more than a theoretical ruse - an attempt to provide the humanist dream with sanction and substance by writing it into both some providential order and the fabric of Nature. This etherealised interdependence has little in common with the rugged, natural variety - the only variety of which we have direct knowledge. We have to assume then that the Trinitarian appeal to the relationality of the "created world" is purely nominal, an attempt to pass off empty conceptual shells as the stuff of reality. This seems all the more probable when one considers the many appeals by Trinitarian thinkers to a need for the redemption, for the divine perfection of the natural world - a certain insinuation that the "created world" is deficient in some way, that the relationality it exhibits is not entirely in accordance with God's plan (or, should we say, in accordance with ethical humanism):

> It is here that the notion of art and science as the perfecting of the material world is important, but also

[28] Ibid., pp.6-7.

> and more important is that of human life as that which is to be offered to the Father in Christ and through Spirit, agents alike of divine creation, redemption and perfection ... the created world in its teleology forms, or rather should form, the framework for the growing towards perfection of its human inhabitants.[29]

As aspiring ecocentrists, we are driven to reject such an ethical beautification of nature, for not only does it misconstrue the dynamic reality of the world, but it conceals an anthropocentric conceit beneath its sheen of altruism and benevolence. It is simply abortive thinking to recast the notion of natural interdependence in terms of the fixed tenets of traditional ethical systems or political ideologies. What does Nature know of social justice? Does she subscribe to principles of egalitarianism? Does she aspire to the ideals of love and compassion? Such ideals – as any are – are merely grist to the mill of Nature's supreme goal – global homeostasis or balance. This, then, is Nature's language, constituted by many sub-dialects which, when heard independently, appear discordant but which, in unison, express a sublime harmony. The monolithic chord of ethical humanism has little place in this delicate symphony – it merely seeks to standardise the many-layered voice of life, to drown out its darker melodies, to erase its disagreeable choruses.

Our new challenge then is to reassess the position of humanity in this many-splintered system, for, if we indeed share a profound relationship with the natural world, if we are indeed connected with her to the depths of our being, then surely we echo within ourselves her many tunes, both her softest strains and crashing cacophonies: Nature at sublime heights, and Nature, "red in tooth and claw".

This challenge demands that we retain the original ecocentric ambition, but begin by preserving it from any extraneous and pre-existing moral scheme – that is, we are called upon to frame the human-Nature rapport in resolutely non-moral terms. Yet, it is not our intention to banish once and for all evaluative discourse from the narrative of ecological self-understanding, for to do so would simply perpetuate that rift between science and ethics, between knowledge and value, which is the

[29] Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many*, pp.208-9.

bane of any living philosophy. But we recognise, too, the greater danger that exists in the premature and naive employment of such an evaluative discourse. Like the contemporary ecocentrist, we too seek that golden formula, that elusive alchemy, within which truth and representation, truth and value, find a happy conjunction. But, in contrast to the rash opportunism and rootless eclecticism with which so much contemporary ecophilosophy is awash, we resolve to seek it through the measured formulation of a genuinely ecocentric hermeneutic. We begin such a critical task by playing the naturalist – that is, by freeing ourselves from the constraints of moral ontology and divine teleology, and re-examining the qualities exhibited by Nature as *phenomenon*.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVIL UNDER FORM OF BABOON

It is dangerous to show man too clearly how much he resembles the beast without at the same time showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to allow him too clear a vision of his greatness without his baseness. It is even more dangerous to leave him in ignorance of both. But it is very profitable to show him both.

Blaise Pascal

Our descent, then, is the origin of our evil passions!! – The devil under form of Baboon is our Grandfather.

Charles Darwin

In order to render itself persuasive, an opinion is called to parry and counter doubters and critics. In the case of a monologous position paper such as this, the critics are silent but impending, and grunts of objection might already be imagined. After all, the previous chapter has comprised a sobering polemic against the ecological approach of ethical humanism, a system, we must concede, which is paved with the best of intentions, but that is all. Yet, we have not done so with impunity and, for the sake of both my own equanimity and that of my readers, I shall attempt to anticipate these unspoken reservations and counter them in turn.

First, the theoretical cogency of our presupposition might be questioned. It has been made clear from the outset that this study aligns itself with the *Deep Ecology* enterprise in so far as it echoes the call for a radical and holistic re-appraisal of the human condition and for the fostering of an "old-new" culture of ecocentrism. Consequently, we have hitherto lampooned anthropocentrism for its ecological

precariousness and sought to expose the duplicity of those systems of thought that parade as ecocentric but which, in effect, conceal a treacherous anthropocentric strain. This ecocentric-anthropocentric dichotomy makes for a neat, manageable conceptual package, but is it grounded in good sense? Is such a dichotomy not itself a conceptual construct and as such an artefact of human experience and language? Ecocentrism is a human perspective, and, as such, is linguistically and culturally enframed. As an ideological position, it has no reality apart from the historico-temporal experience of the human community and therefore is, by rights, anthropocentric. To state otherwise is nonsensical for, after all, the human creature cannot understand and interact with the natural world, but from a human perspective. The ecocentrist, then, who believes that he/she has transcended an all too human self-centredness in order to commune with Nature has merely been seduced by a chimera.

The lesson is categorical - one cannot escape one's "*humanness*"; an attempted escape would itself be a plainly human aspiration. Yet to level such an objection against the ecocentric position is to misunderstand the issue in question. Any ecologist, whether of the more extreme or conservative variety, would have little difficulty granting the inevitable humanness of all ecological undertakings. Such a reality is self-evident, is axiomatic – it describes the inevitable and, as such, it can do little to dampen the spirit of ecocentrism, which does not merely seek to describe, but more importantly seeks to understand and therefore to delineate, an informed choice. Ecocentrism has never disavowed its status as a human perspective. That which is *ecocentric* must not be equated with the *non-human*, nor must the *human* be regarded as, by nature, *human-centred*.[1] Accordingly, both ecocentrism and anthropocentrism should be understood as distinct strategies for understanding our very "*humanness*". In this case, we have elected the former as a more appropriate strategy in an ecological context.

[1] Philosopher and ecologist, Max Oelschlaeger (*The Idea of Wilderness* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1991), p.297), echoes this point when he asserts that "the issue is not choosing between a human and a non-human viewpoint but discussing the relative adequacies and inadequacies of an anthropocentric and ecocentric perspective".

The second hypothetical objection emerges from the first, but is of a more profound significance and is one that could in all probability be levelled repeatedly throughout this study. In our rejoinder to the first theoretical critique, we have stressed the importance of distinguishing the broadly ecocentric from the simply non-human. Expressed differently, this is a warning against the conflation of the human with the non-human. And yet, throughout the preceding chapters much has been made of the close affiliation or rapport that exists between the human creature and its living environment at all levels of its being. It has been suggested that it is simply erroneous to believe that an adequate formulation of human personhood can be arrived at without far-reaching recourse to the natural environment. Deep Systems theory attests to this – the systemic, holographic world it describes, locates the human species within the infinitely complex web of interrelatedness, circumscribing its nature (systemic, not monolithic, nature) with reference to that which is not human, with "the Other".

The danger exists – and of this any sound ecocentrism must be well aware – that the uniqueness of the human animal and the unprecedented niche it occupies in the global system may be overwhelmed and swallowed by the immense tides of non-human existence. Authentic relationality is underpinned by authentic multiplicity and diversity. A relationality that subsumes all within an homogenous whole is no relationality at all. This is precisely the criticism arrayed against the ethical standardisation of Nature's relations in previous chapters.

"Ah" our humanist apologist might then counter, "the ground falls from beneath your post-ethical ecocentrism, for, if you truly concede that humankind is a *sui generis* part of the world, then the quest for the ethical definition of life, for those precepts that delineate the way human life ought to be lived, might very well comprise human distinctness. In such a case, traditional ethical pursuits might be a novelty within the world system but are nevertheless part of that system, albeit as a solely human prerogative. Merely because the human quest for ethical precision cannot find its reflection in the morally ambivalent biosphere does not warrant its

dismissal as a fallacy. To do so is tantamount to condemning the very integrity of being human".

This point is well taken, yet, with all due respect, it does not undermine the ecocentric position so far outlined in this paper. The broadside fired in previous chapters has not sought to dismiss out of hand the specific content of ethical humanism – principles of loving-kindness, justice, equality and so forth. Difficulty arises, however, when such ethicists boldly assert that such principles replicate, and are corroborated by, the processes of life in the physical universe, that the harmonious interrelatedness exuded by Mother Nature lends support to such principles. The object of our vitriol, then, has been the veiled disjunction that exists between the agenda of "mental-rational" ethicists and the bio-physical evidence that has been summoned in support thereof. The reality remains that the human being of contemporary urban-industrial notoriety is an insatiably moralising creature. Yet all ethical pursuits, no less those of liberal humanism, germinate within a specific context. Traditionally, hermeneutics grounds knowledge in historical context – in the narrative of peculiarly human affairs. What a responsible ecocentrism impels one to pursue, however, is the *ecological contextualisation of human history*. Much has been said in the brief history of contemporary ecophilosophy of the need for a re-evaluation of the ecology by the human community, yet *what is more fully at stake in any serious consideration of the ecological crisis is the reassessment of the human condition in the light of its living environment*, indeed as a very part of that evolving universe. If, as William James suggests, "reality is in general what truths have to take account of",[2] then an authentically ecocentric paradigm encourages us to widen the gyre of such a perceived reality to include the limitless spirals of non-human life in this world.

This then is our immediate project – to locate the human as a distinct note within a broader biorhythm. It is an endeavour that is not new, having been largely inaugurated in the modern era by the publication of Charles Darwin's *magnum opus, The Origin of the Species*, in 1859, and which has reached more profound

[2] William James, *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis : Hackett, 1981), p.110.

depths in the controversy of the socio-biology debate. The venture is a scientific one, but more specifically one which seeks to measure the extent to which the natural sciences can penetrate the enigma that is human behaviour. The implications are starkly compelling, sobering, at best, if not downright unsettling.

In postulating a theory of evolution, Darwin was not being innovative. The notion was bandied about in the incipient stages of the *Age of Enlightenment* as a foil to the Genesis story which was becoming increasingly subject to the rigours of the so-called "*Higher Criticism*" which so characterised this period. Interpretations of the theory, however, followed strictly utilitarian channels, so that while evolution was understood to be a regular law-bound process of change generating biological diversity, it also supposedly sought a maximum amount of human happiness. None other than Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was among the many that propagated such a view.[3]

In Charles Darwin, the development of evolutionary thought found its vanguard. An enthused biologist and meticulous scholar, Darwin was able more than most to suspend personal sentiment and religious affiliation in order to achieve scientific honesty. The result was Darwin's pathfinding contribution to a burgeoning field – the theory of *natural selection* or the differential reproduction of genetic alternatives. The notion rests on an economy of explanation that would have pleased William Ockham, and seems at first to be of such a commonplace, self-evident nature that it prompted Thomas Huxley to exclaim, "Of course, how stupid of me not to have thought of that!".[4] Its resilient simplicity has allowed the theory to survive largely intact up to the present time.

[3] Evolution, as originally conceived in the eighteenth century, was understood as a goal-directed process. Exemplifying such a teleological interpretation was French Naturalist, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, who saw in evolution an "upward path", moving towards ever greater complexity and perfection. The postulation of a noble purposiveness did much to offset the more unpalatable elements of evolutionary theory, which were only to emerge fully in Darwin's hypothesis.

[4] Cited in James Rachels, *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1991), p.35.

In defiance of the clockwork monotony of the Cartesian system or the clumsy billiard ball model of Newton, Darwin sought to describe the natural universe as process and located natural selection as the regulating mechanism of such dynamic change. At heart, the hypothesis is derived from the recognition of the obvious environmental constraints that exert themselves in the population growth of any species. Expressed simply, the ecological niche of a species dictates limits to population size and enforces such limits through environmental pressures which result in a relatively high mortality rate of individuals before reproduction is achieved. This, in effect, is a biological restatement of the Malthusian observation that population increases geometrically if unchecked in any way. Thus, competition between individuals of a species is inevitable as aspirant survivors seek to occupy the confined niche which is the species' biospherical inheritance. The determinant for survival, Darwin believed, was to be found in the differences, or variations, that exist between members of a species. Consequently, those characteristics which are better adapted to the environmental milieu, will assist certain individuals in their struggle for existence, increasing their chances of reproducing and so passing such favourable features onto their offspring. Similarly, those members endowed with maladjusted features are more likely to find themselves losers of the biospheric struggle, thereby limiting reproductive options and the possibility of propagating such disadvantageous characteristics. Such an ongoing process of repeated replication and elimination results in modifications within a species as descendants come to inherit a different selection of characteristics to their forebears. Occasionally, the modifications accumulate to such a vast degree that an entirely new species results.[5] This latter hypothesis, especially, sparked a sensational controversy. In *The Origin of the Species*, Darwin made a point of avoiding the sensitive issue of the evolution of humankind itself, settling for an anticipatory remark at the book's conclusion, "Much light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history".[6]

[5] This phenomenon, in the Darwinian mind, accounts for the emergence of the human species. The public outrage, at the time, is not surprising in light of its implications – an uncomfortably close affinity with the "apes", which in the popular imagination is an ignominious bond indeed.

[6] Cited in Rachels, *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism*, p.46.

The wild implications which bubbled beneath the surface of his evolutionary theory would only fully emerge in Darwin's later work, *The Descent of Man* (1871), in which unambiguous links were drawn between humankind and the higher primates, locating the former within an uncomfortable "bestial" line of descent. Consequently, humanity is not merely a self-created species, a product of its own incestuous history, but could now be seen as a scion of pre-history, of a distant biological past claimed by the beasts, or by that which is, in the popular imagination, less than human. It was the accompanying sense of outrage that prompted the wife of the Bishop of Worcester to exclaim soon afterwards, "Descended from monkeys? My dear, let us hope that it isn't true! But if it is, let us hope that it doesn't become widely known".[7] Darwin's project of the "gradual illumination of men's minds achieved by the advancement of science", however, was unrelenting, if only in the heated debate it engendered. Here was a common sense theory that could not be ignored.

Darwinian thought was momentous and indeed remains so. His notion that human nature is immersed in non-human origins would be later corroborated by the discovery of fossil hominids and analysis of the compelling genetic interface that exists between humans and chimpanzees, while his theory of natural selection has been elevated with minor modification to the orthodoxy of the natural sciences, where it remains to the present day.[8] Yet, the intellectual revolution heralded by Darwin's evolutionism has never quite infiltrated the social sciences and humanities, despite its obvious potential applications in this sphere. In fact, marrying evolutionary thought to broader theoretical issues seems to have become something of a forbidden endeavour. That such projects have been stigmatized as pseudo-scientific can in the large part be attributed to the deluge of disreputable responses that followed in the wake of Darwin's disclosure.

---

[7] Cited in David P Barash, *The Hare and the Tortoise : Culture, Biology and Human Nature* (New York : Penguin Books, 1986), p.7.

[8] In a statement issued by the California Board of Education, it is acknowledged that "evolution is the central organizing theory of biology, and has fundamental importance in other sciences as well. It is not more controversial in scientific circles than gravity or electricity is". Cited in John Torrance (ed.), *The Concept of Nature* (New York : Clarendon Press, 1992), p.167.

For all its rugged simplicity, evolutionary thought is easily misapprehended. Setting the tone for a series of intellectual misfirings was the *Social Darwinism* of a fellow evolutionist, Herbert Spencer, who saw in evolutionary theory an ethical justification for an extreme form of laissez-faire individualism. State interference was to be minimised in order to allow the strong to be sorted from the weak in the cut-throat world of economic competition – in essence a perfect duplication of the process of natural selection as it employs environmental pressures to root out weaknesses. Not surprisingly, Spencer's warmest receivers were draped in a star-spangled banner. His facile deductions seemed to write the spirit of American capitalism into the ancient, indelible annals of biological history, so much so that business tycoon, John D Rockerfeller could proudly proclaim:

> The growth of large business is merely a survival of the fittest ... The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendour and fragrance which brings cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grew up around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.[9]

If Spencer's extreme libertarianism seems unnecessarily brutish, then the precise opposite can be said of the soft-bellied altruism prescribed by the Russian anarchist, Prince Peter Kropotkin. Carefully, supplanting the success of the individual with the success of the group and, by extension, the species, as the measure of the evolutionary process, Kropotkin found in Darwinian thought a useful ally for his scheme of mutual aid. In the pursuit of group happiness, evolutionary momentum impels us to help one another in a show of resolute co-operation, not counter-productive competition. Andrew Carnegie, himself a steel magnate and numbering among the supposed economically "fit", was similarly encouraged by the evolutionary process to embark on a philanthropic enterprise to promote global happiness and peace.[10]

---

[9] Cited in Rachels, *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism*, pp.63-4.

[10] In fact, Carnegie poured the enthusiasm of his evolutionism into the newly formed UNESCO, which Carnegie himself chaired. By such a token, this philanthropic organisation can be viewed in part as a product of Carnegie's evolutionary vision of world happiness and peace.

It is clear to any perspicacious reader that *Social Darwinists* have tended to read their own preconceived ideas into the malleable notion of evolutionary development. The reality that such divergent interpretations have been generated by a single scientific hypothesis has done much to engender a hermeneutic of suspicion in response to the socio-biological debate as a whole. Yet, the fact that the incursion of evolutionary thought into the social sciences has been avoided for much of the twentieth century when the debate has never been resolved, suggests a hesitancy to grapple with the issue. It is far easier to bypass and dismiss an intellectual minefield than attempt to thread a way through it. Taken on its own terms, the concept of a process driven by natural selection is an unsettling one. That history attests to endless attempts to alter those terms, to reduce, expand or simply ignore those terms, can be diagnosed on a number of counts.

First, despite the fact that evolution is an ongoing process, it is one that defies teleology. Its regulating mechanism, natural selection, has an implacable impersonality about it. In a sense, biological evolution is "blindly opportunistic",[11] as it draws on randomly generated genetic variations, retaining those that happen to confer advantage, while discarding those that are disadvantageous. There is little to suggest that development is propelled in any particular direction, or that some guiding hand is involved in the formation of favourable characteristics. That certain organisms appear ideally suited to environmental conditions is tantalising, but short-sighted, evidence for the *argument from design hypothesis*. Evolutionary science reveals even the most beautiful of Nature's adaptive wonders to be the directionless, mindless product of a mutated gene pool being acted upon by selective environmental pressures. As socio-biologist Michael Ruse concedes, "the building blocks of evolution are functionally random, and the essentially non-directed nature of the process is in no way affected by selection gathering variations within groups".[12]

[11] A point first articulated by renowned geneticist, Theodosius Dobzhansky.

[12] Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.19.

The absence of any grand consummation of the evolutionary process, of a higher organising principle drawing the universe towards its final apotheosis, can be disheartening to the human creature, so accustomed to understanding itself as a protagonist within a broader field of significance. In effect, the aimless momentum of evolution pays no heed to the sublime embellishments of human achievement – it measures success in unequivocally efficient terms: survival and genetic reproduction. By such a crude standard, the "marvellously endowed" human animal is as successful as a rampant Aids virus. Herbert Spencer and Prince Kropotkin alike have resisted such a starkly indiscriminate yardstick by recasting evolutionary development in unambiguously teleological terms. Thus, Spencer understood evolution as an expression of the "law of progress" which "consists in a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous"[13] and an accompanying increase in complexity. When applied to human affairs, it seems, such an inexorable law promotes the establishment of an extreme form of free-enterprise economics. Similarly, Kropotkin finds in evolutionary process a cryptic moral injunction, which, when decoded, urges us to adopt the quasi-Christian ideal of neighbourly love. A recent case of such ardent progressionism is that of the eccentric Catholic mystic-cum-palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, who identified the culmination of evolutionary progress as the Omega Point at which creation is recapitulated in Christ and a perfected "hyper-consciousness" emerges.[14] Behind all such fanciful conjecture, lies an unwillingness to accept biological evolution as a short-sighted, plodding process which gives little more than an illusion of progress.

In particular, the traditional evolutionary ethicist argues that the process of evolution is not meaningless. It is not an endlessly oscillating stream, going nowhere, and rather slowly at that, but with direction, in particular leading onwards and upwards. Value and meaning come through evolution because the change which leads to organisms, especially to higher organisms, is progressive.[15]

---

[13] Ibid., p.37.

[14] For an exposition of this cosmological mysticism see Teilhard de Chardin's *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. Rene Hague (New York : Harvest Books, 1971).

[15] Michael Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics" in M H Nitecki & D V Nitecki (eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics* (New York : State University Press, 1993), p.139.

Underlying the progressionist view, was the assumption that humanity, especially the European brand of the nineteenth century, represents the vanguard of a goal-orientated process. A similar myth-making faculty is being exercised in the progressionist project as exhibited in the 'strong' forms of the *Anthropic Principle* and *Gaia Hypothesis*, as well as the contemporary preoccupation with a moralisable relationality. The result, on all counts, is what Robert Wright disparagingly labels as "*sugar-coated science*"[16] - attempts to truss up doggedly understated hypotheses, to invent "value and meaning" where such significance is defied. Speaking of the human place in the evolutionary drama, or anti-drama, socio-biologist David P Barash declares rather matter-of-factly, "Joining the mêlée, recognising ourselves as part of the process, we are neither diminished nor expanded, just described".[17] The evolutionary process, it seems, is surprisingly anti-climatic; it knows no glory; it churns out minor fluctuations from millennia of gritty biological struggle. As Leibnitz well understood, nature *non facit saltus* - nature does not make leaps. Understand then the impatience of the human mind, so accustomed to traversing time and space in great imaginative bounds, in the face of the painfully conservative shuffle that is biological evolution.

The second great provocative element of evolutionism is a more pointed articulation of the first. If evolution is, at the macrocosmic level, a directionless, short-sighted process propelled by the microcosmic struggle for survival and reproductive success, then in essence it knows no moral bounds. The moral endeavour is a discriminatory one - it is supremely conscious of the discontinuity between what is and what ought to be. A typical hedonistic utilitarian would assess an act or rule according to the goal of maximising happiness and pleasure. A Kantian deontologist might eulogise the rights of the individual, goading us to treat fellow humans as ends in themselves. The inanimate, unconscious mechanisms of evolution defy both however. Natural selection pays no obeisance to any categorical imperative, nor in its preoccupation with genetic fitness does it take heed of the happiness of the individual. Genes, not individuals, are selected. In

[16] Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal* (New York : Vintage Books, 1994), p.149.

[17] Barash, *The Hare and the Tortoise : Culture, Biology and Human Nature*, p.10.

this sense, evolution rests on short-term success, so much so that immediate adaptive advantages might prove tragic for a species or individual. David P Barash[18] employs the example of light-coloured mice which achieve short-term success in an homogeneously light-coloured environment owing to their protective camouflage. Were the environment to suddenly darken, such mice would be selected against. Their over-specialisation assured them short-term success, but because evolution is too inflexible to serve the ends of the individual or the species, what was originally an adaptive asset results directly in long-term extinction. The evolutionary process, it seems, is notoriously fickle. In it, there is no advancement, no regression, only a bullying change that supersedes the immediate interests of the individual as it spans distant generations. As Robert Wright proclaims:

> The dustbin of genetic history overflows with failed experiments ... Their disposal is the price paid for design by trial and error. But as long as that price can be paid – so long as natural selection has enough generations to work on, and can cast aside scores of failed experiments for everyone it preserves – its creations can be awesome.[19]

Human behaviour, then, even when fired by a sense of moral propriety, is no more evolved or better evolved than that of the common cockroach in so far as both species have adapted equally well to the rigours of their environmental niche. We might, in all reasonableness then, proclaim the evolutionary narrative to be amoral – it cares little for what is right or wrong; its concern is with what works and while it discards its failed experiments, it does not pass judgement of any moral kind on them.

The amorality of evolution can be regarded as a verifiable declaration enunciated by a dispassionate observer seeking merely to describe and understand the evolutionary process. Morality, however, is less about mere *observation* than it is

---

[18] Ibid., p.50.

[19] Wright, *The Moral Animal*, p.25.

about hot-blooded *participation in the world*. The moral bifurcation of reality into right and wrong, good and evil, tends to disregard that non-committal grey fuzz which we can call amoral. Sound science, however, is exclusively preoccupied with self-descriptive, non-evaluative, grey areas. Thus, where the disinterested scientist sees amorality, the morally indignant participant will see traces of the immoral.

Darwin once summarised his theory of natural selection in a neat formula: "Multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die" – little surprise then that many would regard the evolutionary hypothesis as an assault on the foundations of civilised morality. Its implications were morally counter-intuitive, if not positively scandalous. Thus, writing in response to the evolutionism of Chambers' *Vestiges*, geologist Adam Sedgwick would bewail: "If the book be true ... religion is a lie; human law is a mass of folly, and a base injustice; morality is moonshine; our labours for the black people of Africa were works of madmen; and man and woman are only better beasts!"[20] Echoing such a sentiment, Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford and eminent critic of Darwin's iconoclastic thought, wrote in the Quarterly Review:

> Now, we must say at once, and openly, that such a notion is absolutely incompatible not only with single expressions in the word of God on that subject of natural science with which it is not immediately concerned, but which in our judgement is of far more importance, with the whole representation of that moral and spiritual condition of man which is its proper subject matter.[21]

All such fervent responses to the fact of evolution rest ultimately upon a recognition and a resistance. They are driven by a deep unsettling awareness of the natural world, and the evolutionary process that is its fluidic form, as a repository of immoral darkness and death. And, in turn, they culminate in a resistance to the inclusion of humanity in such a "daemonic" history. Robert Wright speaks of the

---

[20] Cited in Rachels, *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism*, pp.50-1.

[21] Ibid., p.47.

overflowing dustbin of failed evolutionary experiments – Nature's shining creations stand among a wasteland of forgotten wreckage. Natural selection, itself, is a mechanism that bespeaks dereliction and death. In order for the population figures of any species to remain constant, we are told, countless potential offspring succumb in their struggle for survival. This outstandingly high mortality rate is reflected in the reality that "999, 998 aspiring cod must perish annually along with 102 potential robins every four years, for two of each species that survive".[22]

This is not to say that Nature's seas positively simmer with a predatory madness, merely that underlying Nature's creative processes is an ambiguous current of death and decay, and that such a cold indifference to the frailty of life is bound to excite an uncomfortably visceral response in a species aspiring to the light of eternal life and its moral heights. Thus, when proclaiming the dizzying heights that separate humanity from "brutish" evolution, Bishop Wilberforce would make an appeal to "man's gift of reason; man's freewill and responsibility, ... the indwelling of the Eternal Spirit ... [and redemption] by the Eternal Son"[23] – in short, as a species that is morally predisposed and destined for eternal life, humanity rises above a degrading natural process conceived of in the opposite terms of immorality and death.

That the human mind with its "gift of reason" should find little solace in contemplating its place within a turbulent natural history is attested to with vigour by the renowned utilitarian, John Stuart Mill. His essay, simply entitled "Nature", is exemplary of the piquant response that invariably occurs when a finely-tuned moral mindset encounters the rough-shod world over which natural selection holds sway. "Nature", he protests,

> "... impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first Christian martyr, starves them with hunger, freezes

[22] A startling statistic employed in Barash, *The Hare and the Tortoise : Culture, Biology and Human Nature*, p.11.

[23] Cited in Rachels, *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism*, p.47.

> them with cold, poisons them by the quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths in reserve ... [all] with the most supercilious disregard both of mercy and justice, emptying her shafts upon the best and noblest indifferently with the meanest and worst ...".[24]

This is certainly a far cry from the sanitised perception of Nature embodied in such terms of affection as Mother Nature (see Chapter 1 for the mythopoeic corruption of the *Gaia Hypothesis*), and although Mill's doom-laden inventory verges on the hyperbolic, we can appreciate the emotional intensity that gave rise to it. From such a perspective, Nature, in all her fatal whimsy, assumes the shape of the Leviathan in a true Hobbesian sense. "If there are any marks at all of special design in creation, one of the things most evidently designed is that a large proportion of all animals should pass their existence in tormenting and devouring other animals".[25]

Darwin, himself, had a profound awareness of the moral implications of a process guided by natural selection, especially with regard to the moral status of the natural world. Traditionally, theodicy had temporarily offset the problem of evil through reference to the grand drama of human fall and redemption, thereby locating it within an exclusively human arena of moral development. Evolutionary theory, however, serves to remind one that, while human suffering can be explained away in terms of human free will and the moral responsibility it entails, the travails of human history are exceeded by those which undergird the evolutionary process; travails, it should be added, which are irredeemable because the organic process is not self-reflexive and therefore cannot evaluate itself by any external moral standard. *In short, the suffering which pervades the natural world is, in a sense, gratuitous because it holds no possibility of moral illumination and final redemption.* In Darwin's mind, this stark reality controverted the belief in an omnipotent, divine creator possessing unbounded benevolence:

---

[24] John Stuart Mill (1874), "Nature" in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M Robson (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1978), vol.10, p.385

[25] Ibid., p.391.

> That there is much suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this in reference to man imagining that it serves for his moral improvement. But the number of men in the world is as nothing compared with that of all other sentient beings, and these often suffer greatly without any moral improvement. A being so powerful and so full of knowledge as God who could create the universe, is to our finite minds omnipotent and omniscient, and it revolts our understanding to suppose that his benevolence is not unbounded, for what advantage can there be in the sufferings of millions of lower animals throughout almost endless time?[26]

The evolution of the natural world, then, is one long *via dolorosa* which holds out forever the promise of reprieve or divine ascension. Humanity, then, must find its bliss *contra Naturam*. Such an assertion anticipates the more advanced stages of our analysis, but it suffices at this stage to take stock of the many responses from within the biological fraternity which have echoed such a sentiment.

Thomas Henry Huxley, so esteemed a member of the Darwinian clique that he was labelled "Darwin's Bulldog", first hoisted the banner of the fray, when he boldly proclaimed: "Let us understand, once and for all, that the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it".[27] Seldom has the campaign against Nature been articulated so unequivocally, and yet, in the light of what has gone before, our sense of outrage has been dampened, replaced by a sober, if not brooding, acknowledgement. This is an utterance of a learned professional who has descended from that reified realm of observed, analysed reality to confront the rigours of lived, diagnosed reality. Huxley can do little else but summon the profound life-forces of human existence and pit them against the living darkness of the cosmos, a cosmos which appears inimical to that very existence. His manifesto is as much a rallying cry as it is a statement of unavoidable fact. In Huxley's mind, there can be no alternative:

---

[26] Darwin cited in Rachels, *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism*, pp.105-6.

[27] Thomas H Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics* (Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1989), p.83.

> The practice of that which is ethically best – what we call goodness or virtue – involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive.[28]

The morally-refined genius of John Stuart Mill was driven to a similar conclusion, disavowing any possibility of finding an exemplary goodness in Nature. At the final count, "If Nature and Man are both the works of a Being of perfect goodness, that Being intended Nature as a scheme to be amended, not imitated, by Man.[29] Nature, by her own standards, is a stranger to perfection – if anything, natural selection operates by comparative or relative perfection, which in effect is no perfection at all. While a characteristic may work better than another, it can never function absolutely perfectly for functional perfection is meaningless within the evolutionary context. Consequently, it is left to humankind, a creature intoxicated with dreams of perfection, to redirect the imperfectible course of Nature.

Now, it would be facile to regard such an anthropocentric belligerence as merely symptomatic of a still unenlightened science reflecting the priggish mores of nineteenth century European society. The facts of evolutionary development have undergone but negligible change in the twentieth century, and the same adverse reaction, though with an improved armoury, has been forthcoming.

A leading exponent of this morally indignant position is the eminent biologist, George Williams, who believes that a century of progress in the biological field has merely served to vindicate Huxley's forceful contention. Where our merry myth-makers of *Gaia* assert the maternal benevolence of the world, Williams finds a hostility to life in general and human life in particular. What may seem to be

---

[28] Ibid., p.82.

[29] Mill, "Nature" in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol.10, pp.398-99.

benign conditions promoting the proliferation of life on Earth, is in fact the result of the resilient adaptive capacities of organisms accommodating environmental conditions which are indifferent to their survival. Such a case of one-sided adaptation given scant encouragement by adverse conditions has led Williams to posit the fundamental "unfitness of the cosmic environment".[30]

At the biological level, Williams is repulsed by what he sees as the moral bankruptcy of a process spurred by the no-holds-barred mechanism of natural selection. In fact, he goes so far as to denounce natural selection as an "evil" and to defame the hitherto lily-white reputation of Mother Earth by labelling her "a wicked old witch".[31] While this may seem anathema to the ears of the sensitive ecologist, Williams does indeed have a compelling case. He echoes our earlier analysis when he characterises natural selection as "immensely powerful, but ... also abysmally stupid".[32] But more than being short-sighted and inanimate, the evolutionary process is above all predisposed to an incorrigible selfishness. In Williams' view, natural selection is little more than "... a process that maximises short-sighted selfishness"[33]:

> The theory of natural selection identifies the self-interest of every individual organism as the maximal representation of its own genes in future generations. There is no encouragement for any belief that an organism can be designed for any purpose other than the most effective pursuit of this self-interest.[34]

It cannot be disputed that natural selection is crudely unaware of the *Greatest Happiness Principle* and its altruistic foundations – indeed, we could go so far as to say that an Altruist, working unselfishly for the well-being of others and without

---

[30] George C Williams quoted by Richard D Alexander in Nitecki & Nitecki (eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics*, p.217.

[31] This defamatory characterisation in fact heads Williams' essay "Mother Nature is a Wicked Old Witch" in Nitecki & Nitecki (eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics*, pp.217-231.

[32] Ibid., p.229.

[33] Ibid., p.228.

[34] Ibid., p.228.

mindfulness of some reward, is destined to be an evolutionary discard.[35] Such an implicit recognition might encourage a species such as our own to view itself as a unique bastion of moral dignity holding out against the undignified fracas of the natural world, and has prompted biologist Edward O Wilson, to identify the moral altruism of the human being as "the central theoretical problem of socio-biology".[36]

The problem, at a theoretical level, is easily appreciated. The natural living history of our world is one shaped by the competitive strivings of its denizens as self-interested agendas clash. Where such conflicting interests are incommensurable, the obvious winners are those parties that are able to promote and achieve their own selfish ends most effectively – a law of severity which makes an anomaly of truly altruistic behaviour. And yet, seemingly against such odds, a species which above all characterises itself as moral, and which has an unprecedented prosperity for altruistic, selfless acts, has thrived, often at the expense of more rigorously selfish species. Simply stated, this contravenes the internal logic of natural selection, and reinforces the intuition that the human creature is endowed with a greater nobility than his brutish cousins.

Traditionally, socio-biologists have resolved the issue by disputing the reality of any independent, altruistic tendency in the human species. Instead, what may seem to be the realisation of the ideal of altruism, is in fact an expression of a qualified "altruism", of a kind not infrequent within the folds of the evolutionary process itself: *kin selection*. Thus, the honeybee worker defends the hive at all costs against intruders which might disrupt the continuing fertility of the colony, and wild dog families engage in co-operative hunting, as the entire pack rallies around the livelihood of pregnant females. In each case, altruism is selective, being directed at genetically related individuals, while co-operation frequently benefits the co-operator. Consequently, such mitigated, or *selective*, altruism is in fact

[35] Richard Dawkins did much to circulate this notion of predisposed selfishness in his publication, *The Selfish Gene* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1976). In it, the world of the selfish gene is depicted as one of "savage competition, ruthless exploitation, and deceit". The marriage of such unrelenting selfishness with stimulus-seeking behaviour in the human species has prompted Michio Kitahara to label evolution as a "tragedy". Michio Kitahara, *The Tragedy of Evolution* (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1991).

[36] Edward O Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Harvard : Harvard University Press, 1978), p.11.

induced by a desire for selfish gains. Natural selection favours altruism toward one's close kin for self-serving reasons and the same rationale, Wilson argues, galvanises human cases of altruistic behaviour which have been accentuated by strong familial and group bonds.[37] Where impulsive, irrational, or what Wilson calls "hard-core", altruism exists, the recipients are almost always one's closest relatives. The frequency and intensity of such selfless displays decline sharply as genetic or social familiarity decreases.

By far the greatest number of incidences of human altruism, however, are "soft-core" – deliberate, calculated acts which are motivated by the expectation of reward or favourable return, and which are therefore ultimately self-serving. Such symbiotic co-operation or reciprocal altruism does not run against the unscrupulous grain of natural selection and has in the large part contributed to the evolutionary success of humanity. Edward Wilson concedes the point in an unabashed fashion: "Human beings appear to be sufficiently selfish and calculating to be capable of indefinitely greater harmony and social homeostasis. This statement is not self-contradictory. True selfishness ... is the key to a more nearly perfect social contract".[38]

Such a viewpoint locates human moral behaviour neatly within the evolutionary continuum, but does so at the expense of the integrity of the moral impulse, relegating it to a mercenary status. Other socio-biologists find such a reduction unpalatable and have sought to accept moral altruism on its own terms while simultaneously acknowledging those of the evolutionary process. Thus, Michael Ruse has recently argued that biological altruism (what we have called mitigated altruism) expresses itself as moral, unmitigated altruism in a species as unique and complex as humanity.[39] Such an approach effectively suggests that biological altruism transcends itself in the unconditional moral altruism that characterises

---

[37] For Wilson's intriguing analysis of human altruism, see Chapter 7 of his trail-blazing work, *On Human Nature*.

[38] Ibid., p.11.

[39] For a neat summary of Michael Ruse's thesis, see his essay, "The New Evolutionary Ethics" in Nitecki & Nitecki (eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics*, pp.133-162.

that, biologically, human behaviour is impelled in certain directions, that there exists an inherited and therefore innate aggressive impulse,[42] a tendency to self-interested kin selection,[43] an impulsive engagement in territorial and sexual competition,[44] even a physical predisposition for stereotyped gender roles.[45] The list continues, but it would be facile to read it as testimony to grim finality. DNA might hold the species on a leash, might bind us to the indelicate monolith of the biological past, but it is indeed a composite strand that holds us there, allowing a certain freedom of movement and manoeuvrability.

On one level, we remain that "weak-bodied, large-brained animal", competing for a niche in the African Savannah and still subject to the pruning action of natural selection; yet, at another level, we are conductors of culture, inhabiting a symbolic universe, generating lozenged fields of significance which lend our species a versatility as yet unseen in the grinding narrative of evolution. That we are not merely animated by innate response mechanisms, as less complex organisms are, but that we dwell within richly patterned constellations of meaning, may itself be attributable to the physico-chemical composition and size of the human brain, and therefore a product of our biological nature; but, nevertheless, such a variability still remains a distinguishing feature of human behaviour. What it does suggest, however, is that the human animal is extraordinarily ambivalent, endowed with an unprecedented freedom, but one that is circumscribed and continuously informed by a senseless biological substratum. Or, as zoologist-cum-psychologist David P Barash well recognises, the human animal has a two-fold anatomy – the plodding, conservative "anatomy of the tortoise" (biology) and the dynamic, protean

[42] Psychologist Anthony Storr does much to dispel misconceptions in his sobering argument for innate aggression in his simply titled work, *Human Aggression* (London : Penguin Books, 1992). See also Konrad Z Lorenzo's ground-breaking work, *On Aggression*, trans. Marjorie Latzke (London : Methuen, 1967).

[43] Edward O Wilson's analysis has never been seriously contended. For a fine evolutionary treatment of human group identification, see sociologist Pierre van den Burghe's acclaimed work, *The Ethnic Phenonenon* (New York : Praeger, 1987).

[44] Any of a host of studies can be cited on the subject, from Edward O Wilson's *On Human Nature*, to Desmond Morris's popular series of works on the behaviour of the human animal.

[45] See Jerome Barkow's publication, *Darwin, Sex and Status* (Toronto : Toronto University Press, 1989) and *Sex, Evolution and Behaviour* by Martin Daly and Margo Wilson (Boston : Willard Grant Press, 1983). Incidentally, Edward O Wilson, himself, was denounced as a "prophet of Right Wing Patriarchy" by certain feminist groups for his interest in stereotypic gender roles, expressed in such provocative statements as "The quintessential female is an individual specialised for making eggs".

"anatomy of the hare" (culture).[46] The result is an experiential burden, a tension, seemingly forever unresolved, that allows the individual to contemplate metaphysical wonders, to soar beyond the confines of dross matter, while defecating, or as director Stanley Kubrick would have it, perform acts of gratuitous violence while listening rapturously to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.[47]

[46] Barash, *The Hare and the Tortoise : Culture, Biology and Human Nature*, Chapters 2 and 3.

[47] A cinematic reference to Kubrick's film production of Anthony Burgess' controversial novel, *A Clockwork Orange*.

The analysis contained in the present chapter stands as a corrective to the sanitised portrayal of natural processes relied upon by dreamy-eyed ecophilosophers. The anaemic façade of their Mother Earth persona is more at home on the gentle lanes of the English country garden than in the rugged wildernesses they have supplanted. More often than not, such a maladroit eco-paradigm petitions grand cosmological principles encoded deep within subatomic physics or hidden within the starry nebulousness of the Milky Way, in an effort to recover an over-arching meaningfulness. In so doing, a poetic dreaminess can be fostered without ever confronting the coarser texture of life as it exists at an immediate, experiential level. This chapter has gone some way to countering such obscurantism by redirecting attention to the nitty-gritty of Nature's own terms, her internal logic and functional efficiency, without sublimating her crudeness within some abstract symmetry. Nature, in so far as she has produced a creature which can seek to transcend her own pedantic terms, is capable of dramatic creativity. That such a creature might be horrified at the creative channels she chooses merely enriches the paradox that is implied in any human-Nature encounter. Our refined self-consciousness, married to a liberal sense of what is "best", has rendered our species curiously sensitive to the transgressions of Nature's ways. In this chapter, Nature's misdemeanours, assessed from an ethical humanist perspective, are three-fold. Expressed differently, alienation from what is perceived as the organic substratum of living Nature may be experienced on three grounds.

First, *Nature is at best indifferent to goal-directed behaviour, operating according to a short-sighted functionalism rather than to a pre-designed course or grand purpose.* Despite our constant personification of her, Nature as a continually evolving pattern of relations is inanimate and blindly insensitive to future possibilities. Apparent harmony in her interlaced creation is mistaken evidence for design, being rather the brittle product of an arduous, and ultimately clumsy, process of trial-and-error. Nature is an opportunist in her *modus operandi* and is notoriously fickle.

Second, *natural selection, by which Nature works her materials, is a concept so devoid of moral sensibility, that it verges on the immoral,* inspiring an appropriate sense of indignation. Numb to the discernment of good and evil, such a modulating mechanism neither protests nor pontificates, simply grading reproductive success and encouraging a healthy dose of selfishness to achieve it. Competition and self-interested co-operation predominate in the natural arena, precipitating in a staggering mortality rate, largely for the sake of manageability.

Finally, the genetic thread that links generations and indeed, species, can all too easily be perceived as a strait-jacket of biological determinism and, therefore, as a threat to the mandate of human free will. Evolution, as the unfolding of Nature's pinions, may be a process capable of immense creativity, but it is one that is incurably broad and tardy, larger than any single life or generation, and therefore its creative tides are impervious to individual history, swamping biographical narratives in organic anonymity. While the evolutionary process may be depicted as an adversary of human ambition, it has posited an interloper in our midst in the frail form of the human body. As a genetic vessel with its own impulsive momentum, the body represents a pre-routed destiny, running through the province of non-humanness and natural selection, along rough-hewn channels of pleasure and pain, and culminating in the eternal promise of physical dissolution. *The human body, then, is an accomplice in the tyranny of the organic past and the human present is burdened with the weight of its unrecorded ages.*

Like an unresolved amphibian, the human being, indeed human being-in-relation, is consumed with a sense of its own ambivalence. It squirms in the insoluble paradox that cradles its existence, aspiring to the heights, striving for the realm of moral goodness, of pure spirit and unadulterated reason, yet it is forever destined to be betrayed by its own physicality, a duplicity that emanates from Nature at large and which finds its reflection in the microcosm of the human body itself. Indeed, the Nature-culture dialectic is a spilling over of such an ontological ambivalence, and the uneasy tension to which it gives rise is, at heart, a repugnance at Nature in all her crudeness and iniquity. Affirming our affinity with her, we seem driven to a

nihilism, a negation of our humanness, and, in death, indict an ignoble life pronouncing with Schopenhauer: "Thou ceasest to be something which thou hadst done better never to become". Affirming our discontinuity with her, we seem driven to heap scorn upon her vulgar devices, and, in so doing, reject the womb of our birth while still tugging at the umbilical cord that ties us there. With Dillard we are led to exclaim: "I came from the world, I crawled out of a sea of amino acids, and now I must whirl around and shake my fist at that sea and cry shame!".[48]

[48] A Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York : Harper's Magazine Press, 1974), p.177.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXORCISM OF NATURE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Put your pure hand on my torn heart,
Do not ever leave me alone with Nature;
For I know her too well not to be afraid of her
She tells me:

"I whirl round contemptuously, unseeing and unhearing, the peoples of the earth side by side with the ants; I do not distinguish their dwelling from their ashes, and as I carry them I am ignorant of the names of the nations. I am called mother and I am a tomb."

Alfred de Vigny

Our exposition of evolutionary thought and its implications for an understanding of Nature's relationality and equilibrium might seem to most to be unnecessarily run through with a creepy morbidity. While we have employed the evolutionary paradigm – the most authoritative of the present day – to dispel the bland light of the romantic musings which so predominate in contemporary ecophilosophy, it may be argued that we have replaced it with far too impenetrable a darkness.

This, however, is the price of intellectual honesty; and if we are merely compounding humanity's cosmic loneliness, then this is the first step to existential redemption if redemption is to be had. Presently, however, any talk of deliverance seems hopelessly inappropriate. Our aforegoing analysis has established Nature as a field of travail, pervaded by conflict, competition and death. We have lent a sympathetic ear to the sentiments of George Williams and others, who see in

Nature an imposing adversary that hinders human ambition and stands in opposition to the human moral project. We feel no need to absolve Darwin when confessing his revulsion at the natural world:

> I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae [parasitic wasps] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.[1]

What is worse is that we have questioned the qualitative distinctiveness of being human by locating humanity within an organic continuum that affirms its close affinity with the "beasts". By portraying the human creature as itself a product of an evolutionary process that it has come to disown, and by calling attention to the biological substratum of its nature, our analysis has served to erode any absolute distinction between the human and non-human realms (in the true spirit of ecocentrism), but, more importantly, has exposed the amalgam of paradoxes that constitute the human condition. Genetically, it seems, our behaviour is impelled in certain directions, directions which exert their own visceral magnetism but which can be confused and off-set by the mental-cognitive forces that comprise human self-consciousness. This curious admixture is indeed the evolutionary heirloom of our species: it has provided us with: a body that exudes frailty and mortality, and that, it seems, is not even ours to possess, for its destiny is to be reclaimed by "the Conqueror Worm"; an enhanced consciousness that whispers intimations of its own immortality; a genetic legacy which, if it were to have its way, would make us unscrupulous, xenophobic "self-promoters"; and an acculturated mind which, if it were to be trusted, would celebrate the unchallenged reign of reason and illuminated free-will, and would forever adjudge itself to be the supreme fashioner of its own destiny. The interplay of such compound forces decrees that human identity is transformed into a field of tension *par excellence*; indeed, such an

[1] Darwin cited in Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal* (New York : Vintage Books, 1994), pp.331-2.

existential tension may even be considered the distinguishing mark of humanity which, alone among animals, lacks an unambiguous mode of being proper to its species. Such an acknowledgement is implicit in the Darwinian formulation, but scientific specialisation has prevented the socio-biological pursuit from assessing the human creature as little else than a sophisticated biological organism, or "naked ape". Its point of departure has always been the biological circuitry of innate drives and impulses, and consequently this field of inquiry has had difficulty loosening the shackles of biological determinism which seems to be part of its very methodology. It required the candid genius of Sigmund Freud to extract more fully the implications of evolutionary thought for the science of human behaviour. In essence, Freud's psychoanalytical theory transposes the physical ruggedness of Darwin's evolutionary paradigm onto the volatile and turbulent waters of the human psyche, an exercise, which in Robert Wright's mind has precipitated "the shift from nineteenth-century earnestness to twentieth-century cynicism".[2] Wright's observation may go some way to explaining why Freudian theory, like evolutionary thought, has been largely neglected by contemporary ecophilosophers, who, on the whole, seem to have little stomach for the world of subversion and subterfuge depicted by each of these respective paradigms.

This neglect is regrettable and surprising when one considers that Freudianism positively lends itself to an ecological treatment. At its heart, it seeks to delineate the encounter between the individual, endowed with his/her own inner momentum – a catalogue of latent drives and hidden propensities – and the environment, which exerts its own set of pressures and constraints upon the development of human personhood. In keeping with the Darwinian characterisation of humanity as a self-serving hedonist, Freud asserts that the human animal is driven, like others, by the pursuit of pleasure. Flying in the face of a Cartesian legacy which renders the individual a rational ascetic, Freud would boldly proclaim that "the essence of man consists not ... in thinking, but in desiring".[3] This is a crucial acknowledgement for it establishes human identity as a

[2] Wright, *The Moral Animal*, p.314.

[3] This is Norman O Brown's précis of the Freudian paradigm. Norman O Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (New York : Vintage Books, 1959), p.7.

product of participation in the world, lifting the individual from the abstracted realm of ideas and relocating him/her within the vital ground of the emotional life-forces, of what Marx labelled "practical-sensuous activity". This lends the notion of personhood a quality of depth, perhaps even insolubility, but also suggests that there are limits to the powers of conscious self-definition, for so long regarded in the Western tradition as the prerogative of a supremely rational human creature. Friedrich Nietzsche pre-empts Freud poignantly when he declares that "all our so called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text".[4] Freud's intimation is that human behaviour is shaped more directly by forces which exert themselves from behind the veil of the conscious mind, from the depths of that "perhaps unknowable, but felt text". "The presence and potency of such a nebulous realm calls into question the validity of any project which seeks to regimentalise the self through the simple imposition of external authority, and which consequently overlooks the subversive influence of the unconscious, equally ineradicable and elusive".[5]

The pivotal theme of Freud's theoretical formulation, however, is one that strikes a dark chord - underpinning his basic hypothesis is the existence of psychic conflict which in turn promulgates repression and neurosis, concepts so ubiquitous that psychoanalysis could rightfully be called the science of "mental dis-ease". The conflict that exists between the multiple levels of the human psyche - a phenomenon which radical therapist R D Laing described as the "divided self"[6] - is precipitated by the hindrance and subsequent abnegation of the pleasure-seeking exercise, which Freud once identified as "the programme of life's purpose".[7] Evidently, Freud drew extensively on the common-sense biological theory of his time in formulating the *Pleasure Principle* as the *raison d'être* of human motivation. Simply stated, the goal of the pleasure principle is happiness which, in

---

[4] Nietzsche quoted in Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire* (New York : Routledge, 1991), p.225.

[5] Freudianism can be said to be the perfect antidote to B K Skinner's optimistic behaviourism, which quite perplexingly still persists as the dominant model of the social sciences.

[6] R D Laing, *The Divided Self : An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1977).

[7] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York : W W Norton, 1961), p.27.

Freud's elementary biological understanding, implied "the procurement of pleasure and the avoidance of pain".[8] Reality, or the external world, however, necessarily restricts the otherwise rampant solicitations of the pleasure principle. In this sense, the *reality principle* is an adversary of the *pleasure principle*. The rigours of the world are dictatorial, frustrating the pursuit of pleasure and levying upon an ever-desirous human creature, the renunciation of desire. Consequently, the trammels of repressed desire are relegated to the subterranean fissures of the unconscious which is lorded over by the pleasure principle, while the conscious self acts as interposer and repressor, negotiating the obstacle that is the external world. Ever the warden of the reality principle, the conscious self seeks to adjust to reality by quashing influences which would disrupt its equilibrium.

A number of preliminary remarks at this point will prepare the way for the further unfolding of our analysis. First, psychic conflict is the corollary of the ontological ambivalence of the human creature. Since the human psyche is an organic, systemic, albeit stratified, whole, however, this tension is *dialectical*. Although repressed, the content of the unconscious constantly seeks expression, although, under conditions of neurosis, it finds such expression within distorted, malformed symptom-formations. This insight, it would seem, is the psychoanalytical analogue of evolutionary anthropology. The previous chapter explored the ambivalence of the human animal as both a passive repository of a genetic legacy and as a self-directed, self-emancipatory consciousness – in short, as a creature endowed with a biologically circumscribed freedom. When such a recognition of external contingency, of mitigated freedom of activity, is recast in terms of the internal reality of the individual, it naturally gives rise to the conscious-unconscious dialectic. In the same way that the socio-biologist understands genetic predispositions to be the enduring determinant of human behaviour, so the psychoanalyst perceives the subversive vortex of the unconscious to be *the* indestructible element of the human psyche. The unconscious, like the socio-

[8] "Our entire psychical activity is bent upon procuring pleasure and avoiding pain, is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle". Freud quoted in Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.8.

biologist's catena of drives and impulses, is the proverbial director behind the scenes.

Second, Freud recognises the adversarial quality of the world - *Eros*, the pursuit of pleasure, and its agent, the libido, encounter reality as an antagonist. Nature, it seems, was especially included under this blanket judgement. After all, Nature, Freud reminds us, "is externally remote ... She destroys us - coldly, cruelly, relentlessly".[9] Such a pronouncement of despair could just as well have been uttered by J S Mill or T H Huxley. In a similar spirit, Weston La Barre understands that "cultural man proposes, but reality disposes, for man is only another kind of animal".[10] Freud's discomfort with brutish Nature is consistent with his assessment of childhood as a period of existential trauma and a wellspring of neurosis, for it is precisely in this formative period that the individual is initiated into a cultural regimen while still immersed in the bodily impulses of Nature. That what is really at stake in the development of the child is the interplay of conflicting forces - the self-possession of culture and the self-gratification of Nature - has been exposed by the novel and erudite approach of post-Freudians, Norman O Brown and Ernest Becker.

While Freud perceived childhood as a neurosis-forming period in which socialisation contends and eventually displaces the claim of the libido, Brown and Becker expand Freud's formulation to broach categories of experience that surpass simple sexual drive. At stake for Freud is the loss of what he called the "ideal of polymorphous perversity"[11] (or play), which contains the erotic possibilities of human nature, and which is supplanted by the infantile organisations of the libido (oral, anal and phallic), each of which is a pattern of neurosis that stretches into adulthood. Central to Freud's diagnosis of retarded infantile sexuality is the relationship that exists between child and parent - a curious concoction of love and hate, frustrated desire and imposed authority. What Brown and Becker seem to

---

[9] Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, p.15.

[10] La Barre quoted in David P Barash, *The Hare and the Tortoise : Culture, Biology and Human Nature* (New York : Penguin Books, 1986), p.57.

[11] Freud quoted in Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York : The Free Press, 1973), p.45.

suggest, however, is that such a case of instinctual ambivalence is in fact a microcosmic reflection of the quality of encounter with the world at large. The neurosis that is human childhood, by this token, is not simply generated by the relation between desire and its unattainable object, but *by the struggle for assertion of the individual against the world.*

Becker suggests that the instinctual ambivalence experienced in childhood is an expression of the paradoxical condition of "*individuality in finitude*",[12] a condition made all the more poignant in childhood when one finds oneself in a prolonged state of helpless dependence. Viewed from this perspective, the *Oedipal Project*, for instance, is less a case of unrequited love for the mother than "a flight from helplessness and obliteration",[13] and a quest by the child to become "father of himself".[14] Brown similarly assesses the *Oedipal Project* as a pattern of "narcissistic inflation,[15] an attempt to transcend the conflict of ambivalence that plagues one's being by "becoming God".

Expressed more pointedly, the *Oedipal Project* constitutes a rebellion against the tyranny of Nature experienced as bodily frailty and physical determinism. If this narcissistic project seeks "possession of the world through self-control",[16] then it is impelled by "man's horror of his own basic animal condition", which, in Becker's mind, "he cannot – especially as a child – understand and a condition that – as an adult – he cannot accept".[17] Anality has similarly been subjected to a novel interpretation that takes cognisance of the dual quality of the human condition. In this sense, anality is seen as an attempt to master the rampant impetuosity of the body by regimentalising it. In each case, neurosis-forming behaviour arises from discomfort with one's own corporeality, with the body as a locus of determinism, deceit and decay, and as that which participates in the treacherous corporeality of

---

[12] Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p.26.

[13] Ibid., p.36.

[14] Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.118.

[15] Ibid., p.118.

[16] Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p.37.

[17] Ibid., p.35.

the world at large. By such a measure, psychic conflict is assessed more accurately as a *flight from the undesirable* rather than the stifled attempt at the *fulfilment of desire.*

The early Freud was sustained by a vision of life-affirming *Eros* struggling against the imposing tides of reality but would later rework his theoretical standpoint to grapple with broader, more formidable, features of the human condition. In *Civilisation and its Discontents,* the arena of his thought came to exceed the narrow confines of individual childhood to span the history of civilisation itself, with the result that the stumbling blocks of a repressed childhood came to be amplified as pitfalls on the stage of entire epochs: "May we not be justified", Freud would inquire, "in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilisations or some epochs of civilisation – possibly the whole of mankind – have become 'neurotic'?".[18] That Freud would all but answer this question in the affirmative attests to his vigorous application of biological theory to his structural analysis of the human psyche. Just as Nietzsche would speak of "this disease called man", Freud understands "Man the social animal ... to be the neurotic animal"[19] who plays out the narrative of its neurosis in history. Such a doctrine of universal neurosis can be accommodated if it nurtures the promise of redemption, the possibility of a return to a state of health and reconciliation. Freud, however, waives such a redemptive possibility by reading the source of neurosis into the ground of Nature itself, manifested as "the external and irreconcilable struggle of life and death in every organism".[20] The biological domain, itself, decrees that an interminable battle be waged between life and death, which, transplanted in the human being produces a "spontaneous tendency to conflict".[21] After all, in Freud's mind, the mental conflict that constitutes neurosis is generated by "the demands made upon the mind in consequence of its connection with the body".[22]

---

[18] Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York : W W Norton, 1962), p.91.

[19] Norman O Brown's analysis of Freud's cynicism in Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.10.

[20] Ibid., p.81.

[21] Freud quoted in Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.81.

[22] Ibid., p.80.

Freud's therapeutic pessimism was finally sealed with his *death instinct theory* postulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* and which can be regarded as the logical consequence of the dualistic anthropology which so persistently pervades his world-view. Where Eros seeks to affirm and enrich life, the *death instinct*, or *Nirvana Principle*, contrives a return to an inanimate state, a quality of peaceful inorganic repose best equated with death:

> The attributes of life were at some time evoked in animate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception ... The tension which then arose in what hitherto has been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state.[23]

By postulating two primal instincts engaged in eternal struggle, Freud is in fact writing the aberration of neurosis into the fabric of Nature itself. By locating unceasing conflict, and therefore disequilibrium, within the domain of biological necessity, Freud is suggesting that the canker of neurosis reaches into the heart of the world and that Nature, itself, is in travail. Life, then, and particularly consciousness, is a condition of disease, which effectively precludes any possibility of a return to health, because nature itself is inherently afflicted. All that is left to humanity, in whose consciousness the ordeal of life is intensified, is the dream of death, of non-being.

Freud, it seems, shares George Williams' repulsion at a world seemingly inimical to life itself, yet while Williams sees hope in defiance of the evolutionary process, Freud is driven to a pronouncement of despair by his impassable pessimism. Humanity cannot exorcise the sickness of which its nature is a very extension. Ernest Becker expounds the macabre impetus of such a perspective:

---

[23] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York : Bantam Books, 1959), p.70.

> Creation is a nightmare spectacular taking place on a planet that has been soaked for hundreds of millions of years in the blood of all its creatures.
>
> Freud knew better, as he gradually came to see that evil in the world is not only in the inside of people, but on the outside, in nature – which is why he became more realistic and pessimistic in his later work ... whatever man does on this planet has to be done in the lived truth of the terror of creation, of the grotesque, of the rumble of panic underneath everything.[24]

Freud's doleful diagnosis represents the supreme refutation of the Romantic ideal. The depiction of childhood as a wellspring of neurosis and Nature as the bedrock of antagonism dismisses any possibility of a return to some indwelling state of pristine innocence. It similarly dispels the romanticising tendency that runs through so much of contemporary ecophilosophy, and that treats ecological negligence as a case of human selfishness wilfully violating a demure and benevolent natural environment. Freud undertook the sovereign ecocentric project – he treated the human being as an animal immersed in bodily instinct and which replicates in its person the natural processes that characterise the world. Yet, in tracing the bond that unites the human with organic creation, Freud did not arrive at an all-encompassing relationality of compassion and loving-kindness, as the ecocentrism of postmodernity does, but rather found himself confronted with a rot that permeates both the nature of the world and the nature of humanity. Expressed succinctly, such a perspective understands that *the source of cultural neurosis can not be alienation from nature, because the meaning of nature is alienation.*

What then are we to make of this proclamation of hopelessness? Given its insurmountable pessimism, the *death instinct theory* has frequently been dismissed as metaphysical conjecture that needlessly spoils the therapeutic framework within which psychoanalysis operates. More than being simply unhelpful in the clinical arena, the death instinct theory can itself be understood as a reactionary doctrine arising out of Freud's growing sense of personal despair and that of civilisation as a

[24] Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p.283.

whole after the appalling tragedy of the First World War. However, whether or not Freud was submitting to a thoughtless impression, it is inevitable that a theorist communicates some degree of his/her personal, lived experience in his/her theory, and it would be simply unfair to dismiss the death instinct theory *ad hominem.*

One avenue for creative interpretation is to understand Freud's perspective as a very symptom of the neurosis he is attempting to diagnose. If we are to subscribe to the thesis of universal human neurosis, then perhaps Freud's pessimism can be viewed as the nasty package that comes with unremitting self-analysis. Freud identified the ultimate cause of repression and neurosis to be anxiety, discerning the prototype of such activity to be "the anxiety of separation from the protecting mother" and further that what is feared in anxiety "is in the nature of an overthrow or an extinction".[25] Yet if neurosis is characterised by severance, by disjointedness and conflict, then it is interesting to note that Freud's assessment of the nature of world and self is itself marked by a similar quality of dissonance. Freud's persistent advocacy of a dualistic anthropology – the opposing forces of *Eros* and *Death*, of creation and destruction – serves merely to enshrine neurosis within the world, a neurosis which evidently found its initial birth in Freud's mind. We do not seek condemnation of Freud but merely to understand the motivational force that drove his thought, a force which, in Freud's own terms, would invariably turn out to be an expression of emotional energies. Freud, we know, was struck by the cold, almost hostile, indifference of the world. Echoes of T H Huxley are discernible in Freud's confession to the Reverend Oskar Pfister:

> I personally have a vast respect for mind, but has nature? Mind is only a little bit of nature, the rest of which seems to be able to get along very well without it. Will it really allow itself to be influenced to any great extent by regard for mind?
>
> Enviable he who can feel more confident about that than I.[26]

[25] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. J Riviere (London : Hogarth Press, 1927), p.85.

[26] Freud quoted in Becker, *The Denial of Death*, pp.121-2.

Once more, the perfidy of nature is evoked, experienced as unresponsiveness, as abandonment, qualities which could just as well inhabit "the anxiety of separation from the protecting mother". We know too that Freud was susceptible to periodic attacks of dread of dying, bouts of chronic death anxiety that punctured his usually stoic exterior. He was unsettled by the idea of his mother learning of his death, an event which by rights exemplifies separation from the protective figure, and which bears significance in the light of Freud's own depiction of neurosis as "an overthrow, or an extinction".

The evidence seems to suggest that Freud partook in the neurosis he sought to delineate, which is not merely to say that such a neurosis is an externalisation or projection upon the world of his own enfeebled state of mind. Were we to depict nature as benevolent and charitable, as "the protecting mother", then we could dismiss Freud's pessimism as an affliction of his own private universe. But knowing better and having been tutored by the frank insights of the previous chapter, we recognise Freud's later thought to be the malcontented product of a man, who, having resolved to explore the ground of his own being and having identified that ground as Nature, was forced to recoil in terror. Nature, as the pre-eminent domain of conflict, invites our revulsion more so than our companionship. The endless campaign waged between life-affirming *Eros* and life-denying *Death* characterises the world as above all a locus of struggle, a struggle which, *ex hypothesi*, is inimical to healthy-mindedness, itself, with its stated goal of the reduction of tension and the maintenance of equilibrium. With no other recourse but to biology, Freud was driven to the conclusion that life itself is marked by struggle, by recurrent tension, etched into the substratum of the instincts, and therefore the equilibrium that is health is only to be found outside life, that is, in death, in the *sopor aeternus*.

Freud employed his death instinct as a theoretical instrument with which to probe human sado-masochistic tendencies. Accordingly, he dallied with the idea that the death instinct engenders a sense of self-loathing, manifested as repetition-compulsion of traumatic experience, and which is generally redirected externally as

aggression, as an impulse to delete the lives of others. Such a theoretical application is puzzling, however, given that the death instinct is consistently associated with homeostasis and tension-reduction and not stimulus-seeking and disruption. On the contrary, this latter project of pleasure-seeking and life-enriching (which incidentally produces tension under the sway of the reality principle), provides the impetus for *Eros*, the life instinct that stands in opposition to the death instinct. Consequently, there is a perplexing ambiguity in Freud's characterisation of the death instinct – it is at once a destructive impulse externalised as stimulus-seeking aggression and disharmony, and the *Nirvana Principle*, an impulse to retrieve a state of inanimate equilibrium, of imperturbable entropy.

This apparent confusion, we shall argue, can only be laid to rest if one treats Freud's perception of Nature as the keystone of his psychoanalytical theory, as we have endeavoured to do all along. To do so successfully, one must understand that while Freud's use of the notion of death is ambiguous, such a two-fold meaning is consistent with his emotionally-fired appraisal of nature. In other words, while Freud appears to make repeated use of the unitary concept of death, the manner of his usage tends to destabilise the meaning of the term so that it comes to signify two distinct modes of non-being, between which he vacillates at different times.

The first of these modes is encapsulated in the notion of death as the transience and ultimate cessation of life – this is the biological understanding of death as the irretrievable loss of life, a breakdown in the processes of life resulting in the dissolution of individuality and consciousness. This is the self-same death or quality of natural mortality that is spoken of by evolutionists and which is seen as activating the creative process of the world. This, too, is evidently the death which Freud had in mind when, inspired by biological theory, he posited the eternal struggle between *Eros* and *Death* as the mark of being.

The second of these modes, unlike the first, truly participates in *non-being,* in so far as it signifies a Death that transcends the cycles of birth and death that

constitute life. Freud spoke of it as the *Nirvana Principle*, a designation that aptly conveys a sense of its quality, and which is perhaps more appropriate than "*Death instinct*" for it has little in common with death as physical mortality. Indeed, it represents, as we have seen, a state of indomitable equilibrium, a peaceful repose of such a profound nature that it is almost certainly not attainable in this world. In fact, this tranquillity is so shot through with a sense of the preternatural that it appears to be the domain of *non-being*, of the Death beyond death. Therefore, where biological death is a feature of "*being-in-the-world*", the Death encased within the death instinct is a feature of "*being-out-of-the-world*", and, as such, it represents a consummate statement of rejection of this world – that is, of a world which precludes its realisation. Moreover, while biological death exists in the full manner of a loss or a deprivation (of life and identity), the death instinct, it seems, seeks an acquisition (of equilibrium) and therefore signifies a fulfilment of being.

Freud's inconsistent employment of the notion of death is curious in that Freud himself was unaware of it. Ever the biologist of the human mind, he was content in the knowledge that throughout his *death instinct theory* he had remained loyal to the simple organic fact of death, eschewing any metaphysical complications. Yet, our analysis seems to suggest that this is simply not the case. Freud's *death instinct theory* was evidently inspired by the domain of organic necessity which, in Freud's perception, is riven by the requisite struggle between two forces – Life and Death. The death impulse therefore is the instinctual analogue of the Death monad, which, because it is primal and undying, characterises all living organisms. But it is at this point that Freud strays, for, as we have ascertained, the death sought by the *death instinct* is qualitatively different from the death that distinguishes the organic cycles of this world, so much so that it might be regarded as a repudiation of organicism itself. Thus, when Freud asserted a universal drive towards death, the goal is not death in the sense of self-destruction (which Freud mistakenly portrayed it as), but *a pre-natal state of non-being, of not ever having been born. The death instinct then is both a rejection of life and the death that inhabits it, and as such is a supremely world-denying metaphysic.*

Taken as a systematic representation of the world, the *death instinct theory*, we have seen, has been subject to derisive treatment. Taken as a structural conduit for the emotional currents of Freud's own visceral reaction to the world, however, its full significance is exposed. In the light of such an interpretation, the death instinct proffers an avenue for redemption which, in Freud's mind, is forsworn by Nature. Expressed in the death instinct theory is a perhaps unquenchable desire for "*at-onement*", not with the world but in defiance of it, not in the realm of restless "*Becoming*", but in the insular, singular domain of pure, unchanging "*Being*". Everywhere Nature pursues the relentless process of becoming, engaging new forms and discarding old ones. Nowhere does its restlessness, its incurable agitation, allow for a lifetime of anchored repose, for the reinstatement of eternity in time. Instead, as our earlier analysis attests, individuality is offered no reprieve by its organic condition, swallowed up by the great folds of embodied time, and sandwiched between a traumatic birth and pending death. By Nature's terms, life is at once a short, hazardous passage out of oblivion and a return to it.

Freud, however, was mistaken in universalising the death instinct as an indelible feature of all organic life, and such an error ultimately erased any possibility of a resolution to the conflict he had delineated. Indeed, life and death do appear to be locked in eternal combat in the province of Nature, but, as we have demonstrated, the organic, biological death implied in this worldly combat has little in common with the sublime inorganicism of the *death instinct*. Freud's error stems from his confusion of these two distinct death principles – a "*dying-in-the-world*" and a "*dying-to-the-world*". The former is the biological destiny of all organisms; the latter, we must concede however, is a solely human prerogative. Moreover, if we take Freud at his word, such a world-denying impulse is the birthright of the human being, not because, as Freud believed, it is the birthright of all life, but rather because human birth alone is, by nature, a fall from grace with the living cosmos. *Environmental antagonism, and not some depravity of soul, then, is the original sin of the species*. This is the congenital neurosis, too, that is given tacit confirmation in the death instinct theory and which is the motor of the historical

process, "... sustained by man's desire to become other than what he is".[27] Freud, himself, was able to discern that history is little more than the unfolding narrative of neurosis. Yet, one crucial proviso remains – alienation from Nature may be the primal blemish of the human species, but it is nevertheless a relational, not an ontological, sin. As such, it is not etched into the ground of immutable nature, but exists in that shifting no-man's-land that prevails between nature and culture. Humanity, as Paul Barash suggests, may be biologically predisposed to a cultural identity and therefore by virtue of its superior brain size and enhanced consciousness, may inherit a natural sense of alienation from the physicality of Nature. Yet, surely the source of such alienation holds the key to its own resolution? Human consciousness of self in opposition to the world inspires a sense of abject terror, it discerns "the rumble of panic underneath everything",[28] but perhaps it is not bound to the rack of dejection on which it is born. The alchemy of consciousness holds within its arcane folds the seeds of reconciliation, of *rapprochement*, with the world; but any authentic affirmation of life must admit its own negation, must embrace the death and darkness that is its own shadow. A state of environmental grace, it seems, is restored, not in the manner of a flight of transcendence, but in that of a confrontation and immersion. The project stands in opposition to Nature, not in the sense of a conquest, but of a redefinition. Indeed, to engage its powers of transformation, human consciousness must turn in on the object of its own despair. The task, it will be agreed, seems an impossible one, but it is slightly less so than a state of abject despair.

Norman O Brown's appraisal of Freud's later thought reflects a similar sentiment. Realising that an irrevocable antagonism between life and death effectively forfeits the possibility of health and harmony, Brown is careful to supplant Freud's strident dualism with an instinctual dialectic: "Dialectics rather than dualism is the metaphysic of hope rather than despair".[29] Underlying Brown's dialectic of hope is a recognition of humanity's distinctness, a penchant for neurosis that separates it

---

[27] Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.15.

[28] Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p.283.

[29] Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.84.

from mere animality, for, in Brown's mind, "instincts, which at the level of animality are in a harmonious unity, are separated at the level of humanity and set into conflict with each other".[30] This conflict precipitates a flight from the death and darkness of the world and culminates in the discontent of a species that can find no rest until it recovers its pristine harmony. Brown's modification to Freud's anthropology circumvents the fatalistic pessimism of the latter by admitting the possibility of *dénouement,* conceived as a return to the primal unity of instincts. Indeed, the suggestion is that "Life and Death coexist in some undifferentiated unity at the animal level and they could be reunified into some higher harmony in man".[31]

Consequently, if history is the expression of humanity's restlessness of spirit, then the final *dénouement* will bring down the curtain on the drama, will bring an end to history as the narrative of humanity's neurosis: "For the therapist and humanitarian", Brown asserts, "a philosophy of history has to take the form of an eschatology, declaring the conditions under which redemption from the human neurosis is possible".[32] History, then, is consummated by the establishment of the primal, indeed natural, harmony in the troubled psyche of humanity, a harmony that is brought about by the reconciliation of human *Eros* with its "great adversary", *Thanatos* (Death), and with the world of Nature as Death's province.

The far-reaching environmental implications of Brown's prognosis, no less than its psychoanalytic repercussions, are clear. Yet, certain elements of Brown's analysis seem amiss and there is a suspicion that such untoward elements can be traced less to his diagnosis of the problem than to his attempted resolution. Brown's appraisal of the human psyche, as gripped by the fever of instinctual conflict and ultimately repulsed by its own mortality, is consistent with our own analysis of the roots of environmental antagonism. The quest to expel one's own sense of finitude and frailty is matched by the rejection of the natural world as the ground of death and

[30] Ibid., p.84.
[31] Ibid., p.87.
[32] Ibid., p.86.

duplicity *par excellence*; or, as Abraham Maslow would have it, "fear of knowledge of oneself is very often isomorphic with, and parallel with, fear of the outside world".[33]

This is certainly gritty stuff, but Brown seems to dispose of this hard-nosed grittiness soon after he embarks on his proposed resolution to the problem of instinctual conflict. Notions of a return to a primordial unity of Life and Death, of history tapering off into an enigmatic state of self-possessed harmony, exude a transcendental dreaminess that smacks of Freud's own death instinct theory. Indeed, Freud also spoke of "human perplexity and helplessness in the face of nature's dreaded forces" and of "the painful riddle of death",[34] and likewise sought refuge in a death that, we have seen, is no death but a state of blissful repose. But where Brown posits reprieve from life's anxieties as the goal of history, Freud can entertain no hope – the desire for reprieve can only be sated *ahistorically*, out of time and out of the world. The schemes of both Freud and Brown are essentially lullabies composed for the anxiety-ridden psyche, but where Freud's cradle-song reveals itself to be a tearful dirge borne of false hope, Brown's song soars on the reassuring winds of imminent release.

Unfortunately, we have learned too much from Freud to join in the uplifting chorus. Brown is perfectly correct in his allegation that "... life-and-death does not make nature sick", that "neurosis remains, as it should be, a human privilege",[35] even though, as it were, such a bitter privilege is one endowed by Nature, herself. But he displays an alarming naïveté in envisioning the final redemption as a retrieval of some long-lost state of pre-ambivalent, child-like innocence. Brown effectively re-engages the Romantic project which Freud had all but banished with his ontological dualism. What is worse, however, is the suggestion that the biological process, itself, will be suspended as a prodigal humanity approaches the moment of its homecoming: "After man's unconscious search for his proper mode

---

[33] Maslow quoted in Becker, *The Denial of Death*, pp.51-2.

[34] Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, Chapters 3 and 4.

[35] Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.100.

of being has ended – after history has ended – particular members of the human species can lead a life which, like the lives of lower organisms, individually embodies the nature of the species".[36] Regrettably, our earlier analysis has demonstrated that what traces of an indwelling nature exist in the human species tend to paint a most unsavoury portrait, and that what ontological bonds link us to our animal cousins exude a bustling self-interestedness rather than a quietistic composure.

No, there can be no return to the idyllic simplicity of childhood, when the world was as a "mystic temple" and "all appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful".[37] There can be no return to a childhood never possessed by our species. The word is out: Eden was only ever rumoured to be and the birth of a world, no less that of a child, has always been a painful one. There can never be any claims to innocence, nor can humanity retrieve a mode of being proper to its species in which it is able to find a supposedly animal-like repose. No, in the adventurous spirit of the amphibian, ours is a species of vagabonds forever fated to play out the unresolved drama of a many-splintered history.

History will not stumble upon its own end, still less will history achieve its goal through a frantic hankering after its own bliss. History will only dispel itself when the object of its fear has been eradicated, when the living darkness that infuses the natural world and that inheres surreptitiously within the human being, has been exorcised. Since this project is an impossible one, although still pursued by modernity, it must be abandoned, supplanted by a new sense of sobriety, perhaps even sombreness, that comes with acknowledgement of the darkness. The new goal, indeed, must deprive itself of any preconceived destination, must be the achievement of activity without motion.[38] For a culture of ecocentrism to emerge with any resolve, it requires a continual re-acquaintance with death and darkness,

---

[36] Ibid., p.106.

[37] A poetic rendering of the world by Thomas Traherne reminiscing on the magical innocence of childhood.

[38] An obvious reference to the Aristotelian ideal.

not for the sake of ultimately banishing the undesirable, but merely for the purpose of perpetually making conscious a relationship that has always been.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC OF HISTORY :

THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF HOPE

> **Every discovery is a conquest over nature, and over chance ... Man has the power of modifying the laws of nature, of making them contribute to his well-being. This power may be feeble and insignificant in each individual, but if it is observed in the species and exercised over a great span of many generations, ever growing with the progress of the human mind, it can ultimately balance that of nature.**
>
> **The Marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse***

> **The History of the Human Species as a whole may be regarded as the unravelling of a hidden Plan of Nature for accomplishing a perfect state of Civil Constitution for Society ... as the sole State of Society in which the tendency of human nature can be all and fully developed.**
>
> **Immanuel Kant, *The Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitan Plan***

> **Science has increased man's control over nature and might therefore be supposed likely to increase his happiness and well-being. This would be the case if men were rational, but in fact they are bundles of passion and instincts.**
>
> **Bertrand Russell, *Icarus, or the Future of Science***

In what has gone before, a dire proclamation has been issued: the myth of a *state-of-nature innocence* has been summarily demythologised, which is to say, laid bare as a mind-forged fiction, while its instinctual correlate – the possibility of effecting

a pristine psychic equilibrium – has been similarly scuppered. Thus, if a *rapprochement* with Nature is indeed an eschatological event, signifying the end of history, as Norman O Brown purports, then it seems that such a closure will have to be postponed a while longer. Already the position into which forthright logic has driven us bodes ill for contemporary ecological philosophy, which, with its penchant for anointing the concept of Nature with moralistic overtones, lacks a suitable discourse with which to express both the ambivalence of Nature and the full complexity of the reaction such an ambivalence engenders within human consciousness.

The Darwinian model of Nature provides a sobering corrective to such a sanitised naturalism. Refraining from characterising natural processes as either good or evil, moral or immoral, evolutionary theory traces with customary disinterestedness the stark conditions of living and dying in the biosphere. The rugged portrait it offers up serves as a fitting antidote to the saccharine paeans of ecocentrists, dispensing as it does with facile notions of natural benevolence and an intelligible moral order undergirding the created world. Indeed, Darwinian insights remind one that a thoroughgoing ecocentrism would re-acquaint humanity with an uncompromising and morally indiscriminate process of birth and decay. If indeed *Gaia* breathes life into the fissures of this world, she is anything but the docile *Consolatrix* of popular fame, being coarse-bosomed and offering but cold comfort to our frail-bodied species.

If hard-nosed evolutionary theory succeeds in chastening the sentimental naturalism of the modern age, then it has required Freud and his intellectual heirs to garner its insights and transpose them into the febrile waters of the human psyche. Thus, Darwin's Nature, unflinchingly chartered and described, is taken up by Freud and recast as a reality subsisting within the individual. Freud's psychoanalytical discourse, then, has been instrumental in mapping out, or at least intimating at, the existential significance of Darwin's formulations. Accordingly, the purely biological conflict that marks Darwin's world becomes in Freud an internal struggle, a *psychomachy*, waged between rival forces within the veiled walls of the

human psyche. Freud, building on Darwin's lead, recognises that Nature acquires its full significance only when it moves from being a cogitative, quantifiable reality to becoming a sensate, qualitative experience. Standing in the raw, Nature succumbs unambiguously to our calibrating instruments, as it did to Darwin's; but as the source of a qualitative experience, it acquires the multivalence of a symbolic resource, able to invoke simultaneous repugnance, adoration and indifference. What is significant is that such meaning is forged through struggle; indeed, struggle is the defining feature of the psycho-Darwinian universe – a struggle for identity and meaning amidst the experience of death, decay and darkness. Hence, Darwin, the great purveyor of Nature's methods and whims, would be driven by his burdensome knowledge to self-doubt, would even dally with apostasy – with the renunciation of divine benevolence, even of God himself. Freud, the defining figure of modern psychoanalysis, would similarly languish in despair at the interior maelstrom he had unveiled, at an inner life marked by deceit, perversity and self-retardation.

As has been borne out by our earlier analysis, the later Freud, increasingly victim to a creeping pessimism, and haunted by the spectre of self-perpetuating neurosis, sought solace in that metaphysical anomaly, the *Nirvana Principle* and its promise of an unearthly tranquillity. Darwin and Freud had equally reacted to what they had perceived to be the requisite conditions of life – physical vulnerability, frustrated desire and mortality; in short, the at times violent struggle *within* Nature and the no less vigorous struggle *against* Nature. Freud recognised that such crude constraints foisted upon embodied existence played themselves out in the individual consciousness, and it was such an insight that lent his psychology its organising logic. The Freudian individual, then, is above all one forged through the creative tension that exists within sets of conflicting, yet mutually defining, forces, and, by extension, is one caught up in the dialectical negation of its own being.

Freud, however, came to recognise that the conditions of existence do not merely play themselves out in the individual psyche, but more particularly in entire cultural forms, so that the artifices of culture themselves can be seen to be vehicles

for collusive neuroses. Thus, the psychopathological complexes that are attendant to the various stages of individual development in turn inhabit the collective evolution of civilisation. By such an admission, Freud transforms his theory of neurosis into a theory of history so that, in the formative years of childhood, "we have to cover the enormous distance of development from primitive man of the Stone Age to civilised man of today".[1] The naive optimism of these early formulations may deserve reproach, but we would do well not to be distracted from the profundity of the underlying idea: that "*ontogeny* recapitulated *phylogeny* (each individual recapitulates the history of the race)",[2] that entire cultural configurations exhibit the same neurotic complexes that underpin individual identity. The early Freud, sharing in the rational optimism of his age, was able to make this assertion in full confidence while proffering the hope of cure – the individual, by moving through the specific content of neurosis and exposing it to the sanitising light of the conscious mind; culture, by moving through the so-called animistic and religious phases before attaining maturity in the well-adjusted, healthy-minded civilisation of the day. Once Freud, however, posited irreconcilable struggle (whether external or internal) as the crucible of life and characterised the life of the individual as exuding an insoluble ambivalence towards self and world, neurosis was finally written into the ground of being and the hope of redemptive cure receded into an ever-encroaching night. Human existence and the cultural forms it yields, came more to be seen as the haphazard interplay of neurotic symptoms than as a long night's journey into day.

Thus far, we have been trafficking in what seem to be little more than sweeping abstractions of history as neurotic interplay, and perhaps frustratingly so. The pivotal nature of this hypothesis can not be overemphasised, however, for it provides a point of entry into the psychoanalytical meaning of history, in general, and of ecological history, in particular, as the peculiar career of environmental disquiet. Its full resonance can only be appreciated in application, as an instrument with which to decipher the abstruse, subtextual content underlying ideological

[1] Freud quoted in Norman O Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (New York : Vintage Books, 1959), p.23.

[2] Brown, *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p.23.

positions. For, if Freudian anthropology is to be taken seriously, one is urged to embrace a *hermeneutic of subterfuge and subversion*; that is, a *hermeneutic of the Unconscious*. Indeed, the operation of neurosis, Freud would remind us, is governed by the *principle of complementarity* – the development of neurotic symptom-formations is regressive so that "it is a law of neurotic diseases that these obsessive acts serve the [repressed] impulse more and more and come nearer and nearer to the original forbidden act".[3] And, as will be confirmed, it is precisely by this measure that contemporary ecophilosophy, humanistic and ecocentric alike, is destined to be a failed project – by its inability to grasp history as the *dialectic of neurosis*, and, by extension, its inability to treat of the human subject ambiguously.

Any perspicacious scholar of ecological philosophy is keenly aware that historical prognosis is as much a keynote of the discipline as are the "natural" sciences – the dynamism and subtlety of well-conducted historiography serve as a necessary counterpoint to the categorical formulations of the latter. This observation makes a mockery of the recent debate between proponents of the so-called "green" and "postmodernist" conceptions of ecological politics. At stake, is the meaning and intelligibility of the category of "nature". Since Derridian deconstruction gained ascendancy in the epistemological field, it has become fashionable to question not only any appeal to an objective foundation of knowledge, but the very existence of a discourse-independent reality. Knowledge, it is asserted, is ideologically framed and discourse-dependent, and invariably so. Consequently much of contemporary ecological philosophy has fallen foul of such a dogma, with its extensive reliance on a concept of innate nature, a living reality independent of cultural context, indeed even of language itself, and which humankind has a moral responsibility to sustain. For the postmodernist, then, the category of "nature" is linguistically-based; its content is therefore fluidic and ephemeral, lacking precision, and ecology is reducible to the "*semiotics*" of Nature. For the indignant ecologist, "nature" signifies a domain of indwelling life, and therefore, of truth and value; it

[3] Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. A A Brill (New York : The Modern Library, 1938), p.831.

remains constant, as does the moral imperative it engenders, against the backdrop of fleeting ideological representations.

While the respective merits of each perspective should be readily apparent, it seems unnecessary that dialogue between the two approaches should have reached an impasse. That such is the case is almost entirely due to doctrinaire stubbornness rather than to the inherent constraints of each paradigm. The simple reality is that neither can be ignored, that each must be given equal measure if any headway is to be made in ecological debate; indeed, that our present analysis has reached this point testifies to the creative interaction of the two perspectives. Our reliance on the organising principles of *psycho-Darwinianism* stands in deference to the need for a naturalistic ontology – an acknowledgement of an independently-existing domain of Nature, and an understanding of the complex pattern of biological relations of which it is comprised. To deny the existence of such a reality is to render naturalistic discourse unintelligible and effectively to erode the foundations of the ecological enterprise. In effect, much ecological philosophy can be understood as an appeal against such cultural relativism.

Freudian psychology and its intellectual scions, in turn, remind one that nature is itself in a state of travail, locked in a creative tension that, in the human creature, gives rise to myriadic cultural forms, and shades of symbolic self-expression, by a curious process of repression, confrontation and transmutation. In such a discourse-dependent realm, the configurations of "nature" are variable and ambiguous, subject to the workings of a supra-biological apparatus. Yet, in keeping with the tenets of depth psychology, such infusions of meaning are only decipherable with reference to the biological ground of being and the emotional life-forces it animates. This is to say that the multifarious world-views to which we subscribe are indeed generated by language and cultural context, but that such ideological constructions cannot be understood outside the human-Nature interface.

The aforegoing distillations of thought, then, serve both as preamble and legitimating logic to what follows – an analysis, drawing on psycho-Darwinian

insights, of a singular historical epoch, selected not merely for its exemplary value, but for the reason that it is indispensable to the exposition of our central thesis. It should perhaps be reiterated once again that, just as neurotic formation-symptoms can only be penetrated with reference to a case history, so the activity proper to ecological philosophy is that of historical prognosis. Pyscho-genealogy is not incidental, but integral, to the discipline. In this regard, the historio-philosophical period in question – Enlightenment Europe – is less chosen than chooses itself. First, the Enlightenment represents, in every sense, the formative period of modernity (and, some would argue, postmodernity); a revolutionary epoch caught up in the clash of world-views, in the upheaval of old certainties and in the mapping out of new vistas of knowledge. As such, it stands as a singularly defining moment in the evolution of not only Western consciousness, but indeed of the shifting self-awareness of humanity at large. Second, much has been made of the Enlightenment era by the ideological watchdogs of the ecological movement, and almost all of it has been of a deprecatory nature. It is entirely reasonable to suppose that, since it forged new foundations of knowledge and experimented with new modes of *being-in-the-world*, the Enlightenment inaugurated a new and unprecedented bearing towards the natural world, one generally associated with an exploitative utilitarianism. This much is acknowledged, but blanket condemnation very rarely augments one's understanding, and where it is a simple formality to cast reflexive judgement, it is invariably more difficult to foster an informed, discerning knowledge. The insight for which we seek, then, exposes as much the profound character of the Enlightenment mindset as it does the shortcomings of the facile historical verdict with which much ecological thought consorts and against which our depth analysis is set.[4]

What, then, is the nature of such a verdict? The ecocentric mindset, we have seen, understands itself to be a revolutionary one, redirecting the tragic impetus of

[4] Although the interpretation of the Enlightenment period proffered in the following pages (the present chapter and the next) is fashioned from the particular perspective of an ecocentric hermeneutic, and therefore, is an entirely novel one, it nevertheless draws on accounts of Enlightenment philosophy already in existence. In this regard, I express my indebtedness to such scholars of repute as Peter Gay, Ernst Cassirer, Lester Crocker, Emile Brehier, Basil Willey and others. I am of course well aware that other interpretations of Enlightenment thought exist, but have elected to rely on the work of those who are considered masters in their field.

modernity by reasserting the organic creatureliness of the human individual. Yet, while the professed ideals of ecocentrism invite admiration, one may be justifiably suspicious of its historical acumen. The unfortunate reality is that an imagination, sparked by moral indignation and feeling the conspiratorial weight of modern civilisation, tends to beget monsters as much as it does bright angels. What is more is that, if one is impassioned by a sense of the culpability of the present, it is the familiar and immediate that more often than not is polemicised, while the distant and exotic are romanticised. It is little surprise then that the traditions of both the Enlightenment and Christianity – the dominant ideologies of the West – bear the brunt of ecological diatribe. While such type-casting may merely be a rhetorical device for promoting critical reflection, it has also led to the identification of environmentalism with a reactionary extremism, "based upon hatred of man" and aspiring to "nothing less than the undoing of the Industrial Revolution, and the return to the poverty, filth and misery of earlier centuries".[5]

At their most unsympathetic, the ideologies of environmentalism condemn the Enlightenment outright, with few mitigating concessions. While the Age of Reason is acknowledged for its role in challenging the dark vestiges of medievalism, environmentalists take it to task for merely supplanting one inflexible dogmatism with another, one which is deemed even more portentous for the unfolding encounter between modern humanity and its natural environment. The passion for exactitude and experimental knowledge which so fired the eighteenth century mind, we are told, would come to crystallise in a new scientific parochialism, lorded over by a scientific priesthood and governed by the principles of reductionism and a crass materialism. The new dispensation effectively sounded the death knell for organicism, for the *Great Chain of Being* that bound the human creature to its living environment and further, to the *anima mundi*, and that, by extension, linked practical expediency with moral responsibility. Indeed, this severance of "natural knowledge" from "moral knowledge" continues to be lamented by ecologists who see in it an ideological buttress for exploitative materialism. In retrospect, it seems

[5] This is the rather sensational verdict issued by anti-environmentalist George Reisman in his 1990 publication, *The Toxicity of Environmentalism* (California : Laguna Hills). See also Timothy Egan's article "The Environmentalist as Bogeyman" in the *New York Times*, January 4, 1992.

inevitable that the hard-nosed rationality of the Enlightenment philosophers would degenerate into a gritty pragmatism, an obsession with utility, which, in concert with the rise of mercantilism and the ascendancy of the middle classes, served to stir the spirit of industry and eventually to transform European society into a full-blooded technocracy. In this regard, Tu Wei-Ming, ecological theologian, articulates the stock response of the environmentalist movement:

> Enlightenment as human awakening, as the discovery of the human potential for global transformation, and as the realisation of the human desire to become the measure and master of all things is still the most influential moral discourse ... of the modern age ... The Enlightenment mentality fueled by the Faustian drive to explore, to know, to conquer, and to subdue persisted as the reigning ideology of the modern West.[6]

The forcefulness of what is certainly a standard appraisal would be open to greater scrutiny, were it not that evidence for such a position seems readily forthcoming. Of the vast corpus of writings bequeathed to modernity by Enlightenment thinkers, few have been singled out for more astringent attention that those of Francis Bacon, deemed by many to be the patriarch of the villainous tradition. Peculiarly sensitive to the benefits of a practical, workable foundation for knowledge, Bacon would unashamedly profess his aim to be "to endeavour to establish the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe",[7] and, less grandiosely, "to increase and multiply the revenues and possessions of man".[8] While this is not remarkable in itself, Bacon's defence is little assisted by the manner in which he embellishes his acquisitive anthropocentrism with the most provocative metaphorical imagery. Bacon's *New Atlantis*, a sprawling utopian exposition,

---

[6] Tu Wei-Ming, "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality : An Exploration of Spiritual Resources in the Global Community" quoted in Nancy G Wright and Donald Kill, *Ecological Healing : A Christian Vision* (New York : Orbis Books, 1993), pp.49-50. For a similar perspective, see also Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (San Francisco : Harper, 1990) and Mary E Clark's *Ariadne's Thread : The Search for New Modes of Thinking* (New York : St Martin's Press, 1989).

[7] Francis Bacon quoted in Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature : The Greening of Science and God* (London : Century, 1994), p.40.

[8] Francis Bacon quoted in William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1994), p.51.

repeatedly identifies the garnering of scientific knowledge with an interrogation or inquisition of the natural world. Thus, he would boldly proclaim that nature "exhibits herself more clearly under the trials and vexations of art [mechanical devices] than when left to herself".[9] Nature, we read, was to be "bound into service" and made a slave and "put in constraint". At times, the scientific experiment is compared to a hunt, with Nature as its skittish quarry: "For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able, when you like, to lead and drive her afterwards to the same place again".[10] Still further, Bacon, entreating government to provide financial support for scientific research, at one point designates his scientist-priests as the "searchers and spies of nature" and compares the significance of their undertaking with that of "exploring and unravelling plots and civil secrets ...".[11] Finally, one should not forget that Bacon, far from being the sceptical materialist, perceived himself to be a god-fearing man and shared in the religiosity of his age. Consequently, in defending his bold scheme of pragmatic knowledge to a tradition which always spoke modestly of human achievement, Bacon would controvert the doctrine of the Fall by arguing that science offers a restoration of the long-lost dominion over Nature, and moreover, that this rehabilitation of human craftsmanship occurs at "divine behest", that is, it is sanctioned by God. In fact, in an earlier essay, he would go so far as to suggest that the tortuous process of experimentation and the gradual divulgence of Nature's secrets comprise a game orchestrated by a playful Godhead:

> ... as if the divine nature enjoyed the kindly innocence of such hide-and-seek, hiding only in order to be found, and with characteristic indulgence desired the human mind to join him in this sport. And indeed it is this glory of discovery that is the true ornament of mankind. In contrast with civil business it never harmed any man, never burdened a conscience with remorse. Its blessing and reward is without ruin, wrong or wretchedness to any.[12]

---

[9] Francis Bacon quoted in Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature : The Greening of Science and God*, p.40.

[10] Francis Bacon quoted in Leiss, *The Domination of Nature*, p.59.

[11] Ibid., p.55.

[12] Ibid., p.50.

Such a lack of moral discernment and the trivialisation of Nature's plight do little to endear Bacon and his intellectual kin to the outraged environmentalist. Little can excuse such a robustness of idiom, but taking such aggressive rhetoric into account, one must question whether Bacon's sanguinary vision is representative of the Enlightenment period. Most ecologically-minded accounts seem to think so. Nancy Wright and Donald Kill reflect popular sentiment when enumerating the ideals of the Enlightenment as being "self-interest, expansion, domination, manipulation and control".[13] Rupert Sheldrake characterises Bacon's scientist-priest, "the secretary of Nature", as a Faustian figure, impelled by "the desire for unlimited knowledge and power"[14] and willing to barter sacred values and moral good sense for the appeasement of such a desire. Ecophilosopher, Henryk Skolimowski, in turn asserts that "secular post-Renaissance ideology gave birth to empiricism and capitalism and to principles justifying cut-throat competition and extolling the concept of 'man is a wolf to man' [*homo homini lupus*] and ultimately an enemy of life itself".[15] And finally, respected scholars of the Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno, add to this growing disrepute by averring that, although the Enlightenment understood itself to be a progressive age, "the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant".[16] Further examples of a similar indictment are as readily attainable, but it suffices to point out that the sample above bears testimony more to the rule than to the exception. Environmentalists, and a host of other counter-culture lobbyists,[17] seem to have found in the Age of Reason, a perfectly self-incriminating malefactor; in every rationalist philosopher, a depraved Francis Bacon.

More sympathetic commentators advocate caution in depicting the Enlightenment mindset monolithically and suggest that it was shaped, rather, by a conglomeration of individual and collective forces, so that, while distinct trends could be identified,

---

[13] Wright and Kill, *Ecological Healing : A Christian Vision*, p.53.

[14] Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature : The Greening of Science and God*, pp.40-2.

[15] Henryk Skolimowski, *Living Philosophy : Ecophilosophy as a Tree of Life* (London : Arkana, 1992), p.94.

[16] M Horkheimer and T Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London : Verso, 1979), p.12.

[17] It has been noted on more than one occasion that the environmentalist movement has frequently aligned itself with feminist-Marxist concerns in a mutual front against the exploitative rationalist tradition.

no single voice predominated. In keeping with such an appraisal, Tim Hayward[18] is careful to set apart two distinguishable legacies of the Enlightenment – the *exploitative* and the *emancipatory*. The exploitative nature of the Enlightenment paradigm has already been well-documented, but Hayward's analysis gives equal recognition to the more beneficent aspects of such a tradition. Accordingly, one should not lose sight of the reality that Enlightenment thought was instrumental in dismantling the great edifices of unimpeachable and arbitrary authority, and, in turn, dispelling the ideological fetters and stultifying fear and superstition that had held sway over the Western mind for well nigh a millennium and a half. Hence, far from being an age of unmitigated and rampant self-interest, the Enlightenment aimed "first and foremost, at liberating people ... and enabling them to realise their autonomy as free, mature and responsible beings ... [and promoting] major ethical values like democracy, freedom and equal rights".[19]

Hayward's balanced evaluation serves as a timely counterfoil to the cardboard villain constructed by much ecological critique. The *Age of Reason* certainly witnessed the rise of the philanthropic enterprise and the extolling of humane values and toleration, in time giving rise to the great liberal democracies of the West and furnishing posterity with a legal nomenclature with which to address moral claims and safeguard moral integrity. Indeed, the discourse of "*moral rights*" continues to predominate in debates concerning the meaning and implementation of justice to the present day.

Adorno and Horkheimer's[20] thesis further attests to the dialectical nature of the Enlightenment world-view, fashioned as it was, by composite forces held in creative tension. Thus, systems of thought typical of the era could frequently be characterised by contradictory elements – Hayward's exploitative and emancipatory values – an ambivalence that tends to undercut the stereotypes conceived for ideological convenience. This is a significant assertion, but it can be married to an

[18] Tim Hayward, *Ecological Thought : An Introduction* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1995).

[19] Ibid., p.9.

[20] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

unreasonable conclusion as evinced by Hayward's own line of argument. Hayward's analysis, as has been indicated, rests on the distinction between two identifiable aspects of the Enlightenment, those associated with exploitative and emancipatory values respectively. What Hayward propounds is that "enlightenment" in its most benevolent and authentic sense, demands that the ideological heritage of the Enlightenment era be drawn upon but in a selective fashion that discards unsavoury elements while elevating its more salubrious qualities as guidelines for a more humane, and, by extension, ecologically-sound society. The project is admirable, but one must question its wisdom; that is, one must question to what extent the specific form of liberal democratic values is divorceable from the socio-cultural context that gave rise to it. If such emancipatory values are an inflection of a broader cultural pattern, then their content can only be understood within that pattern – that is, in juxtaposition with the exploitative dimension of Enlightenment thought. Consequently, to lift arbitrarily such ethical content from its many-textured context is to deal in mere abstraction, and, in effect, to neglect the dialectical tension that is the defining feature of Enlightenment ideology.

The Enlightenment world-view that spawned both exploitative and emancipatory values, then, ought to be considered for what it is – a systemic narrative incorporating what seem to be conflicting threads. How is it then that an Enlightenment thinker could simultaneously praise the indiscriminate pillage of Nature's resources while zealously upholding the standards of moral probity and championing the cause of human dignity? Hayward would have us regard such seemingly antithetical positions as irreconcilable, and would, accordingly, urge the embrace of the one and the rejection of the other. He can not consider that perhaps both the exploitative and the emancipatory dimensions of Enlightenment thought in fact spring from the same ideological reflex because he lacks the interpretative tools with which to deconstruct fully the Enlightenment psyche. This, indeed, is the deficiency of much ecophilosophical endeavour in so far that it considers all ideology to be reducible to a series of consciously-defined positions; that is, it *lacks a hermeneutic of the Unconscious*. In this regard, contemporary ecological

philosophy partakes of the customary Social Sciences paradigm - the human creature, endowed with autonomous volition, is a self-defined creature; history is, in turn, forged by such a process of conscious self-determination. In so doing, it overlooks the subtexts that inhabit any consciously-defined position and underestimates the gamut of psychological forces informing ideological expression. History, one should be reminded, may be the career of conscious self-understanding, but, it is more fully presided over by the Unconscious. At one level, history is the linear unfolding of a narrative, but at still another, and more profound, level, *it is the dialectical interplay of text and subtext, Conscious and Unconscious*, and therefore can be regarded most fully as a drama of concealed identities and hidden propensities.

It is profitable at this point to return to the tutelage of Freud. In an earlier chapter, we contended with Freud that the essence of human creatureliness or beinghood lies less in the act of contemplation than in that of desiring, which is tantamount to asserting that, while intellectual formations are not reducible to subliminal emotional impulses, they cannot be understood apart from such unconscious impetus. Thus, Freud argues conclusively for the dialectic of history when he asserts that:

> We remain on the surface so long as we treat only of memories and ideas. The only valuable things in psychic life are, rather, the emotions. Ideas are repressed only because they are bound up with releases of emotions, which are not to come about; it would be more correct to say that repression deals with the emotions, but these are comprehensible to us only in their tie-up with ideas.[21]

This insight sounds the keynote of our hermeneutic of the Unconscious and, in so doing, casts decisive judgement upon the brand of historiography circulated by ecological philosophers. Thus, for instance, where such thinkers would denounce outright the Cartesian epistemology, with its strict dualism of subject and object,

[21] Sigmund Freud, *Delusion and Dream and Other Essays*, ed. P Rieff (Boston : Beacon Press, 1956), p.70.

mind and body, psychoanalytical wisdom encourages one to postpone judgement until one has uncovered the psychological complex, or specific emotional context, expressed by such a "discordant" formulation. What is significant is that clues pointing to its nature lie in the emotive substratum of existence, what Nietzche called "the unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text". Bertrand Russell approaches such an insight when he suggests that "Science has increased man's control over nature, and might therefore be supposed likely to increase his happiness and well-being. This would be the case if men were rational, but in fact they are bundles of passions and instincts".[22] And one might add that this is a categorical statement – that "if men are bundles of passions and instincts" then all "men" are such, even those, like Rene Descartes, who profess differently. Guileless ecophilosophers, lacking a workable physio-psychology, are foredoomed to encounter ideologies on their own terms, at face value, as it were.

William Leiss, in his outstanding *The Domination of Nature*, intimates at a similar sentiment with his highly suggestive notion of the "*cunning of Unreason*", an inversion of Hegel's own "*cunning of Reason*". Hegel employed this term to denote the often covert workings of history, which, although composed of a multitude of discordant forces, tends to yield a grand design which can be effectively perceived only in retrospect. The Enlightenment, representing the apotheosis of reason, stands as the quintessential embodiment of this "cunning". Its players frequently acted out of short-sighted self-interest, fuelled by blind passion, yet out of this stockpile of crude motivations and materials, Reason constructed for itself the crystalline edifice of Enlightenment thought. Herein, Hegel argues, lies the "cunning of Reason" – a structural undercurrent that insinuates itself into the haphazard agencies of history only to forge, at the final count, its own empire of pristine rationality.

Of course, we have all along heaped scorn on such a misconceived notion of unflappable Reason – of Reason as the arbiter of human self-awareness – and Leiss, himself, is not blind to its inadequacies. His clever inversion of Hegel's

[22] Bertrand Russell, *Icarus, or the Future of Science* (London : Kegan Paul, 1924), p.7.

phraseology dismisses Reason - and hence, the power of conscious self-definition - as the engine of history and suggests that if such an organising principle of history is to be found, it is located more accurately in the "unreasonable" content of the Unconscious. Leiss' "*cunning of Unreason*" approximates our own *hermeneutic of the Unconscious* and points to the underlying irrationalism of the modern scientific-empirical paradigm; hence, Leiss' caveat that "social development continues to defy all attempts at rational control and is governed instead by the puppetry of a hidden dynamic".[23] Yet, while Leiss employs this subtext to explain the failure of the Enlightenment project of rational self-mastery, he hesitates to bring his theme to fruition by identifying the "hidden dynamic". In this regard, it avails little to conclude rather demurely, as he does, that "to control their scientific and technological ingenuity men must first cease to be astonished by it and to request blessings which it is incapable of bestowing on them".[24] Leiss identifies the ideological configurations attending the domination of Nature but since his analysis cannot penetrate the inner mysteries of these configurations, he can do little more than ring out a hollow appeal against them. The reason for such intellectual paralysis is not hard to come by. Leiss, as do the greater number of ecological philosophers, lacks an *ontology of Nature* within which to ground his ideological speculations. Studiously eschewing the provocative formulations of Darwinism, they are deprived of a living conception of "Nature" and subsequently confine themselves to an ideological shadowplay by which conflicting positions are pitted against one another in an irreconcilable struggle. By contrast, it has been the contention of the present study that "Nature in the raw" and the existential challenges it calls forth, provide the key to comprehending the "hidden dynamic" of ecological history. And the Darwinian universe, that of the modern biologist, we have seen, is hardly a quaint affair, thrusting upon the individual and community alike a set of rugged conditions; still further, it is against such intransigencies - a sense of finitude, impotence and moral collapse - that the life of the Freudian individual is set. The constellations of symbols and signs that generate human meaning, it should not be forgotten, do not unravel themselves in

[23] Leiss, *The Domination of Nature*, pp.21-2.

[24] Ibid., p.198.

an interior vacuum; still less are they fashioned by clumsy socio-economic forces – no, such meaning emerges from, and is continually challenged by, the confrontation with the raw physicality of Nature, of which evolutionary theory affords us unsettling glimpses. For all that it is repeatedly overlooked by contemporary ecological thinkers, this remains the single most important precept of sound ecological thought.

The Enlightenment, then, though parading itself as the reign of redoubtable Reason, is no less an epoch lorded over by the Unconscious and its waters of chaos. The challenge, then, lies in identifying the "*hidden dynamic*" that both shapes the discourse of luminous Reason and threatens it with its own subversion. To achieve this end, the analysis that follows takes it upon itself to explore three interrelated aspects of Enlightenment ideology. First, the doctrine of Progress, which exerted its influence on all spheres of Enlightenment thought and indeed, it may be argued, furnished it with its organising principles. An exploration of such forward-looking optimism imparts to one a sense of the hopes and ambitions that mobilised the protagonists of the age, but moreover, exposes the attitudes held by such protagonists towards their present and, indeed, their past. Of particular interest, will be the emergence of a new moral consciousness, and the manner in which such a moral self-awareness reflected the progressive *weltanschauung* within which it was framed. Where contemporary ecophilosophy is predisposed to distinguish sharply the moral refinements of the age from its progressive and exploitative context, our approach seeks to reunify these seemingly contradictory aspects within the single narrative structure that had originally given rise to them – that is, the living experience of the Enlightenment subject. What is more, such a strategy may suggest that the contemporary ecophilosophical enterprise stands more directly in the intellectual lineage of the Enlightenment than it is willing to contemplate.

And now, to the soul of the plot. The Enlightenment, we have seen, is commonly portrayed as being afflicted with an over-reliance on dispassionate Reason, as subscribing unflinchingly to scientific empiricism and, in so doing, denying the

very pattern of relationships with the world at large that constitute human personhood. This apotheosis of Reason was not as imperious as may first appear however. Instead, this supposedly indomitable paradigm was wrought through a struggle with all that it excluded, and indeed it is this repressed content that sustains it. Herein lies the supreme paradox of the Enlightenment (as dialectic): *that it displays a passionate attachment to dispassionate Reason, and an equally passionate disavowal of all that is unreasonable.* The seeds of this passion consequently lie in that with which it wrestled, and which it, ultimately, came to deny. In order to profile this psychological complex, then, we must turn to the Enlightenment's doctrine of the Unreasonable, of death and decay, and the amoral; its eschatology and its theodicy, or rather its lack of an adequate theodicy; and finally, its conception of Nature.

Thirdly, and finally, our analysis endeavours to scrutinise the shifting relationship between the vanguard of new scientific-empiricist order and the apologists of an increasingly beleaguered, but resilient, Christian tradition. Indeed, rarely does the Enlightenment psyche display its mettle more fully than in its often extreme partiality against the metaphysical world-view of the Christian piety. The ideologues of the Enlightenment certainly did not dismiss the tenets of the faith off-handedly, for metaphysical systems are inherently malleable and there was much in the rich vein of the Christian tradition that could be mobilised to serve a more secular-minded master. Yet there was much, too, that invited equal measures of rancour and ridicule in the mind of the eighteenth century *illuminatus*, and insight into the nature of such unpalatable elements and the adverse reaction instigated by such content, affords one a more prudent understanding of the psychopathology that was the *Age of Reason*, and which we, in the present day, seem to have made our own.

Although much contemporary ecological thought may be susceptible to the brash generalisation or the dramatic stereotype, we would do well to lend it an ear when it laments that our age is a supremely homocentric one. The sentiment is certainly well founded. *Realpolitik* – the business of modern living – understands it in no uncertain terms that the human subject is its own measure. Indeed, what had once been the multivalent story of the universe has been reduced to a series of tales of human accomplishment and human failure within the broader saga of human civilisation. This preoccupation with self belies a strident confidence in the human ability to overcome challenges and triumph over adversity. Indeed, while the modern philosopher has occasionally toyed with pessimism, it is optimism that has won out as the mindset most befitting a society built on rapid technological advancement. For those who have not yet attained the paradise of immediacy, then, it is sufficient to believe with confidence in a paradise deferred to a not too distant horizon.

This, however, has not always been the case, and the self-belief which has become a corollary of the modern outlook is really the result of a grand reorientation towards self and world that insinuated itself, through centuries of almost imperceptible gradations, into the Western consciousness. This paradigmatic shift which characterised the *Age of Enlightenment* can perhaps be regarded as the result of a conspiracy of elements. It undoubtedly finds its prelude in the Renaissance, with its rediscovery of classical antiquity, its high learning, its penchant for experimental pseudo-science, and its general resuscitation of the enquiring mind. This enthusiasm for analysis and systematic experimentation was, in turn, fanned by increasing practical proficiency, prompted by the often haphazard discovery of cannon, gunpowder, printing press, and improvements in navigational equipment and agricultural techniques. But whatever the random coincidence of such factors, the Enlightenment bequeathed to modernity a decisive and coherent legacy, incorporating both abstract significance – the establishment of a foundation for reliable knowledge, of a consistent and rigorous methodology – and practical repercussions – a utilitarian keenness which sought the workable application of such knowledge. This aptitude for pragmatism seems to suggest that the

Enlightenment thinker was less the disinterested advocate of pure Reason – stodgily cataloguing items of abstract knowledge – than a protagonist actively engaging both past and present in the hope for a more illustrious and indeed practiceable future.

The luminaries of the *Age of Reason* then were pedagogues – their purpose was didactic, which means, in effect, that they were passionate in extolling the virtues of applied Reason. The emotional undercurrents of the era are perhaps nowhere more openly displayed than in the doctrine of progress, in which the ideologues of the Enlightenment would project their dreams for a prospective humanity onto the screen of a hypothetical future. If, by a sense of progress, we mean a law of social-economic development decreeing an "improvement from a less to more desirable state of affairs",[25] then a consistent philosophy of progress, Sydney Pollard argues, was conspicuously absent prior to the seventeenth century.[26] Pollard proceeds further by ascribing this forward-looking eagerness to a new-found sense of history, which, although drawing from the well-spring of the Greco-Roman and Hebraic world-views, was up to that point unique to the Renaissance-Enlightenment period. This sense of historicity, as much subject to the application of scientific method as any other field of knowledge, came to manifest itself as the burgeoning quest to systematise and indeed cast judgement upon the past while mapping out the prospects of the future. Of course, the Enlightenment was possessed with a sense of its own uniqueness – of this it was certain, but it struggled to locate this uniqueness within the wide vista of civilised history. This indecision came to precipitate the famed skirmish between the *ancients* and the *moderns*, between the conservative-minded who argued for the superiority of the classical age, and the progressive-minded who were convinced of enlightened humanity's ability to surpass in greatness the splendours of Greece and Rome. Whatever the vagaries of the debate, all and sundry recognised the value of tutelage by antiquity. History, the record of human folly and triumph, it was believed, would yield signs and portents about the future of a disciplined humanity if made the object of critical reflection. The Marquis de Condorcet, a towering figure in

[25] Charles Doren's definition of the idea of progress quoted in Sidney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1968), p.9.

[26] Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*.

the evolution of the idea of progress, echoes such a conviction when he described the study of history as "a science to foresee the progressions of the human species" and to enable such a species "to tame the future".[27] Thus, almost imperceptibly, what was an archaeology of the past grew into the architectonics of the future.

If the Enlightenment represents a renewal of confidence in humanity's ability to deal responsibly with the legacies of the past and to forge for itself a better dispensation - what Peter Gay calls "a recovery of nerve" - then how exactly did the proponents of progress imagine the promise of future beatitude? As we have seen in Francis Bacon's aggressive rhetoric, the onward march of a reasonable society was frequently conceived of in starkly physical terms as a conquest of Nature's whims and the alleviation of basic living conditions. The struggle for advancement was an imminent and palpable one - its heroes were less pompous conquerors and grandiose statesmen than the salt-of-the-earth rank and file that tilled the earth and chartered the waters. The Enlightenment, then, was in every sense, animated by a programmatic optimism, presupposing both a philosophy of progress and program for action, and it found in every resolute pragmatist a willing shock-troop for the human cause. Greatness became increasingly less the measure of worth than mere material proficiency, as evinced by Voltaire's declaration that "a simple mechanic like the Abbé Nollet, who knows nothing but recent experiments, is a better physicist than Democritus and Descartes. He is not as great a man as they were, but he knows more, and knows it better".[28] Arthur Young approached a similar evaluation when, in 1788, he declaimed any history that read like a mythological tract - replete with accounts of the exploits of larger-than-life personages - and bemoaned the fact that historical study did not pay more attention to "the progress of agriculture, of commerce, and industry ... the division of that wealth ... and the manners it produced".[29] If the stuff of sound, scientific history is more concrete social fact than myth, then its stock character is the "man

[27] Condorcet quoted in F E Manuel and F P Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1979), p.494.

[28] Francois Marie Voltaire, *Voltaire's Notebooks*, ed. Theodore Besterman (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1952), p.221.

[29] Arthur Young quoted in Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, p.35.

of action", the *homo economicus*, and not some divinely-sanctioned, velvet-bedecked autocrat. Saint-Simon, patriarch of logical positivism, is himself animated by this pervasive spirit of rational utility when he asserts that "the production of useful things is the only reasonable and positive ends that political scenes can set themselves ... The producers of useful things, being the only useful people in society, are the ones who should collaborate to regulate its course".[30]

The defining vision of progress propagated by the *Age of Reason*, then, was effectively a *bourgeois* one. As one commentator has put it, social scientific thought of the period assumed that "the unchanging characteristics of human nature ... are all the specific character traits of the bourgeoisie; that men in other societies ... are in reality, all of them *bourgeois manques*".[31] Such an idea would invariably give rise to the cult of the commodity and material aggrandisement, to the stirrings of the capitalist spirit and the celebration of industry, so ably weaned by the establishment of global trade-routes. The hoarding of goods, the accumulation of wealth, came more and more to be seen as a meritorious preoccupation. Public sentiment, too, became increasingly more susceptible to such propagandist commercialism. Writing in the *Spectator* in the eighteenth century, Addison would endeavour to persuade his readers that "there are not more useful Members in a Commonwealth than Merchants; They knit mankind together in a mutual Intercourse of Good Offices, distribute the Gifts of Nature, find Work for the Poor, add Wealth to the Rich, and Magnificence to the Great".[32]

This ideology of commercial enterprise justifiably invites the reproof of ecological campaigners, who recognise that an infatuation with the tangible proofs of progress can all too easily degenerate into a precarious utopianism built on ecological exploitation. The natural world is inherently denigrated by such a technocratic progressivism, relegated to an inert stockpile of resources, or, when personified, cast in the role of the elusive quarry, the ravaged prey, or the reluctant cornucopia.

---

[30] Saint-Simon quoted in Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, p.113.

[31] Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, p.70.

[32] Addison quoted in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p.49.

Much of ecological thought, then, is given to seeking a regulating principle by which to offset the inflated expectations of *progres indefini* (indefinite progress) and to supplement a renewed respect for the environment with a sense of moderation and abstemiousness. Many ecologists, we have seen, consider themselves to have located such a regulatory principle in the legalistic discourse of the "rights" movement, whereby the cherished tenets of liberal democracy are employed to safeguard the dignity and intrinsic worth of the non-human world. This appeal to the moral inviolability of human and non-human life alike is deemed to inculcate an ethos of accountability in the human subject and, as we have seen, some writers would argue that such a sense of obligation reflects the ethical relationality which underpins the created order itself. What is curious about this approach, is that it draws directly from the Enlightenment's own moral creed. Indeed, the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of what Peter Gay labels "the Politics of Decency"[33] – the advocacy of a social and political order characterised as "secular, reasonable, humane, pacific, open and free",[34] a set of ideals which have not lost any of their lustre in the present day. Ever the champions of rational autonomy, the pedagogues of the Enlightenment would tirelessly fulminate against the arbitrariness of the aristocratic hierarchy which had for so long hindered the realisation of full human "subjecthood". Indeed, such philosophers stand firmly in the liberal tradition when proposing a quasi-democratic dispensation as the most conducive to the continuing development of human potential. As the erudite Peter Gay declares, "the preponderant political thought of the Enlightenment, a kind of snobbish liberalism, at least envisioned the possibility, and proclaimed the desirability, of a society open to talents, in which commoners, even from poor circumstances might rise to positions of influence, wealth and status".[35] This vibrant humanitarianism would, of course, come to precipitate the campaign for toleration of diversities and – a certain panacea for the active conscience – the abolition of slavery. This confidence in the possibility of uniting erstwhile foes – even warring religious factions – under the rubric of a new secular

[33] Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*, pp.397-447.

[34] Ibid., p.397.

[35] Ibid., p.399.

morality, is unmistakable in Voltaire's suggestion that "if there were only one religion in England, one would have to fear despotism; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but they have thirty and they live happy and in peace".[36] The polymaths of the eighteenth century, then, were as conscious of a moral destiny as they were of an economic destiny, and this sense of an incipient moral dispensation became increasingly interpreted in terms of a philanthropic solidarity and the reasoned implementation of just legal statutes. As the conservative Sir John Hawkins, first biographer of Samuel Johnson, put it, "we live in an age when humanity is in fashion".[37] Hence, to retrace the measured course of the Enlightenment centuries is, in truth, to bear witness to the birth of the social conscience, of what Henry Fielding described as "the glorious lust for doing good".

This, then, is what the more prudent ecological ideologue has labelled as the "emancipatory" content of the Enlightenment legacy, one which has effectively become the primary mode of expression for those concerned with ecological "rights". The argument for borrowing from the ideological resources of what is an ecologically bankrupt tradition, we have seen, rests on the premise that the emancipatory content of this tradition is in some way distinct and divorceable from its more exploitative undercurrents. The reality, however, is that such a perspective stands in direct contradistinction to that of Enlightenment protagonists themselves, who, almost without exception, viewed the moral regeneration of the species as not incidental, but integral, to the prevailing vision of socio-economic progress.

The Enlightenment mind, it seems, was convinced that increased material comfort and security would naturally produce a happier and gentler species of humanity, and that this rehabilitation of the human demeanour would, in turn, aid the irrepressible advance of commerce and industry, so much so that futurity could only but secure "the acquisition of the greatest welfare of the greatest number of

---

[36] Voltaire quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*, p.400.

[37] Dorothy George quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*, p.41.

individuals".[38] Examples positively abound in Enlightenment thought which render material advancement as the handmaiden of moral reform, and their copiousness suggests that this did not represent an isolated view, but a consistently held ideological position. Thus, reminiscing over the vagaries of the eighteenth century, Francis Place, the English radical, would write: "The progress made in refinement of manners and morals seems to have gone on simultaneously with the improvement in arts, manufactures and commerce".[39] Similarly, John Adams, who was noted for a more cautious optimism, would exclaim in 1787 that "the arts and sciences, in general, during the last three or four centuries, have had a regular course of progressive development. The inventions in mechanic arts, the discoveries in natural philosophy, navigation, and commerce, and the advancement of civilisation and humanity, have occasioned changes in the condition of the world and the human character which would have astonished the most refined nations of antiquity".[40] William Robertson, too, in paying tribute to the Italian city-state, would suggest that "the progress of commerce had considerable influence in polishing the manners of European nations, and in establishing among them order, equal laws and humanity".[41] Even more unreserved are the sentiments of the eighteenth century social analyst, John Millar, who arrived at the conclusion that:

> The farther a nation advances in opulence and refinement it has occasion to employ a greater number of merchants, of tradesmen and artificers; and as the lower people, in general, become thereby more independent in their circumstances, they begin to exert those sentiments of liberty which are natural to the mind of man, and which necessity alone is able to subdue ... It cannot be doubted that these circumstances have a tendency to introduce a democratical government.[42]

---

[38] This, of course, is the slogan of the utilitarian ethic, here posited by the Marquis de Chastelluc (1734 - 1788) as the "sole end of all governments".

[39] Dorothy George quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.42.

[40] John Adams quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.98.

[41] William Robertson quoted in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Rise of Modern Paganism* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p.258.

[42] John Millar quoted in Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, pp.69-70.

Across the Channel, confidence in the moral disposition of the human subject spilt over into the unashamedly utopian thought of a Condorcet or a Turgot, who, in mapping out the prospects of the future, conceived of a terrestrial urban paradise constructed around the cornerstone of a secular morality. Indeed, Turgot – both solemn ecclesiastic and rationalist prophet – would go so far as to suggest that the human moral instinct – what Rousseau referred to as the *moi* (the individual conscience) – in fact directed the movement of world history so that, in a sense, increased material affluence and technological proficiency could be understood as distillations of what in the first place is a vindication of the moral spirit.[43] Thus, in spite of the caution expressed by a Rousseau, a Diderot, or a Mandeville, the Enlightenment subscribed with almost unshakeable conviction to a euchronic world-view which identified the promotion of humane sentiment and the formation of a moral *Gemeinschaft* with the accumulation of a worldly knowledge and, by extension, the successful application of such knowledge to the spheres of commerce and industry.

As Frank and Fritzie Manuel have expressed it, "the dogma of unlimited progress" came increasingly to be seen as "the very *raison d'être* of moral action".[44] Ultimately, then, this evolution of moral consciousness cannot be understood apart from the culture of self-appeasement within which it flourished. The pivotal nature of this insight is not lost on the distinguished Peter Gay, who articulates it with customary decisiveness, when he writes that:

> Men had been charitable before this time, obviously. They had given alms to the poor and felt pity for the unfortunate. What was new about eighteenth century humanity was that it formed part of the general recovery of nerve: its optimistic decency was grounded in the rational foundations of scientific improvement as much as in religious prescriptions. Generosity was a luxury a progressive society could afford.[45]

---

[43] See Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Chapter 19. Also Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1987).

[44] Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, p.457.

[45] Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*, p.30.

This sense of a composite destiny, involving technological and moral expertise in equal measures, can perhaps best be understood in terms of the broader preoccupation with *natural law* as the foundation of reliable knowledge. The intellectualism of the age, with its predilection for empirical fact, would increasingly come to supplant revelation with reason as the source of incontestable authority, and such a reasonable faculty, we have seen, revealed impeccable design, sublime symmetry and order, where before there had been only an implacable and capricious Will. Deism – so much the fashionable belief of the eighteenth century – had indeed retained belief in a localised divinity but had shorn the created order of any metaphysical complications by relegating this divine persona to some distant first cause. If revelation became a mere adjunct to reason, then knowledge of the world – of God's craftsmanship – was no longer the domain of special privilege, was indeed the birthright of every rationally autonomous human being. As historian Basil Willey has remarked, "Whether one contemplated the infinitely great through the optic glass of the Tuscan artist, or the infinitely little through the microscope of Malpighi, one received at every turn new assurance that all was 'according to the Ordainer of order and mystical mathematicks of the city of heaven'."[46]

If indeed as St Bernard had suggested, *Natura Codex est Dei* ('Nature is the manuscript of God'), and a natural law inhabited the physical universe, then it is entirely reasonable to suppose that a similar law be inscribed on the hearts and minds of the human subject. Whether depicted as reasoned reflection or as a primal instinct, this notion of an indelible moral law residing within, effectively secured the integrity of the moral impulse and made of it a buttress of historical progress. Thus, while the appeal to this moral "idea of first impression" was not new – it had already been issued by Stoics, Epicureans and natural theologians alike – what was novel was the manner in which the eighteenth century mind assimilated this idea of an innate moral sense into its workable program of progress. Consequently, this moral law can in every sense be regarded as the

[46] Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (Middlesex : Pelican Books, 1972), pp.12-13, drawing on a remark made by Sir Thomas Browne, a distinguished follower of Bacon.

internal analogue of that external natural law that had decreed the imperious progress of human society. If, according to the sloganism of the *philosophes*, knowledge is power and therefore knowledge of the inner workings of the natural order affords power over nature, then it follows that attunement to the law within equally imparts power over one's own nature. *Both the pragmatic and moral ideals of the Enlightenment – as complementary facets of a single "natural" system of thought – partake of the discourse of power and, more specifically, of dominion over a recalcitrant nature.*

Few readers will miss the paradoxical nature of this assertion, for what was previously distinguished as distinct "exploitative" and "emancipatory" traditions have been joined in a dialectical unity. This paradox becomes more apparent when one considers that the Enlightenment perceived itself as an exalted return to some wholesome "naturalness" after the "unnaturalness" of the self-denying Christian centuries. The category of Nature, we have seen, served as the bedrock of the scientific, moral, political, even artistic, life of the age – indeed it had become the muse of the progressive mindset – yet the same category was no less the subject of conflicting notions and confused meanings.

How is it then that an epoch which deemed itself to be unwaveringly loyal to the dictates of nature could simultaneously condone the wholesale pillage of the natural world? The solution that suggests itself is that the category of nature that underpins the Enlightenment world-view is in fact an ideological construction and has little to do with the living system of the natural world. Basil Willey intimates at a similar conclusion when he asserts that "Nature [in the eighteenth century] was the grand alternative to all that man had made of man; upon her solid ground therefore – upon the *tabula rasa* prepared by true philosophy – must all the religion, the ethics, the politics, the law, and the art of the future be constructed".[47] Thus, while the *philosophes* sought to dismantle the perfidious "nature" of Christian antiquity, they were similarly engaged in appropriating the concept of Nature which, through their iconoclastic efforts, had been divested of any definitive

[47] Ibid., p.10.

content. If then, as ecologists point out, the overriding project of the Enlightenment was the conquest of Nature, then it was no less the *ideological reinvention of Nature with which to endorse such a conquest*. This would explain, of course, how an eighteenth century rationalist could eulogise the pristine perfection, the incorruptibility of the natural order while simultaneously advocating the relentless interrogation of a "Nature" that is all too ready to withhold her charms. Everywhere one sees the Enlightenment sensibility trussing up the concept of "nature" in the most elegant and exalted terms, so much so that the "natural" became synonymous with that which is either "true" or "pleasing", or both. Even the most fervent Utopianists, Turgot and Condorcet, expressed unreserved praise for "nature", which, as they understood it, was inherently good and had contributed the mandate for unlimited progress. Witness too the exemplary case of Lord Shaftesbury, arch-defender of human goodness, whose moralistic thought was so shot through with a rampant anthropocentrism that he was referred to as "the friend of man", or, as Herder preferred, "the virtuoso of humanity".[48] Yet this did not seem to hinder, in any way, his inclination to divinise Nature, as evinced by this ardent paean to her:

> The Creation is a perpetual Feast to the Mind of a good Man, everything he sees cheers and delights him; Providence has imprinted so many Smiles on Nature, that it is impossible for a Mind which is not sunk in more gross and sensual Delights to take a survey of them without several secret Sensations of Pleasure ... Natural Philosophy quickens this taste of the Creation, and renders it not only pleasing to the Imagination, but to the Understanding ... Such an habitual disposition of Mind consecrates every Field and Wood, turns an ordinary Walk into a morning or evening Sacrifice, and will improve those transient Gleams of Joy, which naturally brighten up and refresh the Soul on such occasions, into an inviolable and perpetual State of Bliss and Happiness.[49]

[48] Ibid., p.60.

[49] Shaftesbury quoted in Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, pp.68-9.

The perspicacious reader will be struck no less by the vehemence of this eulogy than by the manner in which it departs from the qualities so strongly associated with the Enlightenment mind - dispassionate reason, rigorous methodology and meticulous argumentation. What we have above is an inspired utterance which diverges from the tenor of hard-nosed science, yet it draws its inspiration from the scientific world-view with its emphasis on the beneficent order and agreeable proportion of Nature. The reality is that the rise of the *scientific cult of Nature* witnessed a parallel emergency of the *sentimental cult of Nature*, and, frequently, the two were indistinguishable. Where the former manifests a resolute confidence in a well-proportioned, purposeful universe susceptible to the probings of Reason, the popular imagination became infused with a complaisant optimism in a natural world which, if not already perfect, certainly held within its folds the seeds of perfectibility. Such a belief - best summarised by Spinoza's neat formula *omnis existentia est perfectio* ('All that exists is perfect'), or, as Browning preferred, "All's right with the world"[50] - may seem a noble one in itself, but the eighteenth century saw it fall victim to the "sententious moralizing" and mawkish melodrama that so characterised the age. Just as the softening of the human temper was achieved through maudlin dramas that extolled the virtues of *wahre Menschlichkeit* ("true humanity"), so the natural world was made the subject of pastoral idylls and primitivist utopias. The quaint rusticity that inhabits such depictions suggests that their subject was less nature in the raw than a *humanised nature*, purged of any disagreeably bucolic elements. Rousseau's state-of-Nature utopia, for instance, is little more than a rhetorical device for the dissemination of more humane sentiments.[51] The highly stylised natural ideal on which Rousseau relies certainly stands in judgement of eighteenth century Parisian life, but, for all its anti-urban-industrial import, Rousseau's primitivism seeks not the overthrow of modern civilisation but its perfection. Similarly, Diderot's Tahitians,[52] dreamily inhabiting a world founded on love of liberty and a dignified instinctual gratification, have

---

[50] Spinoza and Browning quoted in Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p.48.

[51] See Peyton E Richters (ed.), *Utopias : Social Ideals and Communal Experiments* (Boston : Holbrook Press, 1971).

[52] See Diderot's account of the Tahitian lifestyle in the highly fictionalised *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville*.

little in common with the living community of the South Pacific island. Authenticity, of course, will invariably be forfeited in an epoch guided by conditions of moral expediency and social utility. But, more importantly, what Rousseau and Diderot exemplify is the Enlightenment tendency to appropriate the category of nature – indeed, to make of it the very buttress of a world-view – and to employ it as an all-purpose ideological vehicle for the ethos of the age. Thus, the naturalism of a Rousseau or a Diderot might parade itself as an antithesis to social realities, but it stands firmly in the mainstream Enlightenment tradition in so far as it is less primitivist than progressivist and seeks the future refinement of "civilising" trends. Much the same verdict can be passed on *Wordsworthian Romanticism* and German *Naturphilosophie*, both of which perpetuated a naturalism whose anaemic qualities would deservedly invite satirical riposte.[53]

It is perhaps productive, at this point, to take stock of our preliminary findings before proceeding with the second part of our historical analysis. From the outset, we have been in agreement with those ecological critics who see in the Enlightenment a breeding ground for the paradigm of rational utility and the aggressive exploitation of natural resources. Indeed, socio-economic analysts generally concur that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inaugurated an opportunistic pragmatism which would culminate in the unleashing of a technological proficiency hitherto unseen in the history of civilisation. Ecological thinkers, too, have on the whole identified an unambiguous link between the ruthless industriousness and the ideological foundations of the Enlightenment age – that is, between its mismanagement of the natural environment and its predominant world-view. As we have seen, the sometimes brutal rhetoric of Francis Bacon – much maligned arch-priest of science – has done little to discourage such a synopsis. A more cautious, and certainly less sensational, approach, however, has tended to problematise the relation between practical course of action and symbolic

[53] It would not be entirely unreasonable to draw a comparison between the eighteenth century nostalgia for a pristine state of Nature and Norman O Brown's quest for "instinctual equilibrium" scrutinised in the preceding chapter. Both conceive of their eschatology – the end of history – as a return to a primal state of concord and tranquil repose, and therefore both promulgate the myth of natural goodness and perfection. Similarly, both projects can be taken to task for never actually engaging the living reality of "Nature" and substituting it instead with quixotic abstractions. At the final count, it would seem that the same psychological complex, or the same *pathos*, inhabits both perspectives.

depiction of world and self. The Enlightenment, it has been ascertained, does not present itself as a simple case of ideological cause and material effect, neither do all Enlightenment ideologues fit the mould of a Baconian caricature. What is significant is that the community of the eighteenth century, having shrugged off the paralysis of medievalism, had entered into a struggle for self-assertion against an uncompromisingly physical universe and that this fray manifested itself in equal measure as an internal struggle to find the meaning of human *being-in-the-world*. This in itself is not remarkable, but what is peculiar to the Enlightenment are the terms it utilised to negotiate the struggle – modern civilisation's capacity for unlimited progress on all fronts and the idea of the perfectibility of humanity by its own devices. It has been shown too that this sense of historical expectancy had tended to weave into a coherent progressivist doctrine what had been disparate, but complementary, aspects of the Enlightenment canon – the theory of knowledge as an ever-growing compendium of verifiable findings, the theory of civilisation as an inevitable movement towards greater technological competency, and the "theory of man" as an intrinsically moral being growing towards ever greater self-understanding.

However, if it is the progressivist, even utopian, impulse that seeks to link the epistemology, the industry and the anthropology of the age, then it is the category of "Nature" that succeeds in drawing such distinct spheres closer together and furnishing their union with a coherent, internal logic. Enlightenment ideology can, in every sense, be regarded as a "*natural system*" – its pattern of thought and action derived its organising principles from appeals to "*natural law*", "*natural knowledge*", "*natural impulse*". The *science of nature*, as it were, became the *soteriology* of the Enlightenment, which, having flouted the Christian drama of a divinely-orchestrated deliverance, sought a new independent basis for justifying the present and redeeming the future. No more appropriate resource existed than the concept of "Nature" with its connotations of primacy, indwelling essence and inflexible substratum, which had for so long been reviled and denigrated by an obscurantist Christian mindset by then hopelessly out of fashion.

Yet while this category of "Nature" consistently serves as the central shaft of Enlightenment ideology, our analysis suggests that the manner in which it has been employed in eighteenth century thought (and subsequent intellectual systems) belies a pervasive ambiguity. In the context of the eighteenth century, the concept had become, what could be called, a "*versatile signifier*" - it had been summarily destabilised, divested of any precise meaning, a *deus ex machina* that could be summoned at will. If, then, the overarching project of the Enlightenment was the domination of nature, it can be said that the *zeitgeist* of the age was simultaneously engaged in the reinvention of Nature. This semiotic play, moreover, can only be understood against the backdrop of the utilitarian vigour that so possessed the Enlightenment era and insinuated itself into its doctrinal formulations. Thus, the concept of Nature was systematically refined, sanitised and deprived of living depth before being deployed as a progressivist instrument. Nature as "truth", we have seen, became increasingly confused with Nature as "pleasing", "cheery" and "healthy-minded" in an eighteenth century mind still haunted by the sombre refrain of the Middle Ages. If, then, as Peter Gay asserts, the Enlightenment sought a program for "the domestication of pleasure" and "the humanization of man",[54] then a corollary of such a program would be, no less, the accompanying "refinement of Nature". The meaning of "Nature" was forged in the midst of the physical struggle against refractory Nature, of the pursuit for the utility of Nature. It is little surprise then that the Nature the *philosophes* had come to denounce was the *Leviathan* of Hobbes, brute creation ruled by blind necessity. By contrast, the Nature they had come to praise was the paragon of benevolent symmetry, a Nature, incidentally, that found its loftiest expression in the self-contained rationality and moral respectability of the model citizen. As Peter Gay has well recognised, the famed Noble Savage which embodied this pliant state of nature, almost always turned out to be "more noble than savage" and little more than an idealised depiction of the typical eighteenth century hedonist-humanitarian, stripped to the waist and transported to some far-flung, sun-baked shore.

[54] Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.204.

The ideology of the Enlightenment, then, presents itself as a curious naturalism turned in on itself, *a naturalism which is an accomplice to the very subversion and ultimate subjugation of nature itself.* In short, it is a natural philosophy which stands in defiance of Nature. What is more, this defiance is issued at both an external and internal level – externally, as the technological colonisation of wilderness; internally, as instinctual restraint, as the conquest of an interior wilderness of the mind "where all is laid waste, everything fair and goodly remov'd, and nothing existent but what is savage and deform'd".[55] The weapons of choice for such an internal combat against depravity, ignorance and psychic disarray would of course be the cultivation of reason and a regimen of moral self-improvement. The battle needn't be a lonely one however – the individual was assisted in the project of self-definition by the urgings and promptings of a burgeoning liberal democratic culture, and, the battle having been won, the way was open for the establishment of a collective moral body. This refined moral consciousness can quite justifiably be regarded as the bedfellow of the dominant scientific paradigm of the day – the Newtonian mind had revealed a mechanically deterministic universe, predisposed to the impeccable workings of natural law, especially that of gravitation which bound disparate physical bodies into a harmonious whole. To a mindset strongly inclined to identify natural order with moral order, it was mere formality to transpose the insights of *Newtonianism* into the interior universe of the human subject. This analogous reasoning would, of course, yield an unbending moral law of universal benevolence which stands in every way as the moral equivalent of Newton's law of gravitation. Hence, the interior life of the individual would be increasingly modelled on what were perceived to be the principles of the physical universe.

Where, of course, the vagaries of the living world or the behaviour of the human subject appeared to depart from this model of beatific design, it was deemed to be "unnatural", or, as Shaftesbury preferred, "savage and deform'd", and therefore subject to "correction". Both the practical and moral agenda of the eighteenth

[55] A description fashioned by the easily offended sensibility of Lord Shaftesbury, quoted in Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p.75.

century are underpinned by the recognised need for "*the correction of the environment*". This was quite palpably the case with the Enlightenment pragmatist-industrialist who was actively engaged in reconstructing the crude façade of the natural world along more agreeable lines. Eighteenth century moralists, as we have seen, were similarly engaged in redeeming the despoiled "character of man" by positing the existence of an indwelling moral instinct. Yet, this moral ontology relied no less on the "correction of the environment" than did economic advancement. The simple fact is that eighteenth century moral theory was heavily influenced by Lockean anthropology which was founded on the idea of the plasticity of human nature – the idea that human nature, through conscious self-direction, could be perfected from without and brought into alignment with the harmony of the created world. This strongly environmentalist interpretation of human nature would come to play itself off against those essentialist definitions which stressed the existence of an abiding, indelible "natural law" or "moral instinct", and in time the two approaches would fuse into a perilous compromise formula. The one approach, asserting the malleability of human nature, would seek perfection of the individual from without; the other, by postulating the existence of an unchanging substratum, would seek perfection from within. Sidney Pollard recognises the tension between these divergent conceptions when he remarks that, according to the first, "human benevolence could not arise in the existing immoral environment", while, according to the second view, "without it [benevolence], the environment could not be changed".[56] Enlightenment thought, however, would hold to both views, and their confluence would find its fullest expression in the doctrine of progress – the moral impulse would be construed as the engine of material progress, while the material benefit accrued thereby would simultaneously enhance the moral consciousness of the age. The result was that the material and moral progress of the eighteenth century, alike, would continue apace and each would derive its momentum from the "correction of the environment"; that is, the subjugation of Nature.

[56] Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, p.83.

So far, then, our analysis has served to banish, once and for all, the notion that the Enlightenment tradition is in some way comprised of two divorceable paradigms – the exploitative and the emancipatory. It has repeatedly been shown that the moral accretions of the age are attendant to its sense of industrial and commercial progress, that the Enlightenment's awareness of both a moral and a technological destiny exists on a single ideological continuum which has as its foundation the physical confrontation with Nature. Such an appraisal, of course, places in an increasingly precarious position the curious brand of ecological philosophy that predominates its field. We have already had occasion to perceive how contemporary ecological thought – both humanistic and ecocentric – is for the large part characterised by a bland moralism. The more cautious ecologists suggest expanding the scope of legal rights to include non-human subjects, while ecocentrists, professing their goals to be more revolutionary, propose the fundamental renaissance of human livelihood according to the principles of "natural relationality". Regrettably, those principles frequently turn out to be a remarkably close approximation of those of liberal humanism but merely laced with fiery rhetoric, with the so-called "*relationality*" of the ecocentrists being little more than an ideological vehicle for the diffusion of more humane sentiment. The simple reality is that the urgent exhortations of the ecological movement will remain mere grist to the mill if it repeatedly allows itself to be co-opted by the ecologically-bankrupt tradition of ethical humanism. Like its Enlightenment counterpart, the naturalism of modernity condemns itself to failure by its reliance on sanitised abstractions and naive moral categories. It simply cannot hold out hope of ecological redemption while simultaneously perpetuating the discourse of ethical utilitarianism; neither can it redress this paradigm from within by applying its precepts to the natural world at large. This observation, it seems, has not been entirely lost on cultural analysts. Alasdair McIntyre, arguing that "post-Enlightenment ethical discourse is a failed project",[57] remarks that:

> The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express

[57] A succinct résumé of McIntyre's argument in Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (Yale : Yale University Press, 1994), p.186.

> disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed is their interminable character.[58]

Ethical theorist, Kenneth Sayre, provides a more pointed articulation of this same sentiment, when he writes that:

> ... if norms encouraging conservation and proscribing pollution were actually in force in industrial society, it would not be the result of ethical theory; and the fact that currently they are not in force is not alleviated by any amount of adroit ethical reasoning.[59]

The impotency of ethical discourse, like that of rationalism, can be explained in part by the deficient psychology from which so much moralistic assertion is derived. In this regard, modern ethical theory partakes of the self-same "science of man" that underpinned Enlightenment ideology. The modern morally-autonomous individual is little more than a typical Skinnerian subject endowed with moral instinct. In other words, it is predisposed to a moral life, but requires favourable environmental conditions for the fulfilment of this predisposition. This, of course, explains why modernity shares with the *Age of Reason* an exhaustive reliance on education – or "*positive reinforcement*" as Skinner would call it – for the inculcation of its ethos. Yet, mere ethical injunction flatters to deceive, for it fails to treat of the complete living subject, or as Freud would have it, it fails to engage the "emotional life-forces" of the individual.

As Bertrand Russell had similarly surmised, the rational project of the Enlightenment was itself inclined to failure because the individual is not rational, but "bundles of passions and instincts". This appraisal has been conclusively borne out by our own analysis which repeatedly shows critical reflection giving way to naked passion and enthusiasm for a rational, empirical epistemology exceeding the bounds of reasonableness. The development of a reliable foundation for knowledge

---

[58] McIntyre quoted in Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*, p.186.

[59] Kenneth Sayre, "An Alternative View of Environmental Ethics", *Environmental Ethics*, 13, 1991, p.200.

in experimental science is indeed a momentous one in the career of the human mind, but as the basis of an entire world-view, indeed of an entire ethos, it would always be susceptible to vulgarisation by the popular imagination. Thus, the methodology of professional researchers would evolve almost imperceptibly into the muse of speculative pseudo-science, of a rationalist prophetic tradition corrupted by mere sentiment. If indeed, as Hume argued, the role of the historical scientist is to unearth the laws of the social sciences, and not to "relate stories", then one might remark that the ideologues of the Enlightenment found in such "laws" materials for the composition of "new stories". To be certain, the thinkers of the eighteenth century were as much engaged in generating new myths, as they were in scragging the obsolete mythological cycle of medieval Christianity, and the new mythos would derive its character, on the large part, from the dream of a happy and secure society comprised of morally-responsible individuals. Indeed, Alfred North Whitehead has described the eighteenth century as "an age of reason based upon faith - the faith in question being a confidence in the stability and regularity of the universal frame of Nature".[60] The suggestion is really that while the age paid obeisance to the idea of dispassionate reason, it very rarely succeeded in being dispassionately reasonable, for, we might add, the realisation of this ideal is antithetical to life itself. Peter Gay, in turn, rebukes the *philosophes* for supplanting the intellectual rigour they had come to promulgate with their own brand of parochialism. "Their [the *philosophes'*] relativism", he writes, "was not disinterested but in the service of absolutes".[61] Thus, while Enlightenment thinkers held aspirations to be objective and relativistic, this ideal was seldom realised, and was instead marred by a persistent partisanship.[62] The reason herefore, as we have inferred all along, lies in the reality that this aspiration is by nature less than

---

[60] A paraphrasing of Whitehead's assertion in Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p.124.

[61] Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Rise of Modern Paganism*, p.392.

[62] Peter Gay fortifies this appraisal when he describes Condorcet's *Esquisse* as "... rationalism run riot, dominated by a simple-minded faith in science that confuses over and over again, the improvement of techniques with advances in virtue and happiness". (Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.122). He concludes by suggesting that the *Esquisse* - Condorcet's exposition of progress - "is as much a caricature of the Enlightenment as its testament". Diderot, himself, does little to discourage this characterisation of Enlightenment as "rationalism run riot" when he identifies intellectual activity or a moral act with a "satisfying sexual experience". Rather boldly, he would declare that "My thoughts are my strumpets". La Mettrie, too, displays a less than reasonable attachment to Reason when he writes of "the sublime voluptuousness of study".

rational, is in fact a psychological reflex governed by a hidden emotional dynamic. If Freud is justified in regarding ideas as mere conduits for emotions, then perhaps the Enlightenment paradigm of deified reason is in fact little more than an enunciation of its own emotive subtext - in other words, it may be more accurate to understand this paradigm less as a mode of thought than as a quality of feeling towards self and world, and, in particular, "nature". One might add to Freud's contention that, if ideas indeed serve to conduct emotion, then perhaps ideas can simultaneously serve to obscure their own emotional wellspring, and that if this is the case, then one requires great hermeneutical guile to understand such a process of ideological subterfuge. This has been patently so in the present analysis, where we have been confronted with an age that outwardly depreciated the natural world, while intellectually singing its praises - an apparent discrepancy between thought and action which can only be resolved by recourse to an underlying emotional current.[63] Thus, where we have encountered idyllic paeans and exuberant odes to the goodness of Nature, we have intimated that such formulations conceal a fundamentally misshapen naturalism - a naturalism that reflects the external struggle against physical contingency and the internal struggle to wrest meaning from a seemingly antipathetic universe. For all its calm confidence in the world as a unified natural system, Enlightenment thought is shot through with a sense of struggle between conflicting forces, a struggle which would play itself out in the drama of human history, but which would no less render the physical and symbolic landscape of "nature" a field of travail *par excellence*.

[63] The problematical nature of ideological formulations as source material for historiography is perhaps rarely more apparent than in the case of the Renaissance. It has been well documented that the exploitative paradigm of the Enlightenment had its genesis in the Renaissance mindset with its renewed sense of pragmatism. Yet, the Renaissance world-view, itself, appears to be a sparkling fragment of eco-sense: the concepts of the *Anima Mundi* and the *Great Chain of Being* not only serve to consecrate the natural world, but remind one of the profound "*interconnectedness*" that undergirds the created order. Surveying such an ideology in an uncritical manner, one would be inclined to praise the Renaissance era for its ecological sensitivity, a misrepresentation given the testimony of history. It would once again require a hermeneutic of the Unconscious to ground such abstractions in living experience and to reveal the nature of their duplicity.

CHAPTER 6

THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF DESPAIR

> **The entire disorder of human moral life comes from nature as from a putrid stream ... [Whatever good there is] comes from the trouble we have taken to pluck out the natural weeds and to plant others.**
>
> **Pierre Bayle, *Oevres***

It will not be lost on the attentive reader that the conclusions of the preceding chapter encourage a fundamental re-evaluation of the scientific paradigm of dispassionate reason and that, while our insights may not have altogether discredited this paradigm, they certainly are forceful enough to visit self-doubt upon the doctrinaire rationalist. Our polemic, it must be noted though, is not directed at the scientific fraternity as such, which, by necessity, seeks as honest and workable a description of the world as possible. At the final count, the organising principles of the mental-rational paradigm provide the most effective methodology for the noble ranks of scientific professionals. Once however, the scientific epistemology is construed as a bright, new way in which to conduct the business of living – that is, once a *modus operandi* is mobilised as a *modus vivendi* – it ceases to be scientific, and becomes instead a vehicle for a confused tangle of meanings.

This reality is no more apparent than in the case of eighteenth century Europe, in which the scientific ideal, once appropriated by populist thought-mongerers, became increasingly corrupted by the spleen of a sentimental naturalism, technological utilitarianism, bland humanitarianism and downright fallacious reasoning. Thus, once employed as the basis for an entire world-view, for a grand

re-orientation towards self and world, the scientific-empirical paradigm grows into its own mythological complex within which are housed a gamut of cultural attitudes and ambitions, and therefore which is both at once a symbolic pattern of meaning and a psycho-emotive syndrome. For this reason, the underlying dynamic of the cult of objective reason can only be located in terms that exist outside its own rational discourse, and in strata of the psyche that prevail behind the human power of conscious self-definition. More than once we have suggested that to be consistently rational is not conterminous with merely employing the concept of reason, and that this ideal of clinical objectivity can be enlisted to buttress an entirely unreasonable scheme. Thus, as we have ascertained, eighteenth century European thought was subject to a rampant mythology of Reason which not only yielded a universe that divested itself of mystery and submitted itself to a formulaic understanding, but further served to fortify an unreasonable degree of confidence in human perfectibility.

The concept of Nature was no less susceptible to the new mythologising trends of the eighteenth century and, in fact, the Enlightenment theorists were remarkably consistent in establishing it as the lynchpin of their emerging ideological system. Yet, while such theorists forged a new symbolic relationship with a deified Nature, eighteenth century pragmatists were engaged in implementing a new economic relationship with living Nature that would culminate in the ecological aberration of the Industrial Revolution. The irony that the Enlightenment could praise Nature while simultaneously burying her is understood only if one recognises that its appropriation of the concept of "Nature" is in every sense an act of assertion over and against living Nature. It has become common-place in postmodernist thought to identify language with power, to assert that human discourse encodes within its symbolic structures a pattern of power relations. Such suspicion has customarily been exercised with regard to the most patently exploitative discourses, but the naturalism of the Enlightenment reminds one that even the most exaltant panegyric may conceal a more sinister import.

In its formal expressions, the naturalistic discourse of the eighteenth century depicts a well-proportioned Nature that expresses itself with perfect poise and balance and that renders itself intelligible in staid formulae. It is a bright and glorious thing, which, if not entirely evidence of beatific design, certainly decrees an imperious law of progress on all fronts for a humanity that endeavours to be both responsive and responsible. In it, physical space is regimentalised into a sublime symmetry, time is redeemed in the promise of future beatitude, while apparent chaos is revealed to be merely a fault of human perception. This architectonic Nature, we have seen, in turn finds its corollary in the moral law that resides within, that unassailable authority on which rests the Enlightenment definition of humanhood. Within it, we find little scope for the distemper of fancy, and while passion and the imagination are accorded a meritable place, they do require rehabilitation through the regimen of Reason, their cruder shades being tempered by the softer hues of refined *sensibilité*. Thus, while few would have aligned themselves outright with Humes' pronouncement that "Poets are liars by Profession", there existed a general distrust of the unbridled poetic mindset with its propensity for indiscreet "Gothick" musings. Passion and inspiration, we have pointed out, certainly remained after such curtailments, but existed only in praise of higher ideals – the sense of fulfilment that comes with ethical self-possession, the contemplation of Nature's benign design, the tantalising pursuit of reliable knowledge. Thus, in all, the Enlightenment represents not only a reorientation towards the external universe, but a parallel revolution in human self-understanding which finds its most pointed expression in the new moral vocabulary of the age. We concluded our previous chapter by suggesting that this nascent moral consciousness stands not as the antithesis or counterfoil to the dominant exploitative paradigm of the Enlightenment, but in fact, as its corollary. While the quaint naturalism of eighteenth century humanism subverted the perfidious organicism of living Nature, so its moralistic discourse sought to reconstruct human identity in categorical terms which resist the ambiguous creatureliness of humanity and affirm the implicit unbending moral destiny of the species. Both the naturalism and moralism of the period, then, conspire to produce a boundary-marking ideological system – one which exists less to affirm the theoretical goodness of Nature or the

intrinsic moral character of the individual, than to negate that which fails to conform to new standards of moral respectability and confident healthy-mindedness. The moral-rational world-view, then, rests on an active process of exclusion, wherein both the macrocosm of organic Nature and the interior universe of embodied consciousness are purged of their inherent – indeed dynamic – ambivalence. Consequently, the seeds of the systematic domination of Nature are to be found as much in the smooth, appeasing propositions of Enlightenment moralists and naturalists as in the belligerent harangues of a Francis Bacon.

Equally significant, however, is the reality that contemporary ecological philosophy, for the large part, participates in this self-same duplicitous tradition. Those homocentrists who wield their moral principles and legal rights as if they were a universal panacea are content not to penetrate to the heart of the ecocidal conundrum and resort instead to simple-minded stop-gap measures. Reducing the human-Nature encounter to a legal debate is indeed a gross misrepresentation of the depth of resonance implicit in the encounter, and rather than representing a *rapprochement* with the natural world, it serves instead as a measure of the great divide that isolates modern urban-industrial humanity from its living environment. Ecocentrists, on the other hand, recognise that a nature-oriented renaissance – nothing less than a cultural revolution – is necessary, one that far exceeds simple talk of ethical obligations. Yet, while they suggest that such a revisioning of meaning should centre on a sense of "interrelatedness" with the biosphere, ecocentrists appear reluctant to peer directly into the visage of their beloved "Nature". Instead, we are presented with little more than a sentimental sloganism and saccharine portraiture of Mother Earth that fly in the face of both more rigorous appraisals and simple good sense, and are further reminiscent of the meek naturalism that so pervades eighteenth century thought.

In the preceding chapter we sought to delineate the nature of what we have called "the psychopathology of hope". This term reflects our conviction that while the Enlightenment construed itself as a return to the ground of being, for so long obscured by the shadow of Christian superstition, and although it displayed a

strident confidence in the fundamental benevolence of self and world, its general optimism was less that of an authentic well-adjustment than the brittle and inflated product of a neurotic complex. Indeed, we have already seen how the eighteenth century penchant for an unbridled and imprudent optimism frequently outran its own standards of cautious, level-headed reasonableness. Its belief that truth is reducible to a medley of unbending law and succinct formulae is itself an article of faith, but when married to a grandiose vision of future human perfection, it acquires an almost talismanic quality to transform the nature of reality itself. In other words, the invention of a benign and wholly intelligible Nature as the foundation of self and world represents a cognitive shift – a process of conceptual alchemy, as it were – that succeeds in transmuting reality by redefining the symbolic relations that comprise it. This *symbolic matrix* represents a novel way of negotiating the confrontation with Nature (both internal and external) and, by extension, of ordering the emotions invoked by such a confrontation. As such, it is necessarily a repressive mechanism – that is, it is a facilitator for cognitive adjustment that merely overlays a fundamental experiential-emotive maladjustment. Indeed, herein lies the Enlightenment's psychopathology of hope – *that its doctrinal optimism finds its genesis less in measured self-reflection than in a pre-rational reflex, and that its conscious affirmation of hope serves merely to conceal an unconscious despair.* Thus, the psychopathology of hope leads almost imperceptibly into a psychopathology of despair, just as the pastoral glaze of eighteenth century naturalism points to a deeper, misshapen quality of experience; the one neurotic symptom-formation is merely an inflection of the other, just as the conscious mind finds itself eternally inverted in the depths of the Unconscious.

We have suggested throughout that this psychic disquiet of which we speak emanates from the confrontation with the insoluble fatality of the human condition, and therefore with the raw physicality of Nature in which this fatality finds its reflection. Thus, the ideological assertions of the age should be approached as psychosomatic distillations of what is, most fully, an existential encounter with the moral void of death, decay and apparent meaninglessness. This, of course, is not unique to the Enlightenment epoch – the world-view and ethos of every age are

worked out within such constraints, and therefore serve to manufacture meaning from the conditions of embodied existence – what Ernest Becker has called "creature-consciousness"[1] – which are such that they may continually invite psychic dissolution. The threat remains, but is repeatedly staved off through repressive stratagems which, as Freud recognised, can distinguish entire cultural epochs as much as they do individual case histories. Yet, if the cultural project of any age is the repression of that which may threaten the coherence of what it means to be human, then the eighteenth century stands apart as an epoch which found recourse to a radically new discourse, to a new conceptual framework, with which to negotiate the tyranny of the world. This moral-rational vocabulary, we have already noted, is a language of sharp dichotomies, of rigid causality and moral discernment, and, by extension, one of repression. Consequently, if one is to locate the well-spring of this divisive discourse, one is compelled to seek it in the undifferentiated ground of pre-rational experience and to describe it in terms outside those conceptual categories in which neurosis has come to express itself.

The ground of experience to which we refer is the confrontation with mortality and the fatalism of embodied existence. The darkness of the encounter is unspeakable – it is not reducible to language and therefore is ahistorical; yet, it is the great cultural project of our species to deny or transmute such "daemonic" content, and therefore history becomes the narrative by which the resultant neurosis plays itself out. Nature's darkness – that subversive universe of physical contingency, seemingly random destructiveness, and mute indifference – stands then as the grand meta-language that underlies all cultural utterance and of which all symbolic tongues are but spurious refrains. Consequently, it is a meta-language that is more properly approached by, of all languages, the dialectical discourse of depth psychoanalysis, in whose cherished Unconscious the supreme depths of identity are permitted to preserve some measure of their insolubility and defy a purely rational disclosure. It is precisely the prevalence of such a meta-language – "outside the

[1] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York : The Free Press, 1973), p.23.

great work of history"[2] but integral to history-making – to which Michel Foucault alludes in his *History of Madness* when he asks suggestively:

> What, then, is this confrontation beneath the language of reason? Where can an interrogation lead us that does not follow reason in its horizontal course, but seeks to retrace in time that constant verticality which confronts European culture with what it is not, establishes its range by its own derangement? What realm do we enter which is neither the history of knowledge, nor history itself; which is controlled neither by the teleology of truth nor the rational sequence of causes, since causes have value and meaning only beyond the division?[3]

Foucault's "madness" is an ahistorical realm, one of undifferentiated experience that precedes its construction by language and knowledge, and yet, "it is the void on which the plenitude of history is built, a constant, unchanging 'experience' that stands perpendicular to the horizontal of history", so that "the 'possibility of history' is linked to the 'necessity of madness'."[4] Consequently, in what is a supremely dialectical relation, the cultural project of Reason can be seen to be founded on the very experience of Madness or Unreason which it seeks to keep in abeyance. The task of the "archaeologist" of "madness", then, becomes the understanding of that "perpetual exchange, the obscure common root, the original confrontation that gives sense to both the unity and the opposition of sense and senselessness".[5] Foucault, the archaeologist, not historian, can only intimate at this "obscure common root", since "madness" has "entered a phase of silence", has been "deprived of its language; and although one continued to speak of it, it became impossible for it to speak of itself ...".[6] For Foucault, this muteness is in part attributable to modern psychology which, speaking the language of Reason,

---

[2] Alan Sheridan's phrase in describing the ahistoricity of Foucault's conception of madness, in *Michel Foucault : The Will to Truth* (London : Tavistock Publications, 1980), p.15.

[3] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York : Pantheon, 1965), pp.xii-xiii.

[4] Sheridan, *Michel Foucault : The Will to Truth*, p.15.

[5] Michel Foucault quoted in Sheridan, *Michel Foucault : The Will to Truth*, p.16.

[6] Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York : Harper and Row, 1976), pp.68-9.

has succeeded in conceptually colonising the wilderness of "madness" by reducing what is an essential, ineradicable experience to a mere psychiatric condition. What is more, it is a condition from which "modern man seeks his truth"[7] for it contains within it clues to the definition of sanity, normality and health. Foucault is driven to declare such a search an entirely futile one since ...

> ... Psychology can never tell the truth about madness because it is madness that holds the truth of psychology ... If carried back to its roots the psychology of madness would appear to be not the mastery of mental illness and hence the possibility of its disappearance, but the destruction of psychology itself and the discovery of that essential, non-psychological because non-moralizable relation that is the relation between Reason and Unreason. It is this relation that ... holds out the promise to man that one day, perhaps, he will be able to be free of all psychology and be ready for the great tragic confrontation with madness.[8]

The far-reaching similarities that exist between Foucault's ill-defined "experience of madness" and what we have hitherto described as humanity's fraught-ridden encounter with its own organicism should not be lost on the discerning reader. Both are in the nature of an existential confrontation which exists prior to, and beyond, language, and yet prevails as the eternal, unchanging subtext to all symbolic discourses. Both are rendered meaningful by a process of rational classification - "madness" by psychiatric categories, physical "nature" by the formulations of science. Yet, in both cases, this programme of conceptual reduction is destined to failure, since what it relegates to the periphery of humanhood lies instead at its very heart. Thus, while Foucault suggests that "madness" subsists within the very definition of humanity rather than delineating the outer limits of what it means to be fully human, so we have urged that the challenge of an ecological age is less the preservation of the physical environment - of that which is perceived to exist outside the human - than a fundamental re-

[7] Ibid., p.74.

[8] Ibid., p.73.

evaluation of "humanhood" in terms of its complex relationship with the living biosphere.

The suggestion, in both cases, stands as a challenge, not as a solution, to the problem of being human. Foucault refuses to imply that a reacquaintance with experiential "madness" will in some way serve to ameliorate the human condition or resolve human meaning; it may be enriched thereby, or made more problematic, but not improved. Instead, he speaks of this reacquaintance as "the great tragic confrontation with madness". Similarly, in our own ecological diagnosis, we have swiftly discovered that the modern environmental crisis cannot be obviated by a simple "return to a state-of-nature" sloganism, and such naturalistic naïveté has succumbed to a more cautious, almost cynical, suspicion that the canker of environmental agitation runs deeper than first thought, through to the very condition of self-reflective embodiment – of matter made conscious – and perhaps extends to the very fabric of "nature" itself. At the final count, then, one might assert that the full import of what we have described as the human awareness of its own "natural" fatality is closely resonant with that of Foucault's "madness", and that we have, as it were, located his ahistorical "obscure root" in the living ground of Nature. This, of course, is not to suggest that such "dis-ease" is an ontological one – Foucault himself, pointing to the historicity of "mental illness", would object to such a diagnosis – but to assert that it is rather relational certainly does not render it any less a part of the fabric of living "nature".

Of particular interest is Foucault's treatment of the entire psychiatric enterprise, since psychological insights have themselves served as the theoretical bedrock of the present study. Foucault's inference that a reacquaintance with the experience of "madness" would signify the end of psychology reflects his distrust of the Western psychiatric tradition, which, employing the scientific language of exclusion, wielded the category of mental illness as a tool of power. Its pretensions to have access to the inner mechanisms of "madness" and, therefore, to have in its possession a clean, coherent concept of the condition represent for Foucault a

"moralizing sadism" or what he calls "power-knowledge"[9] (*pouvoir-savoir*) which has as its aim not the liberation, but the confinement and control, of the meaning of humanhood.

The efficacy of this "power-knowledge" rests on the philanthropic pretensions of the psychiatric field, which purports not merely to understand the truth of the human condition but to offer the hope of a cure or a restoration of an original psychic wholeness. Such truth is illusory and such hope is vain, however, and in Foucault's mind each stands as an admission of duplicity, since the standards of health and sanity within which they are grounded are themselves overlayed by centuries of historical sediment - such standards can not serve as the flagship of human liberation or self-awareness since they are the vestige of a historical language or a "power-knowledge", which seeks not to understand but to categorise and alienate. Mental illness can not be the particular object of psychiatric study, since "it is madness that holds the truth of psychology" - it is the madness of the human condition that both precedes and inhabits psychological insight, and is not reducible to it. It is for this reason, too, that "modern man seeks his truth [in psychology] - and loses it". Psychology has evaluated and therefore severed "that essential, non-psychological because non-moralizable relation that is the relation between Reason and Unreason", a relation which is not merely subject to "man's being", but is the very spirit thereof.

Although the present study has drawn on modern psychoanalytical theory for its organising principles rather than shunned it as a construct of power, Foucault's perspective on the project of Western psychology serves to fortify our own theoretical position. This may not be readily apparent from the start, however, for while Foucault's analysis renders "psychology" defunct as a language with which to comprehend the holism of human experience, we have repeatedly advocated the view that psychoanalytical discourse is invaluable in the conceptualisation of a changing human identity, since it alone gives equal articulation to both the biological, pre-conscious substratum of human nature and the symbolic process that

[9] Ibid., p.73.

gives rise to the construction of human meaning. In short, psychological categories succeed in delineating the dual nature of the human creature without compromising the fundamental unity of its being. Thus, the dialectical formulations of modern psychoanalysis are instrumental in conceptualising the meaningful commerce that exists between the biological and supra-biological dimensions of human existence, a project which is at the heart of any serious ecocentric philosophy.

Yet, while our hypothesis rests on the appropriation of psychoanalytical discourse, it has been impelled towards conclusions that closely resemble those of Foucault in their gravity. Like Foucault, we have been driven to question the cogency of popular conceptions of neurosis and standards of mental health. We have supplanted glib definitions of mental "dis-ease" with a more cautious re-evaluation that suggests that neurosis and psychic tension penetrate to the very condition of being human. Environmental antagonism, it seems, is the birthright of the human creature, while the psychic disquiet it generates stands as the interior Gorgon with which every cultural hero must wrestle. Like Foucault's "madness", the reality of neurosis lingers not at the outer bounds of humanity – it is not a blemish on an original perfection, a disruption of a primal unity – but resides at the very heart of the definition of humanhood, and therefore the wistful hope of a simple cure must be forfeited. Thus, abandoning the "cruel" rhetoric of psychology, Foucault foresees the "tragic confrontation with madness"; yet, embracing the contorted language of psychoanalysis, we can already discern the tragic confrontation that echoes in its dialectical formulations and resounds in its internal logic. If indeed such a "tragic confrontation with madness" – Reason against its own Unreason – is the end of history, then it is also its beginning. It is the same vision of universal neurosis and the loss of a standard of pristine goodness that affected Freud's later thought, which, succumbing to a creeping pessimism, would increasingly dabble with the only escape clause available – the *Death Instinct*, a principle that propels tortured sentience to a state of inanimate repose, beyond the tensions of life itself. As we have ascertained, Norman O Brown's proposed resolution fares little better in such a sober light. His suggestions that history can only reach its destined *dénouement* by the establishment of an "instinctual equilibrium" and a

rapprochement with some pristine "species-life" is attractive but naive. There can be no return to a psychosomatic niche that never was – the creature that forever seeks its bliss is a supremely historical one, its disquiet is the engine of history-making. If such a creature is to find repose, it will almost certainly do so outside of history, in a moment of eschatological rupture, but it is inconceivable that such a world-rending event would consist of a return to a lumpen, sub-conscious organicism.

The analogical reasoning that makes connections between Foucault's "archaeology of madness" and our own iconoclastic naturalism does not end here however. Both employ a *hermeneutic of suspicion* in overriding accepted dichotomies and inflexible evaluations. Thus, in renewing the experience of essential "madness", Foucault anticipates the abandonment of the healing art of psychology, for it ultimately rests on a divisive language that cleaves the Reason-Unreason dialectic asunder. Similarly, in acknowledging such essential "madness", our own analysis is driven to discard the simple notion of Nature as healing ground, for such an image is itself fashioned from the same divisive language. To make one's reacquaintance with the sheer organicism of living Nature is indeed to touch on that inviolable relation between Reason and Unreason – the relation is an ambiguous one, for, since it is "non-moralizable", it entails the loss of fixed concepts of health and sanity; the touch is a precarious one, for it threatens to reach to the heart of "madness" that underlies the human condition.

The significance of the essential relation between Reason and Unreason, sanity and "madness", is an issue that is not particular to modernity but it is one that has acquired a peculiar poignancy in the modern age. Thus, while Foucault speaks of a "constant verticality"[10] of death and madness accompanying the horizontal progression of history, he traces the loss of vital interface, the broken dialogue between Reason and what lay beyond its crystalline structure, to the inception of Newtonian physics and Cartesian rationalism. Unwavering belief in a law-governed universe demanded the expulsion of that which exceeded the descriptive

[10] Foucault quoted in Sheridan, *Michel Foucault : The Will to Truth*, p.14.

power of Reason and the enforced silence, but not absence, of "necessary madness" ensued, broken only by the labours of artistic intermediaries. It is more than coincidental that the dominant fashion in contemporary ecological circles is similarly to hold the scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries accountable for the disruption of humanity's organic unity, and the violation of a normative, if not sacred, pattern of natural relations. As we have asserted in the previous chapter, there is much to be said for such a diagnosis, but it fails abysmally in so far as it both misunderstands the deficiencies of the language of Reason and misconstrues the quality and texture of living organicism. Hence, while Foucault castigates the language of Reason for its systematic disempowerment of the experience of "madness", radical ecologists lambaste it for having disregarded a perfectly coherent, indeed moralizable, component of human meaning. The importance of this distinction should not be underestimated. Foucault looks to the Reason-Unreason interface and finds a "*non-moralizable*" relation because it defies fixed, coherent meaning; it defines "the limits rather than the identity of a culture".[11] Ecologists, too, seek to recover the voice of Unreason – this time in the unconscious pattern of Nature – but instead profess to have located a relation with a clearly defined, "*moralizable*" import; that is, a basic charter for responsible, ecocentric living. Thus, where Foucault finds the dark, creative center of "madness" that bespeaks a "tragic confrontation", ecocentrists have uncovered a nexus of affirmative meaning. Foucault is driven to problematise the meaning of humanhood, while ecocentrists claim to have found its resolution.

We have seen that eighteenth century secularists, too, purported to have located the foundation of human meaning – a concoction of moral Newtonianism and the simple therapy of one-eyed optimism – one which in overview has not proven to be too dissimilar to the sentimental naturalism of present-day ecological philosophy. Yet, it would be a gross misrepresentation to portray the humanism of the age as simply one of intoxicated self-confidence and an unwavering belief in the benevolence of the natural order. Such strident exaltation certainly existed, but it

[11] Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.xiii.

can almost certainly be regarded as a psychopathology of hope, for, in essence, it represents a form of self-anaesthetisation against the intellectual and spiritual vertigo of the century, and against the problematisation of self and world that served as the fountainhead of Enlightenment thought. Certainly, the *philosophes* endeavoured to construct a monument to ethical humanism on the ruins of the dismantled Christian hegemony. The cornerstones of the new edifice were to be autonomous Reason, Natural Law and a secular morality, but the process of reconstruction was a perilous one for its success hinged, in part, on the empirical verification of human meaning – that is, on the assurance that, were an ethical humanist to probe the ordered system of the world, he would find the objectification of his own ideological position. Hence, the process was susceptible to sabotage by too penetrative a logic that would seek out conclusions undesirable to the didactic purposes of the new humanism, or a reason which, applied too rigorously, would begin to unravel itself.

The eighteenth century, and eighteenth century France in particular, then, was haunted by an alternative tradition, one which participated in the same culture of critical rationality, but whose paths of logical consistency and systematic reflection led instead to a proclamation of despair. Thus, where the fashioners of the new populist sensibility encountered a world replete with affirmative meaning, a second school of doubters and declaimers would come to recognise a senseless and indifferent universe, devoid of a uniform moral order, or at worst, unmistakably immoral. While deists and moderate humanists found their own corroboration echoed throughout the echelons of the entire created order, those stricken with nihilism were impelled by sheer inscrutable logic to succumb to a sense of the irredeemable cosmic loneliness of humankind; in Foucault's own terms, where the moralists sought to locate the "identity of a culture", a creeping cynicism could only delineate its "limits" by pointing to the fundamental absurdity that underlies the relation between individual and world.

This pessimistic tradition would find its fullest expression in the brutal honesty of a La Mettrie or a Bayle, and in the indiscretion of the Marquis de Sade, but its

contagion would even come to afflict the more respected genius of Voltaire and others of his ilk. By intellectual weight alone, it ought to have sounded the death knell of any sentimental naturalism, indeed of any thoroughgoing Natural Law theory, but history has attested to the perpetuation of this consoling illusion through to the present day. What the existence of this alternative tradition does suggest, though, is that the crucible in which modernism finds its genesis is less that of irresistible conclusion than one of the frustration of resolution. Far from being an intellectual juggernaut that banished entire dimensions of feeling from the human repertoire, the Age of Enlightenment is above all one of dialogue, debate and discord; it is an age of full-blown engagement, of the thrashing out of human meaning in relation to the natural world. Certainly, this reaffirmation of the human-Nature interface, of that inflexible matrix that fuses the human and the natural in organic unity, promised so much. One might argue that it emancipated human cognition from the trammels of an imperious supernaturalism, or that, for all its fallibility, the Enlightenment represents a rite of passage, a collective coming of age; but it is important to recognise that it did so at a significant cost. It dispelled the endless night of medievalism only to subject the human soul to the tortuous shadowplay of freedom: slavish certitude would give way to the anguish of self-doubt, and the eclipse of a metaphysical terrorism would in turn inaugurate a new and no less profound reign – the tyranny of matter.

There is little doubt that the ideologues of the Enlightenment understood themselves as the vanguard of a grand cultural realignment that proffered the harmonisation of theory and practice, thought and feeling. The keynotes of this nascent revolution were likewise clear to a perceptive mind – a restless spirit of critical inquiry and a penchant for experimental science, grounded in a reliable foundation of knowledge. But, as has been noted, the *philosophes* were less the detached analysts of their age than dynamic protagonists within it. Consequently, abstract epistemology served as a potential instrument to be enlisted by an ideological partisanship for the sake of fortifying a new mode of being-in-the-world. Thus, in the dextrous hands of the *philosophes* the indomitable physical order of the Newtonian universe came to yield its interior correlate – an equally immutable moral law, which, if known, serves to buttress a secular morality. Almost inevitably, then, the notion of objective truth and the methodology that surrounded it were infused with dreams of moral and material aggrandizement, and what was initially conceived as a *modus operandi* for correct understanding grew into a social charter for correct and prosperous living.

Perhaps of the many analogies employed by Enlightenment pedagogues in the exposition of their project, the most poignant is that of medicine and cure. Indeed, it is perfectly understandable that eighteenth century humanists, convinced of the social utility of the knowledge of truth, would find in a fledgling, but flourishing, medical profession the prototype of their own revolutionary project. As Peter Gay asserts, "For the Enlightenment, medicine had more than visceral significance. It was in medicine that the *philosophes* tested their philosophy by experience; medicine was at once the model of the new philosophy and proof of its efficacy".[12] The centrality of curative imagery suggests then that the *philosophes* imagined themselves to be practitioners of the healing art, liberating a lamentably stricken humanity from bodily ills and mind-forged maladies. La Mettrie, with customary

[12] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p.13.

abrasiveness, would even go so far as to suggest that "Doctors are the only philosophers who are useful to the Republic ... the others are idlers and drones".[13]

If, however, eighteenth century humanists purported to be physicians for a diseased society, the struggle for health and sanity would be one waged on manifold fronts, against the physical terrors of eighteenth century life and the less palpable, but no less real, terrors of an enslaved consciousness. Yet, these multiple skirmishes can be understood as totalling a united offensive against what was regarded as that most perfidious of villains - revealed religion. If philosophy was understood as medicine for individual and society, as a facilitator of humanity's rite of passage from a position of cosmic dependence to one of self-contained solidarity, then the Christian tradition stood as the infection, a "sacred contagion", "a sick man's dream", an "epidemic of fanaticism and persecution" borne of obscurantist dogma and crude superstition.[14]

In the eyes of the indignant humanist, the phantasmagoria of the Christian world-view bespoke fear, despair, and the very denigration of all that is noble in the human creature. This, especially, was anathema to the *philosophes*. The Christian *doctrine of man*, as laid out in the Genesis creation myth and embellished over centuries of doctrinal dispute, was a singularly unflattering one. Positing some primal fall from grace that had resulted in a congenital disfigurement of human nature, the doctrine encouraged a distrust of a purely human agency. Severed from a redemptive pact with a capricious and dictatorial deity, the human individual stood as a defiant but ultimately wretched and supremely impotent creature. The faculty of reason, while lacking any profound efficacy of its own, was able to serve in an understated capacity only when subordinated to the living light of revelation. Biblical principles and the tenets of faith, then, served as a corrective to a truant Reason, which, if left to its own devices, would merely degenerate into a tool of ignorance and damnation. Likewise, philosophy is ennobled only by submitting to

[13] La Mettrie quoted in John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1981), p.50.

[14] These are examples, among many, of the polemical vigour with which anti-clerical propagandists spiced their medical rhetoric. Quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.16.

the auspices of a higher truth – the philosophical enterprise is to be the handmaiden of theology, for if understanding presupposes faith, then indeed "*verus philosophus est amator Dei*" (the true philosopher is a lover of God).[15] Empirical truth, then, and the world which is its domain, are purely contingent, inextricable from the confused coils of a personalised and undisciplined metaphysical realm.

For many, the indictment of the Christian tradition was borne out by historical analysis. The glories of imperial Rome appeared incomparably splendid when measured against the intellectual poverty of the Christian era, which, marred by internecine wrangling and irresponsible leadership, was noteworthy only for being an unprecedented reign of folly and philistinism. Thus, in lamenting the decline of majestic Rome, Edward Gibbon pointed to the irredeemable sterility of her cultural successor. The members of the Christian polity, and especially those of the Byzantine Empire, wrote Gibbon,

> ... held in their lifeless hands the riches of their fathers, without inheriting the spirit which had created and improved that sacred patrimony; they read, they praised, they compiled, but their languid souls seemed alike incapable of thought and action. In the revolution of ten centuries, not a single discovery was made to exalt the dignity or promote the happiness of mankind. Not a single idea has been added to the speculative systems of antiquity, and a succession of patient disciples became in their turn the dogmatic teachers of the next servile generation.[16]

Whatever the truth of Gibbon's thesis, its polemical exuberance is representative of the general anti-clerical bias of the *philosophes*, and the apparent bankruptcy of the Christian centuries served merely to confirm the conviction that the intellectual and institutional apparatus of revealed religion denoted the chief adversary of a

---

[15] One of St Augustine's memorable dictums, subordinating forever the human faculties of reason and understanding to the Wisdom of the divine, which is to be found in his provocative *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. John Healy (London : Dent, 1934).

[16] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J B Bury (London : Methuen, 1972), Book IV, pp.106-7. The same writer would pay unqualified tribute to the guiding light of Science when he issued the rather jaundiced diagnosis that "The history of empires is that of men's misery. The history of the sciences is that of their grandeur and happiness". Quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*, p.124.

responsible humanistic culture. Ecclesiastical authority, then, was branded as a bedfellow of the *ancien regime*, for its diet of pedantry and superstition was seen to encourage complacency in the face of an exploitative social hierarchy. Hence, scragging a formerly unquestioned religious authority and laying bare its fallibilities was conterminous with a direct assault on the foundations of an unjust society.

The doctrine of original sin, then, which had persisted as the central tenet of eighteenth century religiosity,[17] both Catholic and Protestant, was seen to encourage a paralysing morbidity that hindered the pursuit of happiness and virtue – ideals that constituted the "natural" ambition of humanity. Consequently, it holds little surprise that the *philosophes* and *libertins* heaped scorn on the monastic enterprise which was seen as the very consummation of the wretched Christian ethos of self-denial and world-rejection. While the *philosophes* were cautious in their praise of *amour propre* – that familiar Christian sin of pride – for its overemphasis could all to swiftly foster a new intolerance, they did realise that any significant scientific and moral renewal could only be achieved by a reassertion of self-confidence and a sense of inner worth. Such a responsible and mature human agent, Hume insists, would be driven to reject out of hand "celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues".[18] The precepts of the *via contemplativa*, we are warned, "stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper".[19] The sheer folly of the ascetic life was conveyed in the diagnosis, commonly propagated by anti-clerical factions, that the road of renunciation consists of a violation of nature, that the so-called "evangelical perfection" which is considered the fruit of such renunciation "is nothing but the

[17] This point is issued decisively by Ernst Cassirer when he writes that "In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the dogma of original sin stood in the center and focus of Catholic and Protestant theology. All great religious movements of the time were oriented toward and gathered up in this dogma". Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz Koelln and James Pettegrove (Boston : Beacon Press, 1955), p.74.

[18] David Hume quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*, p.193.

[19] Ibid., p.194.

deadly art of stifling nature",[20] thus ensuring its failure. In providing a portraiture of his noble Tahitian savage, then, Diderot is careful to blame Christianity for the loss of pristine innocence, for heralding the only sin of which the Enlightenment mind could conceive - the sin perpetrated against nature. It was necessary, therefore, to rehabilitate a waylayed humanity by re-evaluating its individual and collective goals, and by conducting its passage from an ethos of self-effacing *agape* to that of self-fulfilling *eros*, from an otherworldly withdrawal to a passionate, but controlled, participation in this world.

In order to affect a change in the texture of eighteenth century life, then, it was necessary to redefine the organising principles that served to circumscribe the human experience. Of these, few held the hearts and minds of its subjects in greater thrall, than the belief in a supreme divine personality that intervened directly in the affairs of its human protégé and guided history towards some cataclysmic apotheosis. Of the many infantile archaisms and outdated shibboleths inherited from the Christian era, few were seen to be in greater need of demythologisation than that of the capricious suzerain who lorded over the human spirit and, in the true manner of a despot, assigned to eternal damnation those who failed to swear fealty. The eighteenth century, then, witnessed the increasing subjection of the eccentricities of the Christian cosmos to the prevailing culture of critical inquiry, and the Christian divinity was shorn of its more sanguinary qualities just as the natural world was stripped of those signs and portents that made of it a theatre for the divine and the demonic. Thus, as the century proceeded, Blaise Pascal's *dieu irrite*[21] - that volatile deity of classical Christianity - came to be superseded by Shaftesbury's "best-natured Being in the world",[22] which concurred with the new cheery conception of religiosity, or by the

---

[20] Diderot quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.194. Holbach, another Encyclopaedist and virulent anti-cleric, echoes such a sentiment, when he speaks of the "fanatical and supernatural ethics" that "are as ridiculous as they are impossible to practice. To prohibit men their passions is to forbid them to be men; to advise a man carried away by his imagination to moderate his desires is to advise him to change his physical constitution, in order for his blood to run more slowly". Ibid., p.194.

[21] See Blaise Pascal's *The Provincial Letters*, trans. A J Krailsheimer (Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1967) for a presentation of his austere brand of Jansenist Christianity.

[22] Shaftesbury quoted in Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (Middlesex : Pelican Books, 1972), p.18.

deus in absentia of the Deists, who, having set the world in perpetual motion, conveniently abdicated the throne and conferred authority upon Reason, that immanent "created deity".[23]

The *philosophes*, then, sought to expose the Christian world-view as an esoteric quackery, by rebutting its cornerstones – the doctrine of providentialism and the belief that the human creature is in some way party to a supernatural prerogative and is therefore a singularly privileged being. It was perceived all too directly by the demythologisers that such an end would be served by dismantling the cosmic hierarchy and levelling the ground of being, and thereby immersing the human identity in the natural order. Thus, in order to liberate humanity from metaphysical tutelage, the *philosophes* sought to forge a closer association between the realm of the human and that of brute creation; that is, rather than establishing correspondences from above the "prescribed sphere of man" – as the notion of the Great Chain of Being did by depicting the metaphysical affiliations of the human individual – the new humanism would do so from below, by drawing out the affinity of "man" with "beast", thereby ensuring that humanity partakes decisively of a domain that, in the Christian understanding, has always been exempt from the divine drama of redemption.

To this end, the anti-Christian polemicists found an indispensable ally in the burgeoning field of natural science, and especially that of the new mechanistic biology which sealed humanity's complete integration within the general fold of nature. The eighteenth century, we know, inherited the Platonic doctrine of the soul, an immaterial, independent principle that served to explain life functions. While this principle could not be wholly discredited by the medical speculation of the age,[24] it was threatened with redundancy as the anatomists' instruments revealed matter to be increasingly more dynamic and self-patterning than previously

[23] The striking phrase with which Morelly described human reason and which reveals much about the bland religiosity of the Deist. Quoted in Lester Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p.17.

[24] The reason for its resilience was that religious apologists insisted on the soul's complete non-materiality, effectively fortifying it against the controversies of anatomical science. The real challenge for proponents of this view was to argue the relevance of such a spectral identity in the debates on human nature.

thought. Indeed, the European mind of the time, in its almost universal subscription to the Galenic system,[25] had long taken for granted the existence of a close rapport between the emotional and physiological states of the individual, but the eighteenth century witnessed the first formal treatment of this psychosomatic correspondence. The view that recommended itself to medical experts early on in the century was that of *animism*, as developed by Stahl, which postulated the existence of some indwelling, sensible "soul" that served to co-ordinate bodily functions. Already, we can discern in such a theory early signs of the displacement of the Christian notion of the rational and moral soul by an organic, albeit spiritual, principle as the mainspring of physiological processes. Such an internal logic was extended further by the theory of *vitalism* which rose to prominence in the latter half of the century and which ascribed the supervision of bodily functions instead to the "sensibility" of nerve fibres. Thus, "the monarchical constitution of animism gave place to the federal constitution of vitalism, with heart and stomach and brain being quasi-independent centres of life".[26] This notion of the human body as a self-regulating system devoid of an autocratic controlling mechanism prepared the way for a belief in self-contained organicism and served to encourage radical materialists like La Mettrie and Helvetius who sought to expunge any reference to a metaphysical postulate from the explanatory systems of anatomical science.

A natural consequence of this germinating "science of man" was a revisioning of the affinity that exists between humans and animals. Much of the debate was centred on the perennial question of whether or not animals possess souls, for a response of even provisional nature would carry immeasurable strategic value to both those who defended humanity's metaphysical privileges, and to those who sought to rescind them. Materialist propagandists and many Christian apologists alike – although for differing reasons – were content to perpetuate Descartes' theory of animal *automatism*, with its manageable reduction of beast to machine.

[25] A system of human pathology formulated by Galen, the second century physician, in which the anatomy was understood in terms of four humours – blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile – each associated with one of four temperaments – sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic, respectively. The accompanying belief that psychosomatic equilibrium could be disrupted by a preponderance of one or another of the humours explains the exhaustive reliance on purging, bleeding and emetics as remedies for both bodily and mental affliction.

[26] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, p.151.

However, the growing corpus of experimental knowledge reaped by the vivisectionists' instruments militated against such a reductionism, and as the eighteenth century proceeded, automatism began to cede ground to the fashionable theory of vitalism. Applied to the province of brutish, but sentient, life, this view endowed animals with a new-Aristotlean "*sensitive soul*" not too dissimilar to that predicated to the human creature. In both cases, the action of this *âme sensitive* relied on the conductivity of a putative "electric fluid" that circulated the neural system of the organism. What is more, this notion of a bestial "*sensibilitê*", although depriving animals of any moral sense, attributed qualities of both feeling and intelligence to the beast, a highly suggestive proposition from which could be inferred that the distinctions between human and brute are those of degree and not of kind. It is indeed testimony to the intellectual ebullience of the Enlightenment era that such a revolutionary anthropology could even be countenanced, still less embraced, by Christian apologists and other fervent defenders of human dignity. Such partisans, it seems, sought to avoid embarrassment in the face of hard-nosed scientific opinion, by ceding respectability to brute creation while still preserving humanity's essential superiority on moral and metaphysical grounds. Such a balancing act was however a perilous one for it failed to defuse the volatility of any formal human-animal rapport and instead exposed to ridicule the vast metaphysical bedrock on which the Christian cosmos rested. Dreamers of humanity's grand empyrean destiny were, to be sure, making their reacquaintance with "man's" other - some would say "poorer" - half, one that rendered him participant in a domain of dross matter and base carnality. The significance of this reassertion of a bodily destiny to rival humanity's moral and spiritual destiny is poignantly expressed by historian John McManners: "The magical complexity of the mechanism of the great Strasbourg clock, by being continually compared with the roasting spit, began to look ordinary. Man's lofty spiritual destiny was being forgotten as he was drawn back, by comparisons, into the routine patterns of natural processes and instinctive reactions".[27]

[27] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, p.159.

Anatomical science then had endowed the automaton of Descartes with a complexity and depth which was previously deemed unimaginable. If, on the outskirts of logic, one could continue to describe the body as a machine, then at least, as La Mettrie asserted, it ought to be regarded as a machine of a higher order, "a machine that winds up its own springs".[28] This elevation of organic matter was, of course, grist to the mill of the intellectual opportunist, and the psychologising philosophers of the age leapt with relish upon, even at times pre-empted, modish biological theory, so that philosophical speculation generally kept abreast of painstaking scientific research. Thus, the popularisation of the anatomists' concept of self-regulating organicism gave rise in turn to the renewal of interest in quasi-scientific categories that would succeed in drawing out the full philosophical implications of scientific debate. Of these, few succeeded more greatly in firing the eighteenth century imagination than the *Chain of Being* concept,[29] revised and shorn of any supernaturalist gobbledygook. The resurgence of this cosmological theory can, in the large part, be regarded as attributable to the general reaction against the application of mathematical models of knowledge to the domain of the living sciences.[30] Cartesian rationalism, with its reliance on mathematical abstraction, was beginning to be shown up as inadequate when pitted against experimental evidence for the continuity that exists between mind and matter. Extrapolating from Newton's law of attraction, philosopher-scientists were, in the course of the century, increasingly abandoning the inertia of Descartes' machine for a more dynamic portrayal of the patterns of living nature. Matter it seemed, was endowed with the property of movement, and therefore, in the face of such fluidity, the proper occupation of the natural sciences is not ontological classification, as in the logico-mathematical model of knowledge, but rather the *description of process*. Thus, Descartes' schizoid system came to be supplanted by one more in keeping with the bustling worldliness and naturalistic bent of the *philosophes* - one which affirmed the interdependence of mind and matter, and therefore, by extension, posited an unbroken continuity between all

[28] La Mettrie quoted in McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, p.163.

[29] For an erudite exposition of this concept, see Arthur O Lovejoy's work, *The Great Chain of Being : A Study in the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 1936).

[30] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*.

forms of organic life. The result is a reserved conflation of the human and the natural, an inviolable unity-in-diversity, that makes of the human mind not an interloper, but the fullest expression, of natural law. Hence, in describing such a world-view, Ernst Cassirer asserts that:

> Between the various forms of life, as we meet them everywhere in organic nature, and the form of self-consciousness, there is no gap. One uninterrupted series of stages leads from the most elementary processes of life to the highest processes of thought, from dark and blurry sensations to the highest form of reflective knowledge.[31]

Of course, this doctrine of an *organic continuum*, even of the flexibility of natural forms, is to a degree prefigured by philosophical systems of the seventeenth century, especially those of Spinoza and Leibniz. Thus, we already see in Spinoza's monistic world-view a tendency both to assert some psychophysical rapport and to unify the world of multiple organic forms under the rubric of an all-pervasive substratum (Spinoza's divine *Substance*). In Spinoza's neat formula, *Deus sive Natura* ("God or Nature"), which continued to be pivotal in eighteenth century cosmological discussion, there exists an intimation of the perfect correspondence between the sensible and intelligible worlds, of the divine harmonisation of mind and matter as two alloys of the same substance. Similarly, Leibniz's philosophy, although it appears to delineate a pluralistic universe through its emphasis on the existence of innumerable, independent Monads, is predicated on the recognition of the fundamental dynamism of natural forms. Indeed, fluidity seems to be the distinguishing characteristic of Leibniz's monads, which, far from being static identities, are perpetually engaged in a process of becoming, throwing out myriadic forms without relinquishing their essential unity. "The nature of the monad", Leibniz declares unequivocally, "consists in being fruitful, and in giving birth to an ever new variety".[32]

---

[31] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp.81-2.

[32] Leibniz quoted in Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p.29.

Such insights into the dynamic nature of matter, inanimate and organic alike, were garnered and married to contemporary biological findings by naturalists from mid-century onwards. The result was the formulation of the theory of *transformism*, which found its most creditable exponent in Buffon, whose 1749 publication *Natural History* stands as a seminal work of modern biology. Buffon's work is significant in so far as it introduces the idea of an *archaeology of nature*, and therefore assigns natural history the task of uncovering the process of change and continuity that underpins organic form. The result is a dismantling of the inflexible categories of traditional taxonomy in favour of a rudimentary theory of the evolution of natural forms and biological types. If biological traits are indeed subject to gradual alteration, then one might infer that both the human and the bestial are merely configurations of the same underlying substance.[33] Materialist propagandists were swift in recognising the far-reaching import of such conclusions, and in the thought of Maupertuis, La Mettrie and even Diderot, one is able to witness the transformist mindset toying tantalisingly with its own internal logic. Thus, La Mettrie in his *L'Homme Machine* argues that "nature has used only a single and same dough, in which she merely varied the yeast", and, "natural law establishes a resemblance among them [human and animal] rather than a difference".[34] The result, of course, was the loss of any qualitative distinction between dead matter and vital phenomena; and an accompanying subjection of lowly brute, higher animal and "noble" humanity alike to the same blind, indiscriminate – and many would argue "degrading" – natural law.

Such quasi-scientific resources, then, were mobilised by opponents of revealed religion to immerse the human in the tides of organic life, thereby presenting a strong case against belief in the immortality of the soul, and in turn, against the monarchical godhead of classical theism. Even in its less austere form, the

[33] In spite of his hard-nosed naturalism, Buffon was however reluctant to advance a complete identification of human and beast, as more radical materialists were. His notion of *homo duplex*, while linking the human and the non-human in the same organic continuum, reserves for humanity a mental and moral uniqueness that allows it ascendancy over insensible creation. This ambiguity rendered Buffon as a pivotal figure in the naturalistic debates of the century, since his thought could be mobilised by both apologists – to defend human dignity – and iconoclasts – to dispel humanity's differential status.

[34] La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, trans. Gertrude Bussey (La Salle, Illinois : Open Court, 1988), pp.99-100, 142.

doctrine of self-patterning, dynamic matter resulted in a form of *panpsychism* that rendered God as Prime Mover all but superfluous. Thus, in commenting on the almost miraculous fecundity of matter, La Mettrie would make the point clear: "Nature, having made, without seeing, eyes which see, now makes, without thinking, a machine that thinks".[35] In the nimble fingers of radical naturalists, then, contemporary biological debate had been reduced to terms which were by nature unfavourable to the Christian apologist: the affinity between human and animal is of such a decisive nature that, either both possess immortal souls and are therefore party to a metaphysical prerogative, or neither are endowed with such a *sentiment de l'existence* and therefore the supernaturalist drama is mere pantomime. Neither of these options could be admitted with equanimity by the Christian faithful, and therefore it was left to the apologist either to maintain a stance of imperious aloofness in the face of such provocation, or to enter the fray at the risk of jeopardising the cornerstones of orthodoxy. The stability of the Christian world-view rested on the *qualitative distinction* of human and beast, and while the scandalous atheist emphasised the parity of the two domains, apologists were content to preserve human superiority by an appeal to an exclusive moral sphere that exempted humanity from the deterministic laws of lower beings. Effectively, however, both the liberal theologian and the moderate humanist tended to subscribe to the view that both significant continuity and decisive distinctiveness characterise the relation between human and animal: each though approached this compromise formula from opposing directions and in turn enlisted its paradoxical quality to serve disparate ideological agendas.

For our present purposes, though, it is significant to note that the ideologues of the new humanism sought to emancipate human thought and behaviour from the shackles of metaphysical imperatives by construing the world as a single coherent system and ensuring humanity's complete integration within the folds of nature. In its more extreme form, such a naturalistic sensibility gave rise to *radical materialism*, which portrayed the human individual as a mere product of the recombinations of matter, and the world as a vast self-referential circuitry. Such a

[35] La Mettrie quoted in McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, p.162.

perspective, or traces thereof, had gained currency by mid-century, having been embraced in various forms by atheists, deists, physiocrats and nihilists either by sheer weight of evidence, out of reactionary zeal against religious authoritarianism, or by the persuasiveness of intellectual vogue. Such malcontents, we have seen, endeavoured to override supra-human directives and make humanity an uncontested master of its sphere by dismissing the *ad hoc* interventionism of classical theism, and by asserting in its place a general, almost anonymous, providence, intelligible but not intelligent. The fundamental irony of the naturalist stratagem is succinctly captured in Lester Crocker's observation that "those who wished to exalt man's dignity by making him the measure of ethical judgement, decried and depreciated his significance in the universal scheme".[36] Indeed, eighteenth century humanist literature is laden with diatribe that denounces as vain illusion, as an expression of unchecked hubris, the Christian elevation of human destiny to one of cosmic significance. Thus, the atheistic D'Holbach writes: "Let us conclude that man has no reasons to think himself a privileged being in nature, he is subject to the same vicissitudes as all its other productions. His supposed prerogatives are founded only on an error".[37] The proto-totalitarian Sabatier de Castres echoes such a sentiment, but with customary causticity transforms it into a sombre epitaph:

> Weak, vain animal! Learn that Nature is no more concerned with you than with the mites to whom you serve as lodging and food during your life, and with the worms who devour you after your death ... But if there is a species whom she has favoured, it is certainly not the human, destructive of almost all others and the only one that destroys itself.[38]

---

[36] Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.78. Crocker's point is well taken and is borne out by an analysis of the eighteenth century preoccupation with the problem of suicide. Generally, the humanists of the age sanctioned the freedom to take one's own life since, in their reckoning, such an act represented a climax of human autonomy. Such a provocative stance flew purposefully in the face of the Christian prohibition against suicide, which traditionally rested on the argument that one's life is not one's own to extinguish since it is a gift of divine grace and reflects the glory of its fashioner. Much, then, turned on this point, and in the *philosophes'* defence of suicide one may discern an irreverent snub against the sacred bonds of the Christian universe. Yet, such a defence also implied a denigration of human life and death, which were construed as entirely lacking in cosmic significance, and thus, inadvertently, fuelled the flames of moral nihilism.

[37] D'Holbach quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.87.

[38] De Castres quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.17.

The histrionic quality of De Castres' proclamation should not blind one to its prophetic significance. Indeed, his remarks represent a view propagated by the greater number of humanists, except of course he has elected to draw out the logical implications of such a view and to express them with melodramatic fervour. But such dramatic force exposes the treacherous ground on which the humanists had elected to fortify their position. Yes, the new enlightened naturalism, buoyed by scientific research and patronised by respectable sentiment, had succeeded in delivering humanity from the tyranny of metaphysics, but it had done so, only to abandon the human mind to the twin vortices of a world, blind, senseless and lacking any absolute imperative, and an accompanying sense of cosmic loneliness. Amidst this loss of transcendent, even mystical, value, the gaze of the *philosophes* remained fixed on their final objective - the establishment of a secular morality. But, as Peter Gay has declared,[39] and as many of the *philosophes* themselves would have affirmed, this secular morality bore, in content, a close resemblance to the traditional Christian ethic, but one shorn of the Christian metaphysic. Such a metaphysical foundation, we have seen, had been successfully eroded, but the task still remained of locating or even constructing a viable ground for ethical action, indeed for ethical discourse, in the midst of the debris of a shattered world-view. Without a process of successful reconstruction, which affirmed the integrity of the moral agent, the humanist program would result in little more than a pyrrhic victory; but, by the same measure, care had to be taken not to resurrect the classical Christian *weltanschauung* in a different guise. The satirical weapons of the anti-clerical *philosophes* dictated that they play themselves off against the vast apparatus of revealed religion at every conceivable angle. The same satirical weapons, however - so scornful of supernaturalism - would impel the new humanist to affirm the sheer "naturalness" of the human moral impulse, and to delineate the inviolable relation between benevolent nature and the moral life. This same ill-fated project would instead revive the problem of evil, that ancient hydra which had scarcely been laid to rest by generations of god-intoxicated theologians. Without the reassuring presence of an omnipotent deity, without the prospect of afterlife vindication or damnation, with an empty sky above and treacherous ground

[39] Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom.*

underfoot, the humanist sought to repel the adversary and its monstrous implications, and the story of this first confrontation between modern humanity and the deeper, more desperate resonances of its being, serves as a striking prelude to the grand moral and existential crises of our present age.

Of the many philosophical dilemmas that harrowed the critical intelligence of the eighteenth century, none reveal more pointedly the tragi-comic quality of the age than the problem of evil, and its attendant problem of free will. Yet even these early secular formulations of the problem represent less the disquiet within the Enlightenment mindset, than the *pathos* of the modern humanistic hero, who, having cast off the shackles of religious dogma, strides confidently into the world to partake of the pageantry of a purely "natural" life, only to be overcome by a sense of contingency, diminished expectation, even abject terror.

The Enlightenment humanist, we have seen, succeeded in rebuffing the challenge of *fideism* only by draining the universe of any profound sacred significance and dispelling its numinous quality. The virulent attacks of the *philosophes* and the more scurrilous efforts of scientific dilettantes had, by the eighteenth century, all but evicted the irate deity of classical tradition and lampooned the doctrine of final causes as an archaic pomposity. Through such a demythologising project, the mysterious providential interventions of the Christian experience were supplanted by the *codex natura* ("code of Nature"), an impersonal material order which served as the foundation-stone of the universe and which, in the eyes of the more enlightened believer, represented a type of general, regimentalised providence. This notion of a natural code stood as the muse of deist thought, just as it was employed as the central shaft of materialist systems, but where the deist recognised the handiwork and wisdom of a divine craftsman, and discerned a moral order suffusing the material order in one divine system, the atheistic materialist eschewed any metaphysical embellishments, and sought instead to describe the empirical universe in none but its own terms. Both positions, then, reflect the dominant trend of eighteenth century thought in their mutual appeal to the authority of Reason and Nature, and in their portrayal of the world as a unified, yet variegated, system. This interface, alone, suggests that both world-views were but variations on a single theme, a suspicion entertained by many apologists of the era, who saw in the deistic phenomenon little more than a disguised atheism. In all fairness, such suspicions were not ill-founded: the deists' prioritisation of the empirical universe as the locus of divine truth and the reliance on reason as the supreme arbiter of

such truth had rendered the supernatural agency of God wholly redundant. In fact, it ensured that God's action in the world, like that of the human agent, was so constrained by that same natural law of which it was the author, that the divine personality could not disrupt the order of creation any more than it could renounce its own divinity. The natural religion of the deists had so circumscribed divine freedom, that the deity of which it spoke was god-like in name only. In reality, it existed only as a ghostly principle with which to justify the existence of a created world, never venturing to cast judgement upon objects of its disfavour. Fénelon, the eighteenth century ecclesiastic and French commentator, describes with a sardonic tone this anaemic deity:

> They [the deists] credit themselves with acknowledging God as the creator whose wisdom is evident in his works; but, according to them, God would be neither good nor wise if he had given man a free will - that is, the power to sin, to turn away from his final goal, to reserve the order and be forever lost ... By adhering to a system that eliminates any real freedom, they divest themselves of any merit, blame or Hell; they admire God without fearing him, and they live without remorse, swayed first one way and then another by passions.[40]

The good bishop Fénelon's insight reveals how the deistic position is but cosmetically different to that of materialist determinism, and how the wholehearted embrace of the empirical order had served to distance God from human affairs. Such a materialistic outlook had, of course, been wielded by the new humanism with conscious deliberation. As Fénelon recognised, it served as the humanist's weapon of choice with which to veto the authority of the divine despot and to bring the curtain down on the entire metaphysical charade of the Christian cosmos. Yet, this same materialist naturalism would prove to be the Achilles heel of the new humanism - it had deposed the moral authority of God and with it any transcendental value-base, but in freeing human agency from any binding absolute imperative, the very establishment of a new moral consciousness was placed in

[40] Fénelon quoted in Emile Brehier, *The Eighteenth Century*, trans. Wade Baskin (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1967), p.14.

jeopardy. The very terms by which the *philosophes* had waged a pitched battle with Christian orthodoxy seemed to preclude any reliable foundation for moral action. From the moment that nature supplanted God as the most immediate moral tribunal, the need to assert humanity's moral impulse degenerated into a desperate struggle against the crazy momentum of naturalist logic, indeed against Nature itself. Herein lies the genesis of the moral project of modernity, a project which is not, as some believe, rooted in the authority of Nature, but one that stands in defiance thereof; indeed, the history of modernity is the history of the retreat from organic Nature and the affirmation instead of Nature reinvented, a secluded "natural" domain located within the human subject marked by qualities of feeling and a sense of inwardness and moral depth. By the eighteenth century, the god who had justified the ways of nature to humanity was in eclipse; the new task that awaited the modern age was to justify the moral ways of humanity *against* the subversive influence of organic Nature.

The great eighteenth century debates over the problem of evil can be regarded largely as a sequel to the thought of the god-fearing sceptic, Pierre Bayle, whose penchant for paradox was instrumental in setting the terms of the dilemma and in problematising the relation between God, world and morality. Bayle's thesis is underpinned by the recognition that a fundamental disjunction exists between the Christian model of God as the safeguarder of morals and values, and therefore as supremely good, and the human experience of the world as the locus of moral and physical ills. For Bayle, the world which flounders between mindless inertia and flagrant maleficence, displays no evidence of design by a deity, both omnipotent and good; human freedom, too, supposedly endowed by God, merely accentuates the wretchedness of the human condition, which seems to lack both the will and the means to retrieve its godly status.

Through his diagnosis of the turpitude of creation, Bayle approached two associated conclusions: either God is unable to eliminate evil even though he wishes to do so, or, God is able to eliminate evil, but does not wish to do so. Both conclusions are of course scandalous in their import: the first renounces the

divinity of God, by compromising his omnipotence, the second denounces the divinity of God, by making him wholly malevolent. Yet, Bayle sought merely to demonstrate that no independent standard of right and goodness exists outside the being of God, that godly behaviour is not the pursuit of some human, and therefore perfectly contingent, ethical notion, but is rather behaviour in accordance with the will of God which transcends our own criterion of virtue and goodness. In effect, Bayle's thought echoes the lament of Job, who finds his faith in divine benevolence assailed by the experience of iniquity and misfortune, but employs it as a theological defence, forever ensuring divine transcendence of human values and morals - "what is bad for man, may be good for God".[41] More cautious apologists were, of course, not blind to the perils of Bayle's position, for by disrupting the perfect concurrence of the human and divine wills, it lay pregnant with two opposing conclusions. Such an approach could either lead, as Bayle had himself intended, to a proclamation of God's inviolate, albeit amoral, majesty, or to the outright rejection of such a tyrannical deity as a model for human affairs. Bayle's post-ethical conception of the divine persona had indeed eroded the metaphysical foundation of morality, an implication that was mere grist to the mill of those deists and atheists who wished to affirm a humanistic ethic rooted in "common-sense reason" ("*une morale laique*") and not in divine ontology. What Bayle had intended to be a reasoned assessment of the impenetrability of divine nature and the limits of human knowledge, was to be enlisted by later secularists as an assault on the doctrines of providence and moral freedom, indeed, on the very existence of God, itself.

It is not difficult to discern why deists and secular moralists, alike, were treading hazardous territory by mobilising Bayle's conundrum against classical theism, and how eventually they would require protection from their own intellectual weapons. At heart, Bayle's analysis rests on the problematic moral status of the created order, on the recognition that in fact the *codex natura* displays little of the benevolence and righteousness of its author. In effect, then, deists and atheists

[41] Bayle quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.39.

were employing such a recognition as an indictment of the God of orthodoxy, but, in so doing, such dissenters were simultaneously discrediting the very foundation of their own naturalistic morality. The fateful stratagem of construing the injustice of nature as an argument against the notion of God as a model of justice had succeeded, in one fell swoop, in dismissing the moral authority of both Nature and God, reducing the universe to an amoral limbo. Still worse, the created order could be understood as actively favouring the villainous and unscrupulous, and the malevolent example of Nature could be wilfully lofted as the banner of a radical moral nihilism, thereby laying to waste the cherished *bienfaisance* ("beneficence") of moral humanists. Rousseau understood well the dire moral implications of materialist logic when he warned that "if Divinity does not exist, only the evil man reasons, the good man is insane",[42] and throughout his career he would seek refuge from such monstrous conclusions by professing almost blind faith in the active benevolence of divine providence.

Others on the extreme fringes of the ideological spectrum, however, were less inclined to scamper back to the bosom of a divine consoler after having tasted the bitter fruits of a despiritualised universe, and instead embraced the nihilistic momentum of their logic. Of these, the Marquis de Sade stands as the most provocative articulator of the nascent culture of moral nihilism, although it appears, quite regrettably, that he is remembered only for his sexual deviancy. Sade revels in the loss of the hierarchy of value effected by the new naturalism, supplants the authority of God with that of Nature and, like so many humanists of his day, secures humanity's complete immersion in the natural order. Yet, where others sought to ground a new non-authoritarian ethic in natural law, Sade recognises that nature operates indiscriminately, paying no obeisance to the moral pleas of the human creature. If, of course, no authority remains to reward or to rebuke, then all actions are permissible, and humanity is freed from moral restraint. Such a realisation is articulated in no uncertain terms by the heroine of Sade's *History of Juliette, or the Prosperities of Vice* (1791), when she declares that "I am convinced

[42] Rousseau quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.34.

that crime serves nature's intentions as well as wisdom and virtue".[43] Sade acknowledges the existence of a natural law, for there can be no supernatural or unnatural law in his scheme, but he discerns within it merely the law of egoism or self-interest, which makes of the universe a den of iniquity, cruelty and destruction. The rule of Nature, then, is the reign of vice, and if God were to exist, he would be an accomplice to the travesty of his creation. Thus, Saint-Fond, Sade's hero from the *History of Juliette*, is driven to proclaim the divine creator as an unmitigated evil-doer, in what remains one of the most uncompromising utterances of eighteenth century nihilism:

> I raise my eyes over the universe, I see evil, disorder and crime ruling everywhere as despots ... what ideas result from this examination? that what we improperly term evil really is not evil, and that this mode is so necessary to the designs of the being who created us that he would cease being the master of his own work if evil did not exist universally over the earth ... [God's hand] has created [the world] only for evil, takes pleasure only in evil, evil is its essence ... this mode being the soul of the Creator as it is that of the creature ... [God is] the most wicked, the most ferocious, the most frightful of all beings. His works cannot be anything else but the result, or the movement of wickedness.[44]

It should not be surprising that Sade claimed La Mettrie and D'Holbach as his intellectual predecessors, for although such thinkers would undoubtedly have been repulsed by his conclusions, Sade's depiction of the triumph of evil is in part inspired by the materialist vision of a universe ruled by brute force and unthinking reflex. La Mettrie certainly foreshadows Sade in his espousal of a world of natural necessity, perfectly self-describing and therefore not subject to human approval or disapproval. Like any good materialist, La Mettrie rejects the doctrine of final causes and repudiates the divine order propagated by the deists, but he does so not to glorify the human project; indeed, he cannot, for his rigorous materialist world-

---

[43] De Sade quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.10.

[44] Ibid., p.42.

view decrees that human life is endowed with no greater significance than the myriadic forms of non-sentient life that surround it: "Besides, who knows whether the reason for man's existence may not be his existence itself? Perhaps he was casually thrown upon a point of the earth's surface without our being able to know how or why; but only that he must live and die, like those mushrooms that come out overnight, or those flowers that border ditches and cover walls".[45]

This same pronouncement could well have been uttered by an existentialist of the twentieth century, and in it, one is able to discern the seeds of a *philosophy of the absurd*. Indeed, La Mettrie is compelled by intellectual consistency to render humanity a species of little consequence, subject to dross physical law and the vicissitudes of organic nature. By grades, humanity is slowly drawn back into the cycles of reflex and instinct, into the non-human domain of visceral impulse, so that the materialist logic eventually comes to question the integrity of the moral project and succumbs to a form of moral anarchism. In a remarkable anticipation of Freud's theory of the Unconscious, La Mettrie suggests that human moral aspirations are merely distillations of more deep-seated, ineradicable impulses that impel the individual to seek pleasure and happiness. Humanity, then, is endowed with a natural inclination – the mark of our organic citizenship, rooted in blood and passion – to pursue self-interest, and since, according to La Mettrie, vice serves such an interest better than virtue, the will to evil should be excused as an "inhuman tendency of humanity".[46]

Such an appeal to the subliminal content of the human psyche effectively serves to erode any foundation for moral responsibility and, since the authority of the conscience is all but abnegated, the question of the inherent morality of an act is rendered null and void. Thus, La Mettrie profiles the philosopher of distinction, who, having penetrated to the truth of the human condition, and dispelled any moralistic pretensions, is ...

---

[45] La Mettrie quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.16.

[46] Ibid., p.169.

> ... Too enlightened to think himself guilty of thoughts and acts which are born and done despite himself; sighing over man's fatal condition, he does not let himself be gnawed by that executioner, remorse, bitter fruit of education, which the tree of nature never bore ... We are no more criminal, in following the imprint of the original impulses that govern us than the Nile is for its floods and the sea for its ravages.[47]

The spectre of *determinism*, then, hung heavy in the intellectual atmosphere of the eighteenth century, and while its most pronounced formulations are contained in the materialist systems of the age, the deists were not exempt from its perils in their appeal to some unbending natural law which is at once a moral law. The very claims of the sentimental deist and moral humanist rested on the assumption that some moral order is discernible in the pattern of relations that comprise the world and that the joint tribunal of Nature and Reason would serve to galvanise a new secular moral consciousness. As the eighteenth century progressed, however, the two fundamental tenets of this position – that nature represents a benevolent order and that the human individual is a free moral agent – came to appear increasingly more fictitious. The world, as fleshed out by the new naturalism, no longer appeared to be designed to meet the needs of reasonable beings, and indeed was riven by such overwhelming malice and discord that the morality of *bienfaisance* seemed a forlorn anomaly. It is understandable then that the Christian apologist and the deist, for all their differences, came to employ similar resources against the assaults of nihilism – the Christian in defence of the benevolence of God, the deist in defence of the benevolence of nature, and both in defence of a discernible moral order.

The materialist, we have seen, had sought to evade the cumbersome problem of evil by denying its existence; since, according to the materialist world-view, the universe is devoid of design, teleology and morality, such supreme indifference effectively neutralises the distinction between right and wrong. The materialist argument, however, was a flimsy one, for what the materialist described as an

[47] Ibid., p.170.

amoral world of brute force resembled a world of active malevolence closely enough for the two to be confused. Early on in the century, Montesquieu had sufficient prescience to anticipate such difficulties when he warned that "power, without justice, can only be evil".[48] Thus, the materialist could maintain equanimity when viewing his ideas as an exercise in pure intellect, but few, outside La Mettrie and, later, Sade, could apply such ideas to the realm of living experience with equal composure.[49] At the final count, radical materialism relegated humanity to a position of cosmic meaninglessness and served to effect a reacquaintance with the rude facts of organic life within which scant consolation could be found, still less, the signposts of a moral life.

The first half of the eighteenth century, then, witnessed Christian apologists and deists, in turn, scrambling to the defence of their respective positions against the problem of evil as revived by Bayle and the moral nihilism to which it led. These cohorts of theological and moral champions found in Leibnizian thought[50] a formidable bulwark with which to repulse Bayle's challenge, and one which contained elements of both metaphysical and naturalistic optimism. The *Leibnizian defence* rested on the proposition that the world as created by God is indeed the best of all possible worlds, one that finds its sufficient reason in the supremely benevolent will of God. Evil, then, does not emanate from the divine author for it possesses no direct cause and instead exists more in the manner of a deficiency or a

---

[48] Montesquieu quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.70.

[49] D'Holbach's is a fine example of a less rigorous and more inconsistent materialism. His drab system of thought suggests a deterministic universe, in which human behaviour is ruled by the general laws of natural necessity and therefore lacks moral significance. Yet, D'Holbach advances his demythologised world-view as a boon to humanity as if it would strengthen the moral fibre of society. He thus finds himself in the untenable position of subscribing to an amoral view of the universe while simultaneously launching a tirade on moral grounds against the evils of supernaturalism and the corruption of its institutions. Frederick the Great's frank response to D'Holbach's work *System of Nature* raises precisely this objection: "After the author has exhausted all evidence to show that men are guided by a fatalistic necessity in all their actions, he had to draw the conclusion that we are only a sort of machine, only marionettes moved by the hand of a blind power. And yet he flies into a passion against priests, governments, and against our whole education system; he believes indeed that the men who exercise these functions are free, even while he proves to them that they are slaves. What foolishness and what nonsense! If everything is moved by necessary causes, then all counsel, all instruction, all rewards and punishments are as superfluous as inexplicable; for one might just as well preach to an oak and try to persuade it to turn into an orange tree" (quoted in Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p.71). Understandably, many other self-styled "materialists" found themselves in a similar predicament.

[50] The kernel of Leibniz's defence is presented in his 1710 publication *Théodicée*.

privation. Evil is purely circumstantial, inhabiting the world as a necessary condition of the greatest good, so that, within the grand network of the world, no evil exists autonomously but is instead subsumed within a higher overarching good. The strength of Leibniz's optimism of course is that it is *a priori*, resting on an incontrovertible faith in the goodness of the divine creator, and in the world as the most perfect of all possible configurations. It ensures that no travesty, however great, can impeach the character of the Maker, since, in it, the vagaries of human experience are lent little weight and cannot controvert eternal divine truths. It is quite understandable, then, that the Leibnizian position is resounded in various forms by optimists throughout the early stages of the century. Alexander Pope and Rousseau, alike, propounded the view that no general evil exists, and that whatever evil may present itself to human experience is merely contingent upon a higher good. Indeed, Pope pushes this line of defence far enough so as to almost deny the very existence of evil, as suggested in typical epigrammatic style by his "All partial evil, universal good" and "Whatever is, is right".[51] Rousseau, too, tends to assert the non-reality of evil, and expresses the conviction that all particular ills eventually come to yield a common good. To be certain, his ethical rationalism precludes him any other option, for it presupposes the goodness of God as creative and executive power, and the existence of a universe replete with moral significance.

More orthodox apologists, of course, could not easily embrace this formal denial of evil for it flew in the face of fundamental doctrine that appeared to rest on the very recognition of ubiquitous evil. Yet, while such champions of the divine order eschewed the *Tout est bien* ("All is good") of the more spirited optimist, they nevertheless found in the notion of *concordia discors* ("concordant discord") a useful resource with which to exculpate the divine creator. Thus, Bonnet, Vauvenargues and De Corbet all propounded the view, not dissimilar to that of Leibniz, that the universe, taken as a whole, is a single harmonious system endowed with as great a degree of perfection as possible. The world, then,

[51] See Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, ed. Frank Brady (Indianapolis : Bobbs-Merrill Educational, 1969) for a poetic rendering of his optimism.

represents not a plethora, but an *economy of evil*, and what evil does manifest itself is necessary to the overarching benevolence of the design.

The remainder of the apologists' arguments throughout the first half of the eighteenth century were merely variations on this Leibnizian theme: that the Creator is supremely good; his creation is less than perfect, but is as perfect as can be; the degree of evil that inhabits the divine system does not exceed that which is absolutely necessary. Those of a physiocratic bent,[52] for example, suggested that suffering, especially that of the physical variety, is a necessary corollary of existence, but is almost always outweighed by the good fortune accrued in a lifetime. Others, especially those who wished to remain within the bounds of theological respectability, were inclined to employ a metaphysical defence. Accordingly, evil was the necessary result, not of physical law, but of free will. Moral transgression inevitably flows from moral freedom, which is likewise a necessary precondition for the achievement of moral good. Such a line of argument, then, endeavoured to acquit God by instead inculpating humanity and diagnosing evil as a fruit of human initiative. This position did not, of course, address the issue of natural evil, and nor did it counter adequately Bayle's argument against the necessity of free will; nevertheless, its accent on human responsibility recommended it to the more orthodox apologist.

Whatever his peculiar line of defence, it is clear that the champion of a moral order implemented by God and woven into the fabric of the world found himself in a difficult position. For the apologist it was not the quality of human experience that was at stake, for few doubted the actual existence of evil and injustice in the world, but rather the authority of such experience. By and large, the apologists' stratagem was to acknowledge the human experience of the world as a field of travail, but only in order to relativise it by pointing to some overarching framework of justice and benevolence. The difficulty, here, is that this grand design was destined to

[52] The Physiocrats, as represented by Turgot, Quesnay, Baudeau and others, preserved belief in divinity, but fused it with the scientific views in currency at the time, in what can only be described as a kind of providential naturalism. Providence in this sense is almost indistinguishable from the natural order and manifests itself most fully in the "code of nature" and its general and uniform laws. To act in accordance with such divinely-decreed laws was understood to contribute invariably to human happiness and the general good.

remain an abstraction for it necessarily lay beyond the ambit of immediate experience and therefore found no replication in the empirical domain. It could be verified only by desperate appeal or leap of faith, and it was embraced not because God's benevolent design made itself palpably clear, but rather because its opposite – that life is brief, brutal and meaningless – could not be admitted; indeed, because its opposite appeared to make life unliveable. The principle of *concordia discors*, then, was not an *aposterii* assertion and therefore was subject to neither proof nor disproof; instead, it was a workable assumption that the universe, at the final count, is indeed a just one, and that its appearance as a theatre of malice is merely illusion borne of a limited human perspective. The beleaguered apologist is driven by the uncompromising nature of the problem to assert an occultic principle of justice and retribution operating in the universe by transmuting apparent evil into a real good. God's design, then, is a covert one, hidden from view, but its qualities of justice and benevolence are more real than narrow human experience might testify.

This notion of the opaqueness of the divine order was pursued further by the more daring apologist, who, in the manner of the abbé Guidi and Polignac, came to assert a radical discrepancy between the ways of God and the ways of humanity, between divine justice and human justice. Accordingly, it is entirely presumptuous to regard God as bound by the dictates of human justice, or to consider human happiness as the very *raison d'être* of the divine order. Thus, the abbé Guidi warns against the "false idea that God should do the best he can for his creatures"[53] while Polignac admonishes the hubris of the lowly creature who makes of himself and his ends the measure of divine justice: "Censor of the universe", he asks rhetorically, "do you then think it is made for you?"[54] Such a defence, then, makes of God a law unto himself, whimsical, impenetrable and endowed with such great freedom of will that he transcends completely the distinction between good and evil. The irony of this position will not be lost on the more astute reader, for, in it, we are presented with a defence that is really no defence at all, and that, instead of

[53] Guidi quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.59.

[54] Ibid., p.59.

defending the idea of divine benevolence against the problem of evil, it has dispensed with divine benevolence altogether. Where previous defences had sought to mitigate the existence of evil and injustice by appealing to a higher order of reality, the approach in question unashamedly married an amoral conception of God to an equally amoral understanding of the created order. The divine persona thus portrayed is disturbingly similar to Sade's malevolent despot, one that had been almost universally denounced as a monstrous chimera of a god but which persistently haunted the philosophical systems of the century.

Such a radical theology, which so completely dissociated God from human values, essentially signalled an ideological victory for the atheistic materialists who had all along sought to sever the ethical bond between God and humanity, and posit in its place an amoral, albeit ordered, universe, perfectly indifferent to the life of the human individual but allowing the little creature an unbridled freedom. Yet, in winning such a battle, they would have to concede a strategic defeat – as we have noted, few materialists were willing to follow Sade over the precipice of moral nihilism and would in the interests of the new humanism recoil from the more unsavoury implications of their logic. Thus, throughout the eighteenth century, one is able to witness materialists, D'Holbach, La Mettrie and Helvetius alike, seeking refuge in a *naturalistic optimism* – this was the only form of optimism available to them – somewhat out of keeping with the general tenor of their thought. Thus, D'Holbach, too, like so many others across the intellectual spectrum, appeals to the principle of *concordia discors*, in this case radically secularised and purged of any reference to God, when he writes that nature "through unforeseen causes and hidden relations, draws concord from discord, happiness even from unhappiness ... By dint of falling the child learns to support himself, to walk, to avoid dangers: by suffering from his errors, man becomes wiser and succeeds in curing himself of them".[55] D'Holbach, in his context, could equally have been defending the wisdom of the divine order, and this example illustrates conclusively how theological and secular optimists both employed the

[55] D'Holbach quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.69.

same intellectual resources in an attempt to surmount the problem of evil, and how both, in turn, were equally vulnerable to its assault.

This, then, was the ruse of the eighteenth century optimist, an admixture of spurious appeal and desperate stop-gap measure. Its tenacious defence of divine and natural benevolence would reach its apogee in mid-century before succumbing as much to the efforts of its detractors as to its own dead-weight. Indeed, the Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755 – what Lester Crocker has described as a "*crise de conscience*"[56] for the eighteenth century – appeared to many as Nature's fateful rejoinder to the sophistry of the optimists; that such a natural disaster should reap its terrible harvest on All Saints' Day and in Europe's most Catholic of cities, only served to hasten the defeat of optimism in its theological and metaphysical forms. The growing chorus of dissent against Leibnizian optimism and the hollow ring of its slogan, "*Tout est bien*" would, thereafter, reach a decisive crescendo. All, indeed, was not well and Nature appeared increasingly to be the mindless and brutal force of La Mettrie, if not Sade's own malignant *dominatrix*.

Yet, outside of Nature's own heavy-handed contribution to the course of the debate, the optimist position, taken on its own terms, was from the outset stricken with a self-defeating logic. Drawing on Spinoza's determinism in which all "possibles" exist and where "man is but a speck",[57] the optimist had sought to repulse Bayle's challenge by assimilating evil within the providential scheme. Whatever evil exists, we are told, exists by natural necessity as an inevitable condition of the created order. Yet, in this desperate attempt to reconcile belief in divine justice with the experience of an unjust world, the optimist has succeeded merely in weaving elements of dark deceit into the fabric of the universe, so much so that *evil is to be admitted, with good, as a co-equal principle of reality*. The logical result of the optimists' defence, then, is a *fatalistic* outlook, a stoical resignation to injury and impiety that makes a mockery of providential design and

[56] Ibid., p.51.

[57] Spinoza quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.46.

the promise of deliverance from evil. If, indeed, "all is good" only in so far as "all that is, is necessary", then the consolation of the first assertion is exposed as vain hope by the second, which is really little more than a pronouncement of both human and divine impotence. This much was recognised by the more alert apologist who perceived in the optimists' ploy the very neutralisation of the providential design it purported to uphold. Thus, the Jesuit, Père Castel, wrote disparagingly of what he regarded as the optimists' sham defence: "They do not criticise providence, but they annihilate it all the better by pretending to applaud it. All is good, all is best, all is very good, evil is not evil, since it is the necessary cause of good ... optimism is only a disguised materialism".[58] Castel's diatribe is certainly not far off the mark. We have already noted how both atheistic materialists and theistic naturalists resorted to a similar theodicy in order to stave off Bayle's problem of evil, but while atheists like D'Holbach and La Mettrie were willing to forfeit the entire providential apparatus, theists and their deistic cousins were not, and instead found themselves burning their proverbial bridges at both ends. Their ruse had failed – it had exculpated God only by rendering him ineffectual before "natural necessity", thereby enshrining evil within the world-system and "consecrating our ills *in perpetuum*".[59]

While the Leibnizian optimist had sought to brighten the human outlook on the misery of life, his *philosophy of necessity* invariably culminated in a philosophy of despair in which both God and humanity stand powerless before the inexorable laws of nature. The atheistic materialist might rejoice at this final banishment of divine providence, but the doctrine of "natural necessity", which in effect posited a deterministic universe, served no less to problematise the meaning of humanity *vis-à-vis* the natural order. This profound disquiet, generated by the optimists' proclamation of despair, is perhaps no more poignantly exhibited than in the writings of Voltaire, who, like so many eighteenth century humanists, appropriated elements of both the materialist and deist world-views in a hybrid ideology that pursued as its final end the establishment of a new secular morality. That Voltaire

[58] Castel quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.48.

[59] Ibid., p.48.

is a moralist renders his thought all the more anxiety-ridden as he seeks to reconcile this *Natural Law Ethics*, which relied on the existence of a moral universe, with his experience of the world as fundamentally amoral. This tension is perhaps indicative of the broader dissonance between Voltaire *the deist*, who professes belief in God as the cornerstone of a benevolent order, and Voltaire *the materialist*, who harbours a suspicion against metaphysics and recognises only an impersonal, amoral world-system. The result is that Voltaire plays out in his person the century's own struggle with the problem of evil, so that in his gradual slide into the throes of pessimism, one may witness the general travail of the age. Thus, Voltaire's early apathy to the problem of theodicy gives way in the 1730's to a slanted optimism, as he increasingly recognises the threat posed to moral humanism by Bayle's conundrum. Voltaire swiftly recognised, however, that the optimists' defence represented an intellectual impasse, as he was driven by the weight of his argument to exonerate God only at the risk of elevating him beyond human categories of goodness and justice. This, of course, is a reiteration of the general folly of the optimists' position, as we have already examined it: God cannot be held accountable for a created order tainted by evil, for the mystery of divine justice far transcends human understanding; yet, if this is the case, then little or no correspondence exists between divine and human justice, and the divine will stands less as the figurehead than as the counterfoil of an earthly morality. This post-ethical conception of the godhead and the *moral relativism* it seemed to encourage was of course untenable to Voltaire as it was to eighteenth century humanism in general. Yet, the problem of theodicy, as it presented itself to the eighteenth century mind, appeared to defy solution, and in *Zadig* (1747) and *Memnon* (1750) Voltaire gives expression to his growing agitation of soul. In *Zadig*, he already suspects that the "realm of grace and the realm of justice" are anything but complementary, that indeed the haphazard bestowal of fortune and misfortune entailed by the former stands in sharp contradistinction to the consistent and responsible application of moral standards. The deity that is party to human suffering cannot be exalted as a model of a justice which by its very nature endeavours to avert such suffering. Thus, Voltaire is driven to renounce a divine order that rests on gratuitous cruelty, while simultaneously affirming divine

authority without which human meaning would be immeasurably enfeebled. If providence exists, it is almost certainly indifferent to human welfare; and if it provides checks and balances unbeknown to a limited human perspective, as the angel Memnon asserts, it is nevertheless willing to sacrifice the human good in the service of this "higher" justice.

Such unpalatable conclusions appeared to be confirmed for Voltaire by the Lisbon tragedy and although he would resist them at each step, he realised too that the natural disaster merely enacted the more extreme implications of his own materialist logic: "We are then only wheels that make the great machine run; we are no more precious in God's eyes than the animals who devour us".[60] But having entertained this perilous notion, which subsides at the heart of all materialist ideologies, Voltaire is driven to contemplate the moral nihilism that is its logical *dénouement*, one that betrays the very essence of the humanistic project and lays to waste the foundation of morality:

> I care no more about him [God] than he does about me ... He has no more jurisdiction over me than a canon of Windsor has over a member of our Parliament. Then I am a god to myself; I'll sacrifice the whole world to my fancies, if I have a chance to; I am without law, I consider only myself; if other beings are sheep, I'll make myself a wolf, if they are chickens, I'll make myself a fox.[61]

Voltaire, the moralist and mocker of metaphysics, then, is led by the sheer intractability of the problem to propound such extremist views while simultaneously recoiling from the more sinister import of his conclusions. At the final count, Voltaire the moralist wins out – unable to abandon his philanthropic

[60] Voltaire's sombre appraisal as reflected in his response to the Lisbon catastrophe, *Poeme sur le desastre de Lisbonne* (quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.65). Its dejected tone is matched by an earlier utterance: "Poor marionettes of the eternal Demuirge, who do not know either why or how an invisible hand moves our springs, and then throws us and piles us up into the box". (Ibid., p.78).

[61] A sinister, and utterly nihilistic, refrain from Voltaire's 1775 publication *Histoire de Jenni* (quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.66).

enterprise, he is left tending Candide's garden,[62] believing in the integrity of the human moral agent and the benevolence of God in spite of all evidence to the contrary. His final refuge is to affirm the human power of self-transcendence in defiance of a world that threatens to curtail it at every turn, and to pursue the ends of a human justice that rings hollow in the moral void of the created order. In desperation, Voltaire seeks to wring a paradox from every contradiction that besets his logic; whether he does so successfully is doubtful, and his concluding pronouncement on the matter - "I cannot escape from this circle"[63] - is an enigmatic one. Indeed, one may discern in it either the utterance of a quietist who is able to affirm all aspects of the world as necessary and therefore succeeds in locating meaning amidst absurdity, or the final petition of a drowning man.[64]

Voltaire's own struggle with the problem of evil, it has been noted, represents more than a mere private drama and mirrors instead the great intellectual skirmishes of the age. Indeed, the quandary into which his naturalism propelled him was reiterated across the Channel by the candid genius of David Hume, who was even less inclined than the moralistic Voltaire to exempt humanity from the tyranny of natural law. In his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, Hume depicts a world weighted with a preponderance of evil and misery, and warns that any attempt to infer the attributes of God from an assessment of his handiwork would

---

[62] Voltaire's *Candide*, a literary and philosophical masterpiece, remains his most poignant commentary on the problem of nihilism and represents a decisive repudiation of the optimists' faith that all is for the best. The adventures of its central protagonist, Candide, expose a world grotesque and misshapen by endless cruelty and seemingly senseless violence. Yet, although its hero is stripped of his original naïveté by the horror of his experiences, the work ends less on a note of morbid despair than on one of sober resignation. Candide is left nurturing his garden, while still harbouring full knowledge of the harshness of the world - a scene which is suggestive of the hope yet contained within the human spirit, despite the crushing weight of a depraved universe. For Voltaire, however, such hope is efficacious only if uncompromising and condemning truths are confronted, not evaded, and therefore the struggle for empowerment is one to be waged successfully only by the courageous and indomitable few.

[63] Voltaire quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.67.

[64] Peter Gay's remark on such an ambivalence is a revealing one: "The same man [Voltaire] who castigated life as a shipwreck and the world as a miserable pile of mud, who described history as a depressing tale and valued peaks of cultivation as rare and precious moments, also predicted a far-reaching, beneficent revolution and the inevitable triumph of philosophy". (Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation - The Science of Freedom*, p.104). Indeed, it has been our intention throughout to demonstrate that the Enlightenment Age was co-habited by two emotionally-fired extremes, and that the dialectical tension thus resultant stands as the creative "daemon" of the period. Voltaire's faith in progress is continually stalked by a despairing pessimism, and as his optimism grows into unreasonable excess, so too does its shadow. The programmatic optimism of the age, then, merely conceals beneath its veneer a thoroughgoing psychopathology of despair, with which it wrestles consciously, but of which, unconsciously, it is but a symptom.

indeed be a perilous project. Yet, Hume recognises, too, that pointing to the sheer impenetrability of divine providence is really akin to neutralising its action, thereby exposing an unassisted humanity to the vagaries of organic nature. The apologist may succeed in exculpating God by intellectual contrivance, but this gives support, at best, to the notion of divine indifference, and providential benevolence remains hearsay in a world which bears none of its marks: "And why should man ... pretend to an exemption from all other animals? The whole earth, believe me, Philo, is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war is kindled amongst all living creatures".[65] Thus, Hume discerns in the law of nature little more than that of self-preservation and the pursuit of self-interest, a vicious biological *fracas* to which humanity itself is condemned by divine apathy, and within which the moral impulse stands as a complete anomaly.

The impasse reached by both Voltaire and Hume in matters of theodicy are, of course, illustrative of the general difficulties encountered by the eighteenth century thinker in reconciling disparate elements of the new humanism. More importantly, such elements required to be justified before the central project of the Enlightenment, which was less one of pure, abstract truth than one of applied truth in which the accumulation of knowledge was understood to promote human happiness and virtue. Indeed, we have already argued that in their eagerness to liberate humanity from supernatural bondage, the Enlightenment ideologues mobilised intellectual resources which proved as insidious to the humanist drama of moral dignity as to the Christian drama of divine redemption, and none more so than the eighteenth century reformulation of the problem of evil. While the Christian apologist appeared to have borne the brunt of the assault, the debate served to jeopardise in equal measure the nascent moral consciousness of the period, which is made palpably clear by the desperate attempts of Voltaire, Diderot and others to extricate themselves from their own nihilistic logic. That their attempts arguably failed can be attributed in part to the general nature of the problem, one which can be recast more pointedly in terms of the relationship

[65] David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. H D Aiken (New York : Haffner, 1948), p.179.

between Nature and humanity. Thus, the immediate effect of Bayle's initial broadside was to problematise the divine-human rapport, but the problem served no less to indict the quality of nature, than the character of God, for it pivoted on the recognition that Nature represents something of a malignancy hopelessly out of keeping with the idea of God's active providence. At one level, then, the apologist was summoned to defend the divine character against the aberration of the created order; at stake, was the cogency of theistic belief in a divine orchestrator who metes out favourable destinies to his most obedient vassals. But, at another, perhaps more profound, level, it was the progressive humanist, himself, who was called to defend, not the providential scheme that he had renounced, but the moral contours of the new humanity against which the organised madness of the world appeared to conspire. A robust naturalism had served the eighteenth century humanist well in rebuffing the parochial doctrine of classical theism, but it made no less a mockery of the moralistic pretensions of the secularist. Witness, then, the difficulties spawned by the Spinozian notion of "natural necessity" which achieved such wide circulation in the eighteenth century and, as we have observed, remained a favourite defence of the optimist against Bayle's problem of evil. The shortcomings of this defence were, of course, rudely exposed when it was realised that it acquitted the divine creator only at the expense of rendering him impotent before the "necessary" evil of his creation; but, more than this, it brought to the fore questions pertaining to human freedom and moral responsibility, for if evil was knitted into the world-system, it could be no better averted by an omnipotent deity than by his infinitely more ill-equipped human counterpart. Thus, by asserting divine incapacitation, the optimist effectively consigned humanity to an eternal victimhood, forever mutineering against a deterministic universe of which it was but a "necessary effect" amongst many. Moral principles could not, after all, be derived from a material universe, whose finer texture is determined by natural necessity – the mechanical indifference of such a universe defies subjective notions of right and wrong, but, more than this, the deterministic logic decrees that the human individual can no more alter the course of his action than an inanimate object can modify the conditions of its existence. Since human motive is merely the effect of a distant, impersonal cause, human agency is disempowered and the

grounds of moral accountability are dissolved. D'Holbach makes the point with customary trenchancy when he writes "If you had to consider the actions that displease us as necessary, your indignation would be the wrath of a child who gets angry with his doll, and your condemnations the caprices of an iniquitous and barbarous despot".[66]

Alas, the beleaguered humanist who found his most effective ideas militating against the service to which they had been employed. The naturalism which proved so effective in dispelling the pomp and ceremony of the Christian cosmos, had by the same measure relegated humanity to a state of such anonymity that it could no longer discern in its being a quality which distinguished it from inanimate existence.[67] All and sundry were merely part of the same non-qualitative system in which "every cause is an effect and every effect is a cause; because everything is infinite, and nothing has begun to be, and nothing will end".[68] The materialist, then, had deposed the divine sovereign, only to lose himself in the unmarked byways of organicism - having locked himself into a system of perpetual becoming, he could no more appeal against the interminable flux of the universe than a cell against the organism of which it was a part.

This intellectual - indeed, spiritual - quagmire into which the eighteenth century naturalist had unknowingly stumbled would in turn serve as the mainspring of modernity as contemporary and later generations of humanistic thinkers sought to obviate a sense of the absurdity of the human condition *vis-à-vis* the natural world. Such a corrective, it was clear to all, would necessarily require a restoration of the

---

[66] D'Holbach quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.167. Although, as we have noted, D'Holbach was far too impassioned a pragmatist to ever take his own good counsel to heart, and leapt with relish upon those whom he perceived to be the enemies of social progress.

[67] Materialists, nevertheless, attempted to speak of ethical principles while still subscribing to a deterministic world-view. Their efforts yielded the argument of "*necessary modifiability*", according to which a system of rewards and punishments is still effective, even if the human agent is not entirely free, since it is able to modify behaviour by an appeal to a pleasure-pain motivation. Thus, the human character may be forged by impersonal circumstance, but it is nevertheless ruled over by fear and desire, which are themselves beyond the individual's control, yet which render legal justice efficacious. Of course, such an argument fails to establish moral accountability, since the extent to which behaviour is modified by a retributive system of justice is itself subject to necessary causation.

[68] Denesle quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.163.

moral status of the human agent, an objective which had always existed at the centre of the Enlightenment project but which had been so severely assailed by the nihilistic cadence of materialism. To be sure, certain radical thinkers had proceeded far enough down the path of naturalism so as to question the very integrity of the moral impulse. Thus, Le Roy, the philosophizing game-warden, would venture so far as to reduce moral law to the natural law of self-interest, so that "the morality of wolves could cast light on that of men".[69] This same sentiment is expressed to varying degrees by La Mettrie, Helvetius, Hobbes, Hume, D'Holbach, Voltaire and Diderot at their most pessimistic, and of course by the radical Sade who unfailingly urges one to consult the beasts of the field for knowledge of true nature. Indeed, the widespread circulation of such an idea is a measure of the extent to which the naturalistic outlook had infiltrated classical Natural Law theory, effectively sounding its death knell. While the eighteenth century began with the ascendancy of the moral rationalism of Descartes and the Cambridge Platonists, it would in time witness the rise to prominence of the "natural science of man", a science which construed the moral conscience not as the unerring arbitrator it was purported to be, but as a repository for those appetites and fears which constitute the organic legacy of the human creature. It was in the spirit of such a science that Diderot and others with strong naturalistic leanings, proclaimed the world to be "the house of the strong"[70] and recognised the egotistical impulse to be the leaven of human nature:

> I realize that I am bringing terror and chaos to mankind; but I must either be unhappy or make others unhappy; and nobody is more precious to me than I am to myself ... It is the voice of nature which is never clearer and louder in me than when it speaks in my own favour ... Who is there among you, who, on the point of death, would not buy back his life at the price of most of the human species, if he were sure of impunity and secrecy?[71]

---

[69] Le Roy quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.99.

[70] Diderot quoted in Lester Crocker, *Nature and Culture : Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p.xiii.

[71] Ibid., p.53.

As we have already noted, the "*moral pyrrhonism*" implicit in the pleasure-pain motif is further exacerbated by the deterministic logic of the materialist, which decrees that all human action proceeds from "necessary cause". In concert, then, the naturalist and materialist arguments rebelled against moral *apriorism*, serving instead to dispute the grounds of moral responsibility by positing a recalcitrant nature that resists rehabilitation. If indeed the individual merely traces out his destiny beneath an auspicious or ill-fated star, or is impelled by instinctual forces beyond the aegis of Reason, then blame cannot be apportioned and a retributive justice is rendered largely ineffectual. But, as Voltaire, Diderot and fellow humanists well recognised, such a logic could never deter humanity from actively pursuing the cause of justice, or from punishing the criminal that proves harmful to the general welfare. What such a logic does comprise, however, is a critique of pure moralism, of an understanding of justice as unwavering ideal, and virtue as immutable law. Yes, the criminal is persecuted and the hero hailed beneath the banner of justice, *but, in reality, supposedly disinterested virtue is little more than enlightened self-interest, and moral law, a mere social convention*. One may rail against the arbitrariness of such a convention, but to little avail, since at stake is not the fairness or equitability of a moral law, but the public interest which it seeks to defend.

This insight into the contingency of social justice, then, served to temper the vigour of moralistic discourse in the eighteenth century, supplanting, as it does, absolutist conceptions of vice and virtue with a more pragmatic view of morality. Thus, in his *Dream of d'Alembert*, Diderot, speaking through one of his dramatic personae, asserts that "it is necessary to change it [the idea of virtue] into the idea of beneficence and its opposite into that of malfeasance. One is born well or ill endowed by nature: one is irresistibly swept away by the general torrent that brings one man to glory and another to disgrace".[72]

[72] Denis Diderot, *Diderot : Interpreter of Nature*, trans. J Stewart and J Kemp, ed. Jonathan Kemp (London : Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p.113.

In statements of this kind, which are representative of a general pattern in eighteenth century thought, one might discern the first stirrings of the utilitarian mindset that would come to dominate the moral consciousness of subsequent centuries. What is significant for our present purposes, however, is that the failure of the ethics of intrinsic, formal value, and the subsequent emergence of an ethics of social utility, are largely attributable to the disruptive influences of naturalistic and materialist systems of thought. The naturalisation of the human identity had succeeded in loosening the fetters of supernatural authoritarianism, but it did so by, at once, casting into disrepute the moral character of the human creature and disputing the integrity of the moral impulse. On the terms laid out by the "natural science of man", it seemed well nigh destined that the new measure of moral action would be one dictated by the politics of sensation, pleasure and pain. Indeed, the naturalistic outlook, which implicated humanity in the ruder forms of organic life, necessarily precipitated the reduction of the moral project to "a method of social hygiene, tyrannical and arbitrary, but necessary",[73] whereby gangrenous limbs of the body politic are amputated in order to preserve the collective welfare of society. This mercenary morality, it may be argued, is no morality at all in so far as moral action is understood as the expression of the nobility of the human being, for it comprises little more than the furtherance of public interest and the apotheosis of the innate egotism of the species. This much is acknowledged by the infamous Robespierre, speaking in the second year of the New Republic: "In a large part", he suggests, "we owe them [the *philosophes*] that kind of practical philosophy which, reducing egoism to a system, considers human society as a war of ruse, success as the rule of justice and injustice, probity as an affair of taste and convention, and the world as the patrimony of clever crooks".[74] That Robespierre might have acted on this observation as a conviction in his Reign of Terror merely confirms our thesis that the utilitarian mindset, although it purports to straddle the moral crisis of modernity by making self-interest the *raison d'être* of moral action, in fact signifies the very failure of the moral project. In so far as it takes seriously

[73] Lester Crocker's succinct description of retributive justice in a materialist universe which precludes any talk of moral accountability. (Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.175).

[74] Robespierre quoted in Crocker, *Nature and Culture : Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment*, p.xiii.

the naturalists' conception of human nature and elevates to an ethical principle humanity's drive for self-gratification and happiness, the utilitarian paradigm serves to remind one of the sheer contingency of moral value. Indeed, as we have observed, the eighteenth century proto-utilitarian was one who relinquished the struggle for formal value, recognised the world as a domain of conflicting interests, and did not hesitate to secure humanity's complete participation in such a competitive fray. The ethic of social utility which he subsequently propagated was symptomatic of a godless age, or at least of an age that questioned the moral status of the divine model, and, in so doing, shattered the cornerstone of moral ontology. But, more than this, such a nascent utilitarianism was the distillation of an age of naturalism, one which sought to construct a new edifice of meaning on the ground of natural law, but which found itself rebuffed at every turn. At the final count, all that remains to one who is equally unconvinced of the providential order of God and the moral order of his creation, is the ledger of advantage-detriment, pleasure-pain, and an eye for the main chance, which, averted from the complexities of an absurd universe, wrings favour from the vagaries of life.

There were others, however, like Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau, who were less inclined to embrace the ignobility of a utilitarian ethic which seemed to diminish the life-essence of humanity by immersing it in the unscrupulous conflict of self-preservation, and by reserving for it the dubious distinction of being the most efficient player in the egotistical game. Where the rude facts of an amoral universe were mere grist to the mill of the sharp-eyed utilitarian, the moral purist of the eighteenth century found himself wrestling with the naturalistic logic which was indispensable to his secularism and yet which proved subversive to his final moral project. The nature of such difficulties has already been closely analysed, but, for present purposes, it is helpful to remind the reader that, at the heart of such difficulties, there prevailed *the disjunction between the moral conception of human nature and the experience of an amoral, if not positively immoral, universe*. Naturalistic thought of the age, and, by extension, its materialist tributary, threatened to engulf humanity within the tides of a senseless organicism which

evinced little moral authority, and which jeopardised the supposed integrity of the moral life.

Yet, a moral self-awareness still remained, especially amongst those like Voltaire and Diderot who had abjured supernatural authoritarianism and were convinced of the indisputable "naturalness" of the human phenomenon. For such thinkers the existence of a moral impulse could not be questioned, but the problem remained of how to understand it in terms of humanity's relation to the world, a relation, it should be noted, which was increasingly scrutinised beneath the lenses of the natural sciences. Deists and secularists, we have seen, succeeded in severing moral agency from the capricious will of God, and in the absence of any such metaphysical foundation, there remained but the authority of nature, which far from sanctioning moral conduct, seemed instead to cast doubts on its cogency at every turn. Without provision for a providential optimism, which discovered in every maelstrom traces of divine grace, the province of nature appeared little more than one of adversity without reprieve, loss without commiseration, hope without fulfilment. Yet, in the absence of some overarching supernatural design, nature is indeed all that exists, and all that exists is natural - multiple configurations unravelling themselves from within the ineffable and mindlessly creative centre of the universe. Pinned then between the naturalistic logic, which had served them so effectively in the struggle against the old shibboleths of monotheism, and the dictates of their own social program, the moral humanists of the age were forced to concede that the human was a perfectly natural creature, endowed with a host of drives and instincts which made of it a companion to the beast of the field. Yet, these architects of the new morality were nevertheless eager to salvage the autonomy of the moral impulse and to offset the demeaning influence of a radical naturalism by preserving for humanity some exemplary status that sets it apart from brute creation, and that permits it freedom from the system of necessity implicit within a materialistic universe. Thus, the eighteenth century is inhabited by a vast cohort of humanistic thinkers[75] who sought to defend the moral dignity of the

[75] The most indefatigable proponents of this view included in their number such respected thinkers as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu, Leroy, Shaftesbury and Wollaston.

species, by professing it to be both related to, yet distinct from, the less subtle forms of sentient life. The efforts of some, like Voltaire and Diderot, were routinely sabotaged by the materialistic bent of their thought, but many of the less sensitive souls relentlessly pursued this line of approach as the only means possible by which to preserve a sense of the integrity of human morality. By this measure, human nature is a binary one – what the naturalist Buffon called *homo duplex* – a locus of both moral beauty and brute impulse, lorded over by innate drive and desire, but subject to a further law that exempts the human individual from the life of the "lower beings" and that makes of him, in the truest sense, a moral entity. Rousseau, a passionate ethical rationalist, articulates decisively this popular sentiment when he warns that ...

> ... Man is not a dog or a wolf. It is only necessary in his species to establish the first social relations to give his feelings a morality forever unknown to beasts. Animals have a heart and passions; but the holy image of the honest and the beautiful will never enter into any hearts except those of man.[76]

The strength of this position, which gained such currency in the eighteenth century and beyond, is evident, for it secures for humanity a *unique moral prerogative* that allows it transcendence of the ruder modes of living, yet still ensures the complete "naturalness" of the moral project by making of it an innate disposition, or a law of being. In no small measure, the quality of "human-ness" is distinguished from the demeaning domain of base organicism by its moral law, an immutable birthright whose action is enhanced by the lessons of experience and the light of reason. Such a compromise formula, then, endeavoured to absorb the pressures of naturalistic opinion while still retaining a moral anthropology that enshrined the ennobling qualities of the species. This composite conception of human nature is both provocative, since it proffers a curious relationship between human and animal, and significant, since, outside utilitarianism, it would come to determine markedly the form in which the moral consciousness of the eighteenth century was

[76] Rousseau quoted in Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.95.

to be transmitted to subsequent generations of thinkers. Since much of our present analysis turns on this point, our insights into its nature are best arranged schematically.

First, this dual ontology invariably introduced elements of equivocality into the meaning of the concept "nature", and infused the perceived relationship between humanity and non-human nature with an ambiguity which, we have contended, is the distinguishing feature of eighteenth century thought. The notion of "natural law" was bandied about heavily, and understandably so, since it was the age that first bore witness to the maturation of naturalistic opinion into a coherent system of thought; but the concept was frequently employed inconsistently so that it came to invoke multiple, if not conflicting, meanings. At one level, nature seemed to denote all that was real, and all that was realised – it served as a general category within which to contain a perfectly self-describing universe. Indeed, this definition, which drew strongly on Spinoza's system of natural necessity, was that most widely employed by the more adventurous materialist and naturalist, who had disavowed any supernatural authority and therefore was compelled to describe all as natural and necessary. This line of thought, of course, merely resurrected the problem of free will by admitting a deterministic world-view, and, in so doing, challenged the meaning of morality and the justice of a reformative legal system that relied so heavily on the effectiveness of endorsement and deterrent. The moral nihilism implicit in such a position is neatly expressed by Grimm, who, in response to the musings of the moralist, demurred thus: "What devilish nonsense! What is nature? Is not all that is? ... How can what is be contrary to nature?"[77] Thus, the rampant naturalism of the age had summarily dismantled the hierarchy of being and, with it, any symbolic matrix for meaningful action in the world. We witness here most lucidly the anxiety of the eighteenth century mind – unable to resist the naturalist-materialist bent of its thinking, yet striving for pointers to the moral life amidst the amorphous organicism to which it had been condemned by that self-same logic. A few intellects, like those of Sade and Retif de la Bretonne, were able to discern in nature the operation of an active principle of malevolence and were

[77] Ibid., p.xvii.

able to transcribe their vision without revulsion; some, like La Mettrie and Helvetius, were content to toy with the more absurd features of the materialists' world-view; but most thinkers were unable to abandon their programs of moral-social conduct for the sake of insidious reasoning, and instead resurrected moral meaning on the foundations of a utilitarian logic. *Disinterested virtue gave way to enlightened self-interest, the ideal of moral perfection succumbed to the principle of social utility.*

At another level, however, nature was construed as more than a self-referential descriptive category and came instead to connote the source of normative law from which could be deduced moral duties. Nature, in this sense, signified the moral life proper to the human species. Since it was the unique preserve of humanity and allowed it to transcend irrational desire and resist universal propensity, this "nature" can rightfully be designated a "*meta-nature*" which played itself off against the disorderliness of nature in the raw. As we have hitherto contended, this so-called Natural Law has little to recommend it to the naturalist, since the universal moral code it proffers represents in every sense a reinvention of nature and a bulwark against the encroaching madness of the organic world. Between a traumatic birth and a no less meaningless death, this Natural Law succeeds in salvaging for humanity a sense of moral purpose and collective will with which to defy as far as possible its fateful creatureliness.

Thus, the naturalistic discourse employed in the intellectual systems of the eighteenth century is suffused with an ambiguity which reflects both the new-found awareness of nature as non-rational and non-moral, and the sense of disquiet instilled by such an awareness. The result, of course, was an increasing confusion of the law of organic nature and the law of moral nature, and a problematisation of their relationship which was to extend into the following centuries as modern humanity sought to make sense of its "natural" identity. Indeed, it was such a mystifying lack of coherence that prompted the incisive Pierre Bayle to exclaim:

> There is scarcely a word that is used in a vaguer way than that of Nature; it enters into all kinds of discourse, now with one sense, now with another, and one is scarcely ever dealing with a precise idea ... But above all, the conclusion is not certain, this comes from nature, therefore this is good and right. We see in the human species many very bad things, although it cannot be doubted that they are the work of nature ... Nature is a state of sickness.[78]

Second, the composite anthropology furthered by proponents of secular humanism endowed humanity with an additional moral law which is nominally described as a "natural law" (*droit naturell*), but the difficulty still remained of reconciling the dictates of this moral law (Natural Law), which was the distinguishing feature of the human life, with the common and crude law of nature, which humanity shared with brute creation. Such reconciliation was certainly not easily achieved, since, as we have contended throughout, the affirmation of moral law was designed from the outset to preserve for humanity some semblance of an integral ontology, a sense of "*being-in-itself*" which spared it from the sheer anonymity and contingency of its organic creatureliness. What is more, the great debates on the problem of evil which had characterised the century merely served to accentuate the vast dissonance which existed between the aims of the moral life and the hostile indifference of a palpably amoral universe; for, after all, if the spectre of a cruel and unjust world could cast the moral status of the creator-God into disrepute, it could no less tarnish the moral project of humanity. Indeed, Bayle's torturous paradoxes did much to revive the problem of natural evil and to raise the suspicion that perhaps Nature, herself, is replete with wanton destructiveness and a mindless malevolence, and that if God could be considered the author of natural evil, then it would be no more scandalous to regard humanity as a participant in such an ill-begotten design. By positing the existence of some immutable moral law etched into the human conscience, moral theorists of the eighteenth century did not obviate the problem of moral action in an amoral world, but merely transposed it into the interior depths of the human psyche. We have already observed how the Enlightenment age was unprecedented in its enthusiasm for inquiry into humanity's

[78] Ibid., p.xvii.

biological identity, a burgeoning intellectual field which invariably encouraged the view that a close rapport existed between human and beast. For many, this invoked a fundamental distrust of a human nature which seemed increasingly to partake of "lower", unconscious modes of existence, impelled by irresistible impulse and lorded over by the quasi-mystical influence of the blood and the viscera. The simultaneous operation of a moral law, a *natura contra natura*, which appealed to reason and an equally mystical inner sense, seemed merely to render the human psyche a locus of warring factions – a *psychomachy* in which a compulsion to (natural) virtue competed with a compulsion to (natural) vice, and humanity's nobler half contested the sway of its carnal temperament. Thus, the struggle to achieve dominion over the untrammelled wastes of external nature, which is the mark of the modern age, is mirrored by a no less relentless struggle within, and perceptions of human nature and the symbolic mapping out of its dispositions reflect, in equal degree, a human-Nature relationship fraught with tension.[79]

Third, the crisis in moral self-awareness precipitated by the rampant naturalism of the eighteenth century invariably resulted in a revisioning of moral theory in keeping with the revolutionary tenor of the age. As we have duly noted, Enlightenment ideologues – especially those on the continent – were galvanized by the perceived need for a genuinely humanistic ethic, one which celebrated the human capacity for self-determination and commemorated the decline of crude superstition and clerical bigotry. But we have observed, too, that, with the formal disavowal of divine providence, there remained but one seat of moral action – Nature, and she had been shown up by the epic debates of the age to be an unruly and tempestuous figure, seemingly estranged from the moral sensibility of the new humanism: hence, the need to reinvent Nature, to forge a symbolic pattern of meaning with which to repel the mad fatality of an organic life and restore to

[79] Eighteenth century commentator, Formey, demonstrates well how the naturalism of the age in fact represents a sublimation of Nature, effected through a language of exclusion, when he writes that "nature is indeed our guide to the moral life and happiness ... but not nature in the sense of 'the gross inclinations that are common to us and to animals ... The natural law I pose is that rule of the beautiful, the right, the honest, that reason deduces from the consideration of our nature (*notre être*) and our situation in the universe'." Crocker, *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*, p.100.

human "beinghood", the freedom and integrity of a proper moral subject. This necessarily implied a retreat from the common law of nature which held sway over the amoral wilderness of the world, to an alternative Natural law, a moral code operating within the human agent. The result, of course, is that the new bastion of morality became the human subject itself; that is, the moral agent no longer compelled by divine sanction and acting out of reverential piety, but one prepossessed by *a sense of moral depth* and, enlivened by such an *inwardness*, able to articulate the individual and collective conceptions of "right". As Charles Taylor correctly asserts in his astute appraisal of the modern identity, this ethos of self-reflexivity is not a universal human propensity, but is rather "a function of a historically limited mode of self-interpretation, one which has become dominant in the modern West ... but which had a beginning in time and space and may have an end".[80] Of course, such a genealogy finds its most prominent wellspring in the Platonic tradition of self-knowledge and the Augustinian tradition it came to influence, but in terms of the modern epistemology of self, it received its most pointed expression in the intellectual revolutions of the Enlightenment era. Indeed, outside of the utilitarian paradigm, the vehicles by which the eighteenth century promulgated its moral consciousness into subsequent centuries (and a formative influence it was) both bear the stamp of such introspectiveness.

The first of these, Natural Law Theory, underwent methodical transformation in the face of the intellectual upheaval of the age. When measured against the naturalistic and humanistic opinion of the day, traditional Natural Law Theory, with its reliance on an ordered universe permeated by the moral presence of its divine author and descried by the light of Reason, appeared to be an article of faith belonging to an outdated theistic catechism. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the existence of a divinely-decreed and immutable moral law operative within the created universe had begun to appear doubtful, and the very probity of human motivation was regularly called into question. The result of such pressures was an abandonment of the pliable and ill-defined contours of the classical Natural Law

[80] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.111.

and a shift of emphasis to the empirical realities of human desires, needs and claims, in what is better described as a theory of "*natural rights*". Thus, where the classical-Christian theory finds its ultimate justification in God's moral law, the proto-modern doctrine of "rights" recognizes as the basic unit of moral action the desire for self-fulfilment of the individual, and the inalienable right to the protection of such self-interest, a right which exists independently of any metaphysical sanction. The former, then, allows little provision for the individual to assert moral claims against the social compact in defence of private interests, a weakness which is rectified by the latter theory with its assertion of a catena of rights to which the individual has legal recourse, and by which the legitimate wielding of social power is constrained.[81]

It is immediately apparent that the natural rights doctrine, to which the modern understanding of juridical law owes much, rests on a peculiarly abstract conception of that which is "natural". Indeed, its notion of "natural right" appears to denote an unbending prerogative assigned to the individual on the mere grounds of being a moral agent. Yet, this agency is no less an abstraction, enshrining hypothetical qualities of *equality* and *reciprocity* made real through the institutions of the social compact. Not only are we presented here with the assumed and inviolable dignity of the human subject, but the idea of a state of nature constituted by qualities of freedom and equality. Thus, the worth of the individual is *aprioristic*, actualised by desire and the freedom to protect self-interest, but *antecedent* to the elemental needs of life. The result, of course, is the reinvention of Nature – that is, the imparting of moral categories derived from social experience to the idea of Nature – and the realignment of moral value from the divine edifice without, to the

[81] Two contrasting figures stand as the chief pathfinders in the emerging theory of "natural rights". The first of these, Thomas Hobbes, revolutionized the concept of law by associating it with the conscious manipulation of power. Law is not grounded in the natural order since, for Hobbes, the condition of humanity in a state of nature is a chaotic and egotistical one, but instead emanates from the human will, as it seeks to buttress its subjective claims, or "rights", with the conscious wielding of power. The second figure, Grotius, an Arminian Protestant, sought to elevate moral law beyond the arbitrary will of God, or the equally arbitrary will of the state, and to protect its integrity from the demeaning consideration of power and self-interest. He achieved this by mathematicising Natural Law, so that it is made akin to an article of logic or a mathematical axiom, perfectly accessible to disinterested Reason and independent of the vagaries of the Will. Although a god-fearing thinker, Grotius prepared the way for the secularisation of Natural Law, since in his scheme the feasibility of such a law rests neither on the will of God nor on its participation in some Eternal Law. Instead, it reflects the abstract worth of the moral agent which it is the purpose of positive, civil law to protect.

interior universe within, animated by desire and need, and circumscribed by a series of subjective claims. In all senses, this new understanding of moral meaning comprises an empowerment of the individual whose worth is imparted "by nature", in the same way that it is permeated throughout by the discourse of power. Indeed, the theory of natural rights is one that resonates closely with the ethos of utilitarianism since it treats self-interest as a moral end and provides the individual with the legal means by which to pursue such ends. Implicit in such a scheme is a correlation of virtue and happiness, of what is "right" with what is "good", a correlation which finds its fullest expression in the new idea of society as a relationship of mutual obligation, namely, the idea of the social contract between moral agents.[82]

Allied to this revisioning of Natural Law Theory was the emergence of *moral sense* or *natural sympathy theories*, which flourished in eighteenth century England, especially, under the influence of Lockean empiricism and the Cambridge Platonists. Thus, the proponent of moral sense theory took from empiricism the rejection of rationalism with its innate ideas and, in order to fill the void that so remained, borrowed from the Platonist the idea that goodness is immutable and eternal, not by metaphysical sanction, but by virtue of nature itself. Consequently, humanity is endowed with a *predisposition to goodness* which is made manifest by a quality of immediate feeling or internal sense. By identifying the seat of moral action as an instinctual feeling, or as Saint-Hyacinthe asserted, "an instinct for truth",[83] moral sense theory ensures the complete "naturalness" of moral judgement – indeed, the movement of such an instinct is not dissimilar to the instantaneous operation that gives rise to sensory impressions, and is certainly no

---

[82] This intrusion of the calculation of self-interest onto the terrain of moral theory, we have hitherto asserted, is largely due to the collapse of paternalism and the subsequent emergence of a naturalistic anthropology. But such a trend, with its utilitarian conception of ethics, in turn invoked a counter-reaction. Kant's deontological ethics perhaps stands as the flagship of such a rejoinder and represents a brave effort to rescue the moral status of humanity from the quagmire of a debasing naturalism. Indeed, Kant once again makes the rational agent master of its domain by according it an inviolable "dignity" (*Würde*), but he does so only at the cost of subjugating animality. Thus, humanity's prerogative as a moral being is understood as the capacity to know and conquer the physical world and to restrain the passions in the interests of an ethical society. In every sense, then, Kant's notion of a moral *Kultur* represents a transcendence of Nature and the repression of base instinct.

[83] Saint-Hyacinthe quoted in Crocker, *Nature and Culture : Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment*, p.81.

of this ideological convergence has yet to be achieved and many ecological theorists continue to be afflicted with a general distrust of the dogmatism of organized religion, recent trends in the field attest to a growing awareness that recourse to a sacralising discourse is required if the hegemony of scientific materialism and crass consumerism is to be successfully challenged.

Indeed, in militating against the ecological approach of the secular humanist, which has hitherto proven singularly sterile in its appeal against the culture of utilitarian individualism, the present study lends its voice to the growing conviction that a renaissance of religious consciousness is "a necessary condition for the resolution of ecocrisis".[2] This guiding insight brings with it the responsibility of critical discernment, which, in ecotheological circles is understood to demand the sifting of religious models, distinguishing those which promote ecological sanity from others that harbour a reckless anthropocentrism - a discriminatory project which reflects the reality that ecotheological debate is born out of controversy and claims of religious culpability. Yet, in so far as religious apologists have sought to repulse accusations of ecological bankruptcy by diligently applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to their respective traditions, the field of ecotheology has increasingly enmeshed itself in that bland ecocentric rhetoric which it has been the expressed purpose of this study to subvert. In embracing uncritically the first principles and crude historiography of contemporary ecological philosophy, there exists every possibility that ecotheologians have become party to a misdiagnosis of the nature of ecocrisis and, in so doing, misconstrued the peculiar value of a religionised consciousness in an age whose distinguishing feature is as much its impoverishment of spirit as its maltreatment of the living environment. Thus, in what follows, our earlier epistemological inquiry into the mythologising trends of ecological philosophy is subsumed within a more pointed examination of the methodological frailty of recent attempts at an ecocentric and, indeed, postmodern religiosity. The formative principles of our ecotheological hermeneutic are drawn from the revisionist psycho-Darwinian paradigm which it has required the greater part of

[2] Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (Yale : Yale University Press, 1994), p.22.

this study to formulate, and which we have hitherto enlisted to dispute the intelligibility of the modern myth of the goodness of Nature.

Yet, although psycho-Darwinism affords us our organising logic, this, the culmination of a work that does not shrink from controversy, is no less indebted to the guiding genius of an interlocutor who was himself familiar with controversy, and who, in his dialogical role, enables us to squeeze a greater profoundness of insight from our working model – Friedrich Nietzsche, that enigmatic poet-philosopher, who has been accorded the distinction (a dubious one, perhaps!) of being the first postmodern thinker, and who, in proclaiming the death of God, became the spokesperson for an entire epoch; Nietzsche, simultaneous iconoclast and physician of the spirit, who, in concert with Darwin and Freud, completes that great triumvirate in whose revolutionary thought begins the wholesale re-education of the contemporary ecological philosopher.

The neglect accorded this imposing figure by the ecophilosophical fraternity is perhaps understandable given both the skittish nature of the Nietzschean idiom and the extent to which heinous misapplications of such an idiom appear to have irrecoverably tarnished the Nietzschean legacy. But such squeamishness becomes all the more inexcusable when one considers that the object of neglect is a thinker who openly avowed "My mission" to be "the dehumanization of nature and then the naturalization of the human after it has gained the pure concept of Nature".[3] Such an unequivocal statement of purpose would appear to align the Nietzschean enterprise with that of the latter-day ecocentrist, who endeavours no less to redress the anthropocentric bent of modern conceptions of self and world by securing humanity's integration within a vital pattern of biospheric relations.

Yet, despite this commonality of purpose, which is an audacious, though necessary, one to the present age, Nietzsche stands very much as a counterfoil to the ecocentrist project as conceived by postmodern ideologues, a project which, we

[3] Nietzsche quoted in Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times* (Yale : Yale University Press, 1993), p.278.

have averred throughout, betrays its foundational principles by a reluctance to pursue vigorously enough "the dehumanization of nature" and subsequent "naturalization of the human". Despite his tentativeness, however, perhaps even the ardent ecocentrist cannot be aware of the precariousness of such a task – he posits the *prima facie* goodness of Nature and seeks his bliss in some primal unity of the human and non-human. For, indeed, *any attempt to renegotiate the Faustian bargain of modern culture must necessarily penetrate to that original despair which first set the terms of that baleful transaction*; and thus, in groping for a redemptive formula, the ecocentrist is instead fated to relive that alienation from the ground of being which prevails at the parched heart of modernity – that is, a confrontation with the creatureliness of the human, and the organic madness it evokes. To the extent that the ecocentrist wavers before his uncompleted task, unable to relinquish the moral humanism against which the internal logic of his position revolts, he is *victim* to the same spiritual decrepitude; but, to the extent that he lacks the courage to pursue such logic ever onward, sacrificing intellectual probity to an empty sloganism, he is an *active accomplice* in this spiritual decrepitude. Yet, where our faint-hearted ecocentric pretender has faltered, the Nietzschean hero strides confidently forward, beyond the modern myths of historical progress and the goodness of Nature, onward to a confrontation with the fatality of the creaturely condition, making an anthem of his funeral dirge, penetrating to the cankerous heart of modern nihilism, and emerging from it with a mirth that does not mock or curse, but a Joyous Science from which resounds an eternal "*Yes*" – and all this, because he can do little else, because his capacity for self-delusion has failed him. Who is this shining stranger whose embrace envelops entire worlds and who beckons "the fearless" to follow? Whence does his adventure of *immanentism* take him, and what is the true nature of his exquisitely dangerous gift? For better or for worse, one may descry within the peculiar career of the Nietzschean hero, the future of an authentic earth-centred spirituality and the prospective reign of a full-bodied God.

Nietzsche stands, in the true aspect of the ecological philosopher, as a Janus-faced thinker, anxiously sifting the living folds of history for the finely-wrought

"*historical sense*", for the knowledge that "we are not our own, that we have not made ourselves",[4] but that we belong to a broader history and a more expansive nature; yet, who all the while fixes a gaze on the future horizon in the spirit of a *Versucher* ("seeker or adventurer")[5] and masterbuilder.[6] Nietzsche's recovery of a critical history, like that of the contemporary ecocentric agitator, is at once a "disclosure of the unholy spiritual history of the West",[7] founded on the hubris of anthropocentrism, "an extravagant aberration of human vanity and unreason".[8] Indeed, in terms strongly reminiscent of contemporary ecotheological appraisals, Nietzsche denounces the dominant Pauline-Augustinian legacy of the Christian tradition as a violation of nature itself, as a "kind of castration of the seeking and forward-striving spirit" and "the worst mutilation of man that can be imagined".[9] Yet, if the "holy lie" of the priest stifles the wayfaring spirit by an appeal to a monstrous metaphysical logic – a belief in a transcendent deity who stands over and against his creation and who metes out reward and punishment in accordance with the priestly law-book, and a postmortem existence which compensates for the iniquities of earthly life – then Nietzsche takes it upon himself to proclaim the final dissipation of such a deceit and to celebrate the revival of "the seeking and forward-striving spirit".

Nietzsche's own "experiment with truth", then, ensues where the old stultifying fiction of the Christian cosmos lies discarded; yet, while such an experiment is conducted in the spirit of a wayfarer who has cast aside outdated maps and charts,

---

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, trans. R J Hollingdale (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1986), I 588. (Quotations from Nietzsche's writings are referred to by section and paragraph and not by page number, in order to allow cross-referencing in different editions).

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R J Hollingdale (London : Penguin Books, 1973), II 42.

[6] It may appear anomalous to apply this designation to one such as Nietzsche, who, in the popular mind, will ever stand as the relentless deconstructionist *par excellence*. Consequently, it will come as a surprise to many that Nietzsche regarded his rigorous experimentation with ideals of truth and value, art and religion, as in fact motivated by a *Bautreib*, a drive to build or construct. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R J Hollingdale (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7.

[7] Laurence Lampert's description of the Nietzschean project. Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.288.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York : Vintage Books, 1974), V 346.

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale (New York : Vintage Books, 1967), 141.

it is not without its own guiding principles and subtle truths – neither dogmatic nor relativistic – which have been intuited in the very act of intellectual revolt. In a remarkably early essay, *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*, Nietzsche enumerates these truths as "the teachings of the sovereignty of becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and kinds, of the lack of any cardinal difference between man and animals".[10] This rudimentary manifesto may appear to secure Nietzsche's complete kinship with the modern ecocentric enterprise, which similarly stresses the inadequacies of inflexible ontological and conceptual categories as an expression of a universe characterised by a systemic unity and organic interrelatedness. However, in a startling reversal of the ecocentrists' position, Nietzsche proceeds to delineate such formative insights to be "teachings I consider true but deadly".[11] In other words, Nietzsche begins his great experiment with epistemological and ontological constraints which bear a marked resemblance to those of contemporary ecocentric philosophy, but where the latter-day ecocentrist discerns in such principles a blueprint for a revisioning of human personhood, Nietzsche discovers instead an ensemble of "*deadly truths*" which threatens the very coherence of that personhood. And herein lies the foundation of Nietzsche's "critical history" – an awareness of the deadliness of truth and of the "unholy spiritual history of the West" as a failed attempt to resolve a conflict "in which life lies and truth kills".[12]

Yet, "the Truth must be told though the world crumble",[13] and Nietzsche takes it upon himself to play the reckless philosopher, to drink from Truth's chalice and to distil from its brackish waters a delicious and strangely enlivening poison. From this provocative insight into the seemingly irresolvable dissonance between truth and life, spring the intellectual, artistic and spiritual keynotes of Nietzsche's thought, a three-pronged problematisation of meaning, which represents as much a catena of pre-eminent Nietzschean themes as it does the muster-roll of any critical

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life", 9, in *Untimely Meditations*.

[11] Ibid., 9.

[12] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.281.

[13] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.342.

ecological philosophy: the *problem of method*, or that of truth and representation; the *problem of morality*, or that of truth and value; and finally, the *problem of Immanentism*, or that of an earth-centred spirituality, within which all Nietzschean themes find their confluence. On all three counts, the Nietzschean analysis deviates significantly from that of contemporary eco-ideology, despite shared objectives – an intellectual disjunction which serves to elucidate the frailties of both recent ecotheological models and the diagnostic formulae from which they are derived.

The *problem of method*, or that of truth and representation is one which has already been broached in our earlier consideration of the ecological misappropriation of scientific theory, but which is endowed with special significance in a Nietzschean dialogue. Writing as one of the *Unzeitgemässen*,[14] as a solitary wanderer whose temporal displacement and critical historical sense afford a view of the span of European centuries and insight into the contingency of cultural forms, Nietzsche represents in every sense a liminal figure – at once an obituarist of outmoded artifice and a facilitator of an "old-new" science of knowledge. His catena of three "deadly truths" constitute as much a controversion of the "*pious fraud*"[15] ("*pia fraus*") of the Christian metaphysic as of the modern Hegelian myth of a progressive world history which came to supersede it. From early on in his intellectual career, Nietzsche evinces a profound distrust of both the metaphysical truth-claims of organised religion and the humanistic dogma of modern science, false doctrines which in his view have been spawned by the action of self-interested motives rather than by a desire for truth.

The early Nietzsche, then, was prepossessed by a sense of the *disutility of truth* which, for the sake of ideological expediency, he believed it was the habit of cultural regimes to falsify. Although Nietzsche retained this profound awareness of the antagonism of truth and life, however, he began increasingly to doubt the existence of an objective reality against which truth-claims could be measured, and so, the object of his critical attention became less the final content of individual truth-claims than *the very process by which such claims came to be fashioned.* Expressed differently, the specific problem of ascertaining the veracity of truth assertions gave way to the general epistemological problem of whether the world is knowable in itself. The point is made unequivocally in *The Will to Power* where Nietzsche asserts that "Truth is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created and that gives a name to a

[14] Nietzsche characterised four early essays as *Die Unzeitgemässen* or *The Untimely Ones : David Strauss, The Confessor and Writer; On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life; Schopenhauer as Educator* and *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*.

[15] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The 'Improvers' of Mankind", 5, in *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R J Hollingdale (London : Penguin Books, 1968).

process ..., an active determining, not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the '*will to power*'."[16]

In the light of this critical awareness of "truth-making", Nietzsche's call becomes one for a resurgence of *philology* or *hermeneutics* – the art of interpretation – with which to supplant physics as the discipline most valued by the philosopher, a call which secures Nietzsche's affiliation with the postmodernist (anti) movement that was to claim him as an intellectual predecessor. The world to which Nietzsche points is a fundamentally ambiguous one, a fluidic reality that eludes the rigid categories of description and classification, and, hence, his most vitriolic outbursts are reserved for those ideological systems which seek to divest the universe of such rich ambiguity by a reduction to fixed law and staid formula. "Plato is boring"[17] complains Nietzsche in *The Twilight of the Idols*, inveighing against those "amiable Idealists"[18] who mistakenly postulate the existence of some inert realm of eternal, transcendent forms in an effort to defy the unsettling dynamism of organic existence. The Pauline-Augustinian legacy of Christianity falls equally foul of Nietzsche's discerning eye for perpetuating the Platonist's primacy of being and fashioning from it a monolithic dogma which would come to disfigure the hearts and minds of its subjects and, for centuries, depose the illustrious sovereignty of "becoming". Cartesianism fares little better, and is berated for its false assumption that the world, as objective truth, is only perfectly knowable to the dispassionate observer, and more so, for the estrangement wrought by its self-truncating conception of the knowing subject. For one such as Nietzsche whose *Zarathustra* proclaimed intellectual probity to be the youngest virtue[19] and yet, who paid homage to "passion – the-gift-giving virtue",[20] the dominant ascetic ideal of the purely contemplative man represents a morbid self-abnegation, a "repulsive and gloomy caterpillar form" within which lay dormant "that many-colored and

[16] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, III 552.

[17] Nietzsche, "What I Owe to the Ancients" 2, in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[18] Ibid., 2.

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. R J Hollingdale (London : Penguin Books, 1961), 'Of the Afterworldsmen'.

[20] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.388.

dangerous winged creature, 'the spirit'."[21] Thus, in a conclusive snub of the *res cogitans* of Descartes and the modern scientific tradition which pays obeisance to it, Nietzsche would come to assert that "our cognitive apparatus is an abstracting and falsifying mechanism, directed not towards knowing, but towards mastery and possession".[22]

In doubting the integrity of the truth-seeker, Nietzsche questions the very ethos of truth-seeking, ridiculing the quest for exactitude as a self-appeasing vanity which hinders rather than aids the process of understanding a world of inexorable flux. His genealogy of ideas, then, is in fact a history of philosophy's ignorance, uncovered by the application of the philosopher's virtue of truthfulness to philosophy's own "truths", and by a recognition that inflexible categories of "knowing" do not apprehend the real but merely render it "shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general".[23] Nietzsche, then, relinquishes the claim to know, but mitigates such an admission of ignorance by construing it as the truthful outcome of the pursuit of knowledge. The result is a radical perspectivism which casts the *knower as protagonist*, and *knowledge as passionate participation*, which discloses the limitations of knowledge and the inevitability of an interpretative prejudice, and which, in a final disavowal of the cult of objective certitude, opts for the "open seas" and the "inescapability of enigma".[24] And herein lies the root of Nietzsche's rejection of the modern Hegelian notion of historical *dénouement*, which, buoyed by the modern dream of enlightened progress, envisions the end of history as the establishment of a global society, liberal, liberated and in the know. Whence, then, this pipe-dream of future beatitude and a sealed intelligence, if history is in fact not the tale of Reason unfurling its providential plan, but that of philosophy's disguised ignorance?

---

[21] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, III 10.

[22] Nietzsche quoted in Mary Warnock, *Existentialism* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1970), p.14.

[23] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 354.

[24] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.384.

Nietzsche's critical insights into the production of "truth" and the influence of language as an interpretative device have become commonplace in our own culture of postmodernism, and the notion of the world as some supra-historical or supra-cultural substratum has long since faded from the epistemological terrain. Our age is pre-eminently one of the hermeneutical science, of "reading well"[25] and of understanding the world to be little more than "the sum of linguistic self-production".[26] Knowledge is invariably a social construct, a variation within an endlessly proliferating text, which not only conceals where the subject ends and the object begins, but which renders the very subject-object distinction redundant. From this dominant socio-linguistic perspective, the human is primarily a "story-telling, culture-dwelling" creature,[27] reading both itself and the world into a text, into Derrida's "never-ending verbal chain".[28] Thus, where once the world yielded silently to the lucidity of Reason, it now reinvents itself repeatedly through the transfigurative power of language and the potency of symbol, and "the whole landscape ... is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes ...".[29]

This conversational, discourse-dependent epistemology, of course, holds revolutionary significance for the religious enterprise, which has, on the basis of inflexible vocabularies and transcendental signifieds (absolute truths), claimed special authority in the past. The view that religious communities, especially those that are scripturally-based, represent passive transmitters of an eternal, divine revelation is no longer a tenable one – the human reader, participating in the instability of the text is, in the least, a co-partner in the production of truth, and so, recent attempts to analyse the creation of religious meaning, eschew talk of ontological privilege in favour of a conversational, contextual hermeneutic. In

---

[25] Nietzsche describes authentic philology as precisely the "art of reading well"; that is, the ability to resist a falsifying interpretation when desiring to understand, or "read", the self and the world. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 52, trans. R J Hollingdale (London : Penguin Books, 1968).

[26] George Pattison, *Agnosis : Theology in the Void* (New York : St Martin's Press, 1996), p.139.

[27] Max Oelschlaeger's description of the human species, drawing strongly on the sociolinguistic perspective. Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*, p.27.

[28] George Pattison's description of the primarily verbal character of the Derridian universe. (Pattison, *Agnosis : Theology in the Void*, p.139).

[29] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston : Northwest University Press, 1968), p.155.

propounding a perspective on religious discourse which has become largely representative among socio-linguists, George Lindbeck argues that ...

> A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought ... It is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive and non-discursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed.[30]

Since, then, meaning and language are concomitant, the process of interpreting religious truths, however profound, is not dissimilar to reading a text of purely secular nature. Although a religious system is not unique in being a panoply of symbols – or "army of metaphors"[31] as Nietzsche would have it – it does present itself as an affective and cognitive resource of a higher order, and therefore, as a singularly powerful determinant of individual and collective subjectivities. Where before, however, religious tradition was perceived to be the repository of monolithic dogma, and the imposing divide between orthodoxy and heresy was keenly felt in any interpretative scheme, the socio-linguistic perspective has revealed it to be no less implicated in the polymorphous play of language and subject to the instability of the text. In short, such a perspective depicts religious tradition as a fundamentally dynamic and malleable resource, an ambiguity which does not detract from its authority as dispenser of truths, although such truths are now considered contextually. In fact, the socio-linguist may argue that the efficacy of a religious system – its authority to hold sway over the hearts and minds of its adherents – is greatly enhanced, and not diminished, by its very adaptability.

---

[30] George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia : Westminster Press, 1984), p.33.

[31] Max Oelschlaeger's rendering of Nietzsche's "movable host of metaphors". Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*, p.104.

Such interpretative open-endedness, of course, gives rise to a utilitarian conception of knowledge, for if the existence of some independently existing truth can no longer be countenanced, then the new goal of inquiry becomes instead a working knowledge, or truths that resonate with the changing context of individual and collective experience. Richard Rorty argues precisely for the inevitability of such a utilitarian bent when he suggests that "viewing inquiry as recontextualization makes it impossible to take seriously the notion of some contexts being intrinsically privileged, as opposed to being useful for some particular purpose".[32] Thus, religious tradition, like any text, can be understood as a powerful metaphorical model, "open to intersubjective interpretative discourse",[33] and therefore the production of religious meaning is necessarily a dialogical operation. The idea that a religious tradition abounds with creative possibilities made real through an "intersubjective interpretative discourse" would suggest, then, that the process of constructing (religious) meaning incorporates a necessary and inescapable bias. Indeed, the mainline postmodernist would argue that such bias does not hinder, but rather augments, the production of coherent meaning, and is an enriching precondition of the interpretative process. Such bias serves an adaptive function and succeeds in this capacity if it is able to accommodate ever-expanding categories and contexts of human experience, and thereby, preserve the world from self-contradiction. Meaning is invariably generated by the creative interplay of text and context, and therefore, the postmodernist does not shrink from proclaiming an active subjectivism, but instead employs the perceived dynamism of the subject as the fountainhead of his epistemology.

The "linguistic turn" of postmodernism has, of course, favoured those purveyors of an earth-centred spirituality who recognise in the religious tradition of the West an ambiguous resource, one which is to be castigated for its dismal ecological track record, but which can yet be reformed into an indispensable ally of a new ecocentric sensibility, and therefore which requires to be made an object of critical engagement. Socio-linguistic insights lend weight to such an engagement by

[32] Richard Rorty quoted in Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*, p.27.

[33] Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1990), p.21.

positing the fundamental versatility of sacred models, and therefore appear to give license to new interpretative possibilities, to the quest for new efficacious metaphors. Yet, although one cannot deny, with the socio-linguist, the inevitability of subjective interpretation in the production of meaning, such an insight can all too easily translate itself into a crude subjectivism – an interpretative *laissez-faire* – so that what is perceived to be a critical dialogue is in fact an uncritical monologue. It is indeed ironical that postmodern perspectivism was born of a critical heritage which sought to expose the active role of the subject in the pursuit of knowledge, without ever doubting the possibility of such knowledge and conflating truth and falsity within an epistemological mist. It appears to have resulted instead in the loss of a vital responsiveness to the world in which it can no longer muster belief, investing in the human subject an authority to toy irresponsibly with its own subjectivity and to fashion from it "truths" in accordance with its whims and interests.[34]

Richard Rorty's perspective – one typical of the socio-linguist – comes unwittingly close to endorsing such a conclusion, when he writes that "the world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other humans can do that".[35] Thus, if in rewriting texts – so the logic runs – we manufacture ourselves anew, then what is required in times of exigency is a simple linguistic reprogramming of ourselves, our world and our God(s). From the socio-linguist's perspective, then, what is demanded of the ecotheologian is little more than active participation in Wittgenstein's "language game", a mixing and matching of texts and contexts in service of an ecocentric agenda. Once the contingency of all textual traditions is assumed, the new task of the ecotheologian

[34] Arran E Gare, in his erudite study, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (London : Routledge, 1995), similarly argues that the postmodern rebellion has culminated in "a form of idealism", or, more particularly, in "poststructuralist idealism" (p.99), which he disparages for its "... failure to orient people for action ...", its "... rejection of perspective ...", and for its "... loss of contact with any reality beyond language and text ..." (p.99). Indeed, he regards the continuing despoliation of global ecosystems as a fundamental indictment of postmodern culture, itself.

[35] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.6.

becomes the quest for "legitimating narratives",[36] for a "sacred canopy" of "models of God"[37] with which to shore up a germinal ethos of ecocentrism. As George Lindbeck would have it, innovation in understanding should be perceived "not as proceeding from new [religious] experiences, but as resulting from the interaction of a cultural-linguistic system with changing situations. Religious traditions are not transformed, abandoned, or replaced because of an upwelling of new or different ways of feeling about the self, world or God, but because a religious interpretative scheme ... develops anomalies in its applications in new contexts".[38]

Such a *politics of truth-production* render the normative influences of world and God largely otiose, to be reinvented as convenience decrees. Consequently, the success of an interpretative scheme is to be measured not by its aspiration to "truth", but by its ability "to reduce the world [of experience] to manageable format".[39] Wherein, then, lies the authority of the non-human if it is forever to be made a province of the merely human? What hope for an authentic ethos of ecocentrism if, intoxicated with its own subjectivity, the human agent perpetually employs the world as a vehicle for its own self-legitimation?

Similarly convinced of the fluidity of "truth", the contemporary ecotheologian appears to have regrettably bought into the *surface-and-sign world* of the postmodernist, sifting through metaphors, motifs and models, and shuffling symbols in an effort to arrive at the most advantageous combination; meticulously supplanting moribund eschatology with sparkling cosmology, rigid theism with vague pantheism, in the belief that such symbol-tampering will induce respect and reverence for the natural universe. The naïveté of this position is equalled only by its sheer perfidiousness, for it betrays the ecocentric ethos of concomitance with

---

[36] See Chapter 3 of Oelschlaeger's *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* entitled "The Sacred Canopy : Religion as Legitimating Narrative".

[37] An obvious reference to Sally McFague's "metaphorical theology" which urges a reconceptualisation of God in keeping with the dictates of a postmodern culture. See Sally McFague's *Models of God : Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1987).

[38] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p.39.

[39] Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, p.21.

Nature by depriving the natural world altogether of any authoritative influence in the revisioning of human personhood. The socio-linguistic paradigm merely entitles the ecotheologian to traffic in eviscerated abstractions which have little in common with the living ground of Nature, and which serve to corroborate a narrow humanistic perspective trussed up in false ecocentric attire. By the same measure, the postmodern hermeneutic, despite all its pretensions to the contrary, lays pregnant with a modernist's dream – its so-called "*intersubjective interpretative discourse*" has not stimulated critical self-examination, but dampened it, and resulted instead in a crude democracy of the intellect which has but expanded utilitarian individualism into a utilitarian collectivism, and which perceives itself advancing steadily towards the "global village" at the end of history, the perfect realisation of the law of the average and mediocre.

The culture of postmodernism, to be sure, entitles one to dream oneself unashamedly into the world and God, and to revel in the playfulness of language and the "polysemy of symbol"[40] – indeed, to participate in the infinite richness of the universe – but, at the final count, modern urban-industrial humanity has little stomach for the vertigo of this infinity and will invariably forfeit such participation for one a little less imaginative and infinitely more attractive: the modernist's fantasy of historical progress and the gradual inauguration of an age of universal freedom, enlightenment and prosperity. Thus, the postmodernist's "*right of subjectivity*", originally conceived to expand the vistas of knowledge and allow access to contiguous universes of meaning, has steadily degenerated into the "*rule of self-interest*", and become, instead, a vehicle for wilful ignorance, popular prejudice and the safe, drab dream of an economist. Indeed, it is difficult to discern how the ecotheologian's cut-and-paste method could possibly controvert what is primarily an economic relationship with the living environment, if Nature is perceived to lack any coherent authority and serves as little more than a mirror for the incestuous humanism of the modern age. Where Nature is paraded as a *theological fundamentum*, it is employed instead as an *ideational epiphenomenon*, a blandly moralistic side-show to the grand drama of human self-interest, so that

[40] Umberto Eco's succinct phrase for the multivalency of the postmodern universe.

what promised to be the final abjuration of the tradition of Enlightenment utilitarianism has turned out to be what one commentator has scathingly described as "a kind of pseudo-mystical mixing and matching of symbols and ideas that have nothing in common with each other, ... another exciting ... shopping spree in the great mall of the world's traditions".[41]

It is apparent, then, that the postmodernist has aligned himself with the Nietzschean relinquishment of the claim to know, but seems to have done so only to controvert the first Nietzschean virtue of intellectual probity. Such irony is made complete when one considers that the culture of postmodernism, which claims for itself the Nietzschean patrimony, continues to display an irrational allegiance to those "myths of the modern times" for which Nietzsche reserved nought but contempt – belief in the linear progress of history, the idea of human beings as malleable, and the conceited opinion that human well-being is the meaning of the universe.[42] It is a peculiar characteristic of the Nietzschean hermeneutic that it advocates an interpretative open-endedness and destabilises "truth" by exposing its historical contingency, while yet preserving an unequivocal concept of "falsity", of the "pious fraud"[43] which can no longer be sustained. It is only from such a paradoxical position that one can begin to understand how a writer can propound a genealogical relativity, scoffing at absolute truth-assertions, and yet seek to discover what he calls the "basic eternal text of *homo natura*".[44] Nietzsche is no dogmatist, but such reference to some eternal natural text would suggest that he is neither a complete relativist, and although he advocates the "new infinite of uncertainty",[45] he understands too that such interpretative openness may merely feed the temptation to refurbish old lies in a new guise: "Ah, too many ungodly possibilities of interpretation are counted in with this unknown, too much devilry,

---

[41] Mary Lefkowitz quoted in Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (North Carolina : University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p.140.

[42] Nietzsche's adumbration of what he called "the myths of modern times", cited in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.276.

[43] A pejorative designation applied by Nietzsche to both the ethos of Christianity and the secular morality which is its successor.

[44] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, VII 230.

[45] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 374.

stupidity, foolishness of interpretation – our own human, all too human itself, which we know ...".[46]

Nietzsche's denunciation of a rampant self-determinism, of the idea the human nature is malleable and can be reinvented as desire sees fit, is precisely a caveat against re-enacting follies, and suggests that, although meaning is inevitably subjective, the proper task of the philosopher is *to discriminate between subjectivities*. This is a crucial acknowledgement and one which indicates that Nietzsche's intention is less to demonstrate the general contingency of all "truth" than to understand the modern myths of self and world in terms of a very specific genealogy. We are not free to reinvent history, because we belong to that history, to a singular though varied intellectual and spiritual lineage, and it is incumbent upon the intellectual conscience to foster, and not to abandon, a critical historical sense in an effort to understand modern subjectivity and to scupper the discredited fictions with which it appeases itself. It is in the mould of the critical historian, then, that Nietzsche scrutinizes the modern age of the actor ("*Schauspieler*") who, like the latter-day socio-linguist, honours the vast human power of self-definition and, through mastery of artifice and appearance, effects a repeated reinvention of self. Yet, if the modern age is that of the actor, it is one that has witnessed the "*hypertrophy of the actor's art*",[47] an art which for Nietzsche originally served an adaptive function, but which has increasingly encouraged an uncritical acceptance of modern subjectivity. To be sure, Nietzsche is not altogether averse to the actor's craft, and in the *Joyous Science*, he writes in the spirit of the *Provençal Troubadour* – a trickster figure who delights in play – but he is no less the discerning philosopher who exercises a critical sense, who will not allow all possibilities and will not countenance all appearances, and who performs out of gratitude to the broader narrative of history and Nature. One wonders, indeed, whether the "hypertrophy of the actor's art" of which Nietzsche spoke has not found its most complete expression in the socio-linguist's cult of subjectivity in

[46] Ibid., V 374.

[47] Laurence Lampert's apt phrase, describing the Nietzschean perspective on the evolution of the actor's art in the modern age. Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.372.

which the critical sense is exercised selectively and generally subordinated to a narrow utilitarian logic.

This divergence of the Nietzschean project from that of the contemporary socio-linguist becomes plain when one remembers Nietzsche's self-professed agenda: "The dehumanization of nature and then the naturalization of the human after it has gained the pure concept of Nature". The "dehumanization of nature"? The "pure concept of Nature"? Such terms are antithetical to the socio-linguist's logic, which, in its infatuation with human self-production, has difficulty admitting the possibility of a dehumanized nature – from such a perspective all that remains is the search for the most expedient humanization of nature, that is, for the most useful metaphorical models of the world. Such a position is, of course, prone to sabotage by the instrumentalist humanism of the modern age, which tends to identify utility with self-aggrandizement, and it is precisely to warn against the humanists' soliloquy that Nietzsche uncharacteristically employs essentialist discourse in delineating his mission. But such language is more than a stylistic ploy – it suggests that a mature, if not complete, understanding of Nature can be achieved, that human subjectivity must be disciplined in order to discern more clearly a "pure concept of Nature" which does not contradict the primacy of becoming and the fluidity of being. Nietzsche's essentialism, then, is provisional and acts in the service of a higher, non-essentialist conception of the real.

Nietzsche's quest for a "pure concept of Nature" begins with a renunciation of the Baconian-Cartesian cult of certitude, but it does not end with a wholesale abandonment of the modern scientific paradigm, for modern science is impelled by its ethos of truthfulness to uncover finally the deadly character of "truth" and therefore to facilitate its own self-transcendence. Instead, the philosopher is a celebrant of science – "Long live Physics!"[48] Nietzsche exclaims, because science's penchant for self-criticism and self-certification has exposed the "noble lie" of the virtuous philosophers and the "pious fraud" of the Christian metaphysic; indeed, because science's intellectual conscience will continue to strip away vanities born

[48] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, IV 335.

of falsehood, until the deadly truths are reasserted and the tradition of rational optimism dies by its own hand. For Nietzsche, modern physics will, despite its pretensions to the contrary, reveal the fluidity of the real, and so inaugurate the great re-education of humanity. It is an education to be advanced still further by Darwinian evolutionary theory, with which Nietzsche was well acquainted, and which he recognised to secure humanity's complete participation in natural processes (the third "deadly truth").[49] The naturalization of the human begins with the recognition that the human is little more than an inflexion of the natural, given over to dreams of self-importance by virtue of its superior intelligence, but nonetheless of no greater consequence in a universe devoid of a providential order:

> In some remote corner of the universe that is poured out in countless flickering solar systems, there was once a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the most arrogant and untruthful moment in "world history" – yet indeed only a moment. After nature had taken a few breaths, the star froze over and the clever animals had to die.[50]

Nietzsche preserves for the "clever animal" the universal organic destiny, within which the invention of knowledge is but a momentary distraction, a whispered vanity soon to be dissipated in the immensity of a godless universe. He recognises such insight into the feebleness of the human condition to be a perilous one, but as one of "the fearless" who extols the virtue of intellectual probity above all, he is compelled to accept the dictates of his knowledge, even though it may jeopardise the very idea of knowledge, itself. Nietzsche, the reckless philosopher, embraces science's unconditional will to truth, but he does so without modern science's irrational optimism and with an unflinching awareness of the complete disutility – the deadly character – of truth. Yes, objective value is groundless, the fluidity of the world defies dogmatic understanding and knowledge is but a ruse, and yet the

[49] Despite Nietzsche's obvious affinity for the Darwinian project, he nevertheless objected to the Darwinian notion that the basic instinct of life is that of self-preservation. This understated depiction of life's momentum seemed to Nietzsche to assign the living organism an overly passive role, and contradicted his own understanding of life as the will to power, and of the goal of life as not simply the preservation of self, but the expansion of self. This point serves as the basis for Nietzsche's refutation of Spinoza, and echoes thereof are apparent in his great rebuttal of Schopenhauer's position.

[50] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.416.

will to truth must not, can not, be abandoned, for a qualitative "truth" about the character of the living universe still remains: "The world seen from within, the world described and defined according to its '*intelligible character*' – it would be just '*will to power*' and nothing besides";[51] and further, "What man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants is an increase of power. Pleasure or displeasure follow from the striving after that".[52]

This is certainly a decisive insight and one which stands as the bedrock of the Nietzschean position. In it, Nietzsche has succeeded in delineating the "intelligible character" of the world in a manner which is compelling without being parochial, and suggestive without being entirely relativistic – a subtlety of logic which is sorely lacking in postmodern subjectivism. Where the modern socio-linguist is apt to manipulate the human-Nature encounter by suitably reinventing a world devoid of stable meaning, Nietzsche instead resolves to consult the world, which he believes to display an intelligible character, in order to understand better the nature of the existential encounter. Thus, in the manner of a non-committal socio-linguist, Nietzsche declares the will to power to be "an innovation as a theory", but what postmodernist – unconvinced of the singular reality of the world – would be bold enough to proclaim it "the primordial fact of all history"?[53]

This is indeed a striking assertion for it posits the fundamental principle of organic life – the will to power – as the defining subtext of what was perceived to be a uniquely human narrative. In a stunning reversal of the socio-linguist's position, in which "nature" is little more than a category of human self-production, Nietzsche seeks to recover the organic identity of his species and to ground the history of human self-understanding in the irreducible experience of human creatureliness. Herein lies Nietzsche's "eternal basic text of *homo natura*" – Foucault's "*constant verticality*" – which prevails as the inarticulate epicentre of all spoken tongues, one which is ubiquitous, but silent, and therefore which requires an almost

[51] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, II 36.

[52] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, III 702.

[53] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX 259.

preternatural sense, a "second hearing" or "third ear",[54] to be deciphered. Mere philology, the science of reading, is not enough, for no text, written or spoken, is self-contained, but is ever suggestive of a hidden bio-historical narrative. Similarly, the solipsistic pantomime of the modern actor (postmodernist) must be rejected, for in it, he is but transfixed by the medium of self-expression and has permitted himself to be seduced by mere sound and simple appearance, believing himself to be master of his own illusion.

For Nietzsche, then, philology can only mature into the "art of hearing" once it is augmented by psychology, or, more particularly, a *physio-psychology*, which acknowledges "the phenomenality of the inner world"[55] and seeks to uncover "the facts of consciousness". Thus, Nietzsche turns the gaze of Descartes' inquiring subject inward so that it comes to question the constraints of its own subjectivity, and therefore what previously was an investigation into the nature of external reality is recast instead as an investigation of consciousness itself. Psychology becomes the mode of inquiry proper to one who understands that, since "in every philosophy there is a point at which the 'conviction' of the philosopher steps upon the scene",[56] perspectives are necessarily contingent on the personality of the perceiver. Nietzsche, then, admits the subjectivity of all truth-assertions, but nevertheless, in the manner of the psychologist, endeavours to discover the "truth" of his own subjectivity in the knowledge that full objectivity is unattainable. This is significant, for postmodern perspectivism similarly acknowledges the inevitability of an interpretative bias, but is, precisely for this reason, suspicious of psychological inquiry into supposedly stable, universal "elements of consciousness". For the postmodernist, the human agent lacks any definable ontological substance and exists more in the manner of a symbolically constructed subjectivity, a view of self and world made real only within a consciously articulated text. Unconvinced of the knowability, or even of the reality, of its

[54] Ibid., VIII 246.

[55] "I maintain the phenomenality of the inner world too" - Nietzsche's bold proclamation in *The Will to Power*, III 477.

[56] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 8.

interior life, such an agent eschews the possibility of a critical self-knowledge and so, is fated to be perpetually self-legitimating.

But human culture is not its own context, and therefore the text of the human culture-dweller ought not to be its own narcissistic reflection, ought not to be the mere conscious working out of individual and collective self-interest. Nietzsche understands this, and therefore he cannot allow the human subject to become a contented prisoner of its own grammar, whether that of a life-denying theism or a godless materialism. Indeed, the Nietzschean philosopher is one who yearns for the interpretative expansiveness of the "open seas", impelled onward by the "stimulus of the enigmatic";[57] he is the restless "Hyperborean",[58] the "emancipated spirit" who discerns in every self-aggrandizing grammar, a falsifying deceit; in every conviction, a lie. Thus, philology – the art of reading well, "of being able to read off a fact without falsifying it by interpretation, without losing caution, patience, subtlety in the desire for understanding"[59] – becomes necessary, for language clarifies in order to conceal, describes in order to divide: "There is a philosophical mythology concealed in language"[60] which flows from "the fact that in language man set a world of his own over against the other world"[61] and which posits the human subject as "the measure of things",[62] supplanting the living ground of existence with "the abstract intelligibility of existence".[63]

The task of philology, then, is to reverse that "hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and still more of the material",[64] which is ensconced within the history of human self-expression, by correctly interpreting the human subject as a participant within a broader living context. But it is precisely because the dominant

---

[57] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, III 470.

[58] Nietzsche opens *The Anti-Christ* by describing himself and his kind as the "*Hyperboreans*" (*The Anti-Christ*, I). This reference to the mysterious race from Greek mythology is designed to give an impression of inaccessibility and a sense of immeasurable distance from the commonplace and the mediocre.

[59] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 52.

[60] Ibid., Appendix C, p.191.

[61] Ibid., p.190.

[62] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 3.

[63] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, Appendix B, p.190.

[64] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale (New York : Vintage Books, 1969), III 28.

cultural texts of our story-telling species are in fact falsifying documents which banish from speech that vital encounter to which they owe their origin, that the art of reading well requires to be augmented by psychology, or a discipline that succeeds in bringing to the light of consciousness that "unconscious domination and directing"[65] which underlies language. Thus, the "path to the fundamental problems" is necessarily "a proper physio-psychology",[66] for it alone treats of the human subject as a *psycho-physical unity*, as a creature of the world participating in a universal organic destiny, and understands the mystery of human subjecthood to be in fact the mystique of embodied intelligence: "The whole of conscious life, the mind together with the soul together with the heart, with virtue and goodness labour in the service of the basic animal functions ...".[67] The "truth" about human identity simply cannot be peddled off to the self-legitimating subject, because that identity belongs to Nature, to the "eternal natural text of *homo natura*". In keeping with such a naturalization of the human, Nietzsche is driven to supplant modernity's subject-predicate relationship with one which acknowledges the interpenetration of subject and object, or the kinship of self and world: "Many drives struggle to predominate in me. In this I am the image of everything living and I explain this to myself".[68]

Nietzsche's naturalization of the human is conducted with intellectual rigour and an acuity of insight, but at no point does his naturalism aspire to be a system, for "the will to system is a lack of integrity",[69] an imposition of self over and against the dynamic realm of becoming. It is not without cause, then, that Nietzsche distrusts the desiring subject, for an all too human desire recoils from the hazards of the deadly truths and seeks assurance in the mirage of conviction, and, to be sure, "what is the difference between conviction and lie?".[70] Indeed, "the philosopher

---

[65] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 20.

[66] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.350.

[67] Nietzsche quoted in H A Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher* (London : Macmillan, 1948), p.397. Nietzsche is here prefiguring with a certain lack of subtlety Freud's *id*-dominated *Unconscious*, that catena of drives and instincts which, ever unseen, direct the drama of the conscious life.

[68] Nietzsche quoted in Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche : The Body and Culture, Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy*, trans. Séan Hand (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1991), p.233.

[69] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, Appendix A, p.188.

[70] In *The Anti-Christ* (p.55), Nietzsche poses "the decisive question: is there any difference whatever between a lie and a conviction?"

despises desiring man, and the 'desirable' man too – he despises all the *desiderata*, all the ideals of man"[71] for at bottom they conceal merely "the worthless, the absurd, the sick, the cowardly, the weary ..."[72] – in short, they conceal a *psychopathology of hope*. Consequently, in a final refutation of the postmodernist's self-appeasing subject, Nietzsche describes his project as a "*self-overcoming*",[73] for in order to penetrate to a "pure concept of nature", the philosopher must renounce the desire that falsifies and offer himself up to the deadly character of truth.

But the philosopher does not banish desire altogether, nor does he disparage his own subjectivity, for this would be a re-enactment of the old Cartesian folly; instead, his "passion" for "truth-telling" is his "gift-giving virtue",[74] and a sense of his own subjecthood within the living universe remains his guiding intuition. Thus, Nietzsche's scheme can be more properly understood as an *etiology* of human desire, as less a critical assessment of human behaviour or utterance than one of human motivation; for, if "truth" is elusive and lies abound, then "ultimately the point is to what end a lie is told".[75] This is precisely the basis of Nietzsche's objection to the mythology of Christianity – the bankruptcy of the tradition lies not in the fact that it rests on fraudulent claims, but that its fraud is an "unholy sickness": "That 'holy' ends are lacking in Christianity is my objection to its means. Only bad ends: the poisoning, slandering, denying of life, contempt for the body, the denigration and self-violation of man through the concept of sin – consequently its means too are bad".[76] Nietzsche's self-professed aim, then, is not the abandonment of values altogether, still less the endorsement of all values, but rather the "*revaluation of values*" – that is, "the attempt, undertaken with every expedient, with every instinct, with genius of every kind, to bring about the victory

---

[71] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 32 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[72] Ibid., 32.

[73] In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (136 7), Nietzsche ascribes "*Self-overcoming*" to the "wisest of men", and attributes it to their "will to truth".

[74] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.388.

[75] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 56.

[76] Ibid., 56.

of the opposing values, the noble values".[77] The naturalisation of the human, or the problem of truth and representation, thus gives rise to the second of the great Nietzschean themes: the problem of truth and value, or more simply, the problem of morality.

[77] Ibid., 61.

Nietzsche's treatment of the *problem of morality* is consistent with the dictates of his own physio-psychology and with his understanding of history as the struggle between "pious fraud" and "deadly truth", noble and ignoble values, rather than between virtue and vice, or good and evil. This "revaluation of values" has earned for him the title of "the first immoralist"[78] for it begins with the premise that "there are no moral facts whatever";[79] that not only is morality itself "an interpretation of certain phenomena" (for this is not incriminating in itself) but that it is "more precisely a misinterpretation".[80] Nietzsche, then, demands of the heroic philosopher that he places himself "beyond good and evil",[81] that he extricates himself from the falsifying rhetoric of moralism in order to discern more clearly the "physiological value judgements"[82] that underlie moral evaluations. By measuring moral pretensions against the organic rootedness of human identity and against the character of the world as "will to power", Nietzsche comes to decipher the moral ideal into fundamentally amoral terms: "The victory of a moral ideal is gained, like any other victory, by 'immoral' means: force, lying, defamation, injustice ... Morality is just as 'immoral' as any other thing on earth; morality itself is a form of immorality".[83] Moralism, then, is little more than an obfuscating stratagem, one born of self-interested motivation, but which seeks to conceal its own ignoble nature by an appeal to the false dichotomies of virtue and vice, right and wrong. Nietzsche undertakes precisely to confuse such dichotomising by tracing the moral impulse to categories of experience which lie beyond the perimeter of moral self-definition; and so, in portraying the will to morality as a struggle within the world at large rather than as an interior struggle with moral conscience, he succeeds in preserving the world, itself, from self-contradiction: "Contradiction is removed from things, the homogeneity in all events is saved ...".[84]

---

[78] With flagrant disregard for reputation, Nietzsche proclaimed himself to be "the first immoralist" standing in unwavering opposition to modern "ideas" and "ideals". Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Untimely Ones", 3, in *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York : Vintage Books, 1969).

[79] Nietzsche, "The 'Improvers' of Mankind" I in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[80] Ibid., 1.

[81] Ibid., 1.

[82] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 20.

[83] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, II 306-8.

[84] Ibid., II 308.

Nietzsche's subversion of traditional morality can be most fully understood as the result of the proper application of a physio-psychology to the science of philology, and thus, its guiding logic is drawn from the marriage of his hermeneutic of history and critical theory of nature. The characterisation of the world as "will to power" is generally a crude and cryptic formulation, but it serves a useful methodological purpose in repelling, once and for all, the moralisation of Nature and in fostering the recognition ...

> ... That even our moral judgements and valuations are only pictures and phantasies about a physiological process which is unknown to us ...? That all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps, unknowable, but felt text.[85]

Nietzsche does not purport to know such a text, but he does profess to apprehend the qualities of feeling and shades of experience contained therein, a claim to which he is authorized by virtue of his willingness to discern the biological encounter underlying all ideological encounters. His physio-psychology suggests precisely that the *cognitive* is merely a distillation of the *affective*, that the ideational gesture conceals a somatic posture, and therefore that human history is less the chronicle of warring ideologies, than of conflicting dispositions towards life itself. The "will to power" stands as the foundational principle of Nietzsche's monistic cosmology, but it is at best suggestive, for once exposed to the instinctual ambivalence of the human creature, it comes to manifest itself in divergent modes of "*being-in-relation*", as "a drive toward something or away from something ..."[86] or as "the will to take possession of a thing or to defend oneself against or repel it ...".[87]

The vagaries of history, therefore, are not simply shaped by human intersubjective dialogue, for the history of ideas is at once a history of bodily dispositions, and

---

[85] Nietzsche quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche : Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1968), p.182.

[86] Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, *Nietzsche : Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, p.185.

[87] Nietzsche quoted in Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p.216.

therefore of Nature itself as "will to power". What marks the Nietzschean hero – that is, what renders him a sound "legislator" – is precisely his willingness to conscientise the primordial fact of "will to power", and the physio-psychology that results, succeeds in subverting moral principles not merely by relativising them (for there is something of the relative in all truth assertion), but by exposing the moralising impulse as fundamentally harmful to life. Nietzsche's genealogy of morals is equally an *etiology* – a history of a disease – for if Nietzsche denounces moral teleology for being a fiction, he denounces it, in even greater measure, for being a harmful fiction. "Man is finished when he becomes altruistic"[88] because the ethos of humanitarianism, of treating human interests as moral ends, is one derived from disease and resentment ("*ressentiment*") against the world. This is a significant diagnosis, for in it Nietzsche applies to modern morality a term – "*ressentiment*"[89] – which he employs to great effect in his anti-Christian diatribe, and which is consistent with his appraisal of Christianity as a tradition born out of self-loathing and moved by the spirit of revenge against the world. Indeed, the Christian tradition is still much maligned to the present day for its perceived life-denying tenor, but what is remarkable about Nietzsche's diagnosis is that it points to the kinship of the otherworldly morality of Christian medievalism and the secular liberal morality of our own atheistic age, as value-systems which are both rooted in "a general decay of vitality".[90]

This assessment will undoubtedly appear alien to the modern reader who, in lacking a proper physio-psychology, is accustomed to regarding Christian medievalism and modern liberalism as disparate ideologies, and who is equally accustomed to regarding the latter as the most humane to which any society could aspire. But the internal logic of Nietzsche's position is made more accessible when one comes to appreciate his assertion that "all values to which mankind now attaches the highest desirability are *décadence-values*",[91] and therefore, that where

---

[88] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 35 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[89] See Walter Kaufmann's introduction to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* for a helpful discussion on Nietzsche's use of the term "*ressentiment*".

[90] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 37 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[91] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 6.

the moralist perceives virtuous reform of the human character, Nietzsche discerns instead a sham or "slave" morality, a "cowardice", a "pitiableness", an "old woman's morality",[92] characterised by physical and intellectual frailty, and a feebleness of spirit. From such a perspective, the moral sensibility of the modern age is in every sense the rule of mediocrity, a smug and stagnant self-contentedness which belongs to "the weaklings who thought themselves good because they had no claws",[93] and which militates against the nobler values. Indeed, from the vantage point of the master morality, the self-effacing altruist conceals a self-appeasing hypocrite, who opts for kindness because he "is merely too weak and timid to act otherwise";[94] who resents the struggle for power because he lacks the courage for it, and so wreaks the only vengeance of which he is capable – to make a rule of his weakness and "a virtue of [his] necessity".[95] Consequently, "what has become instinct here [in the modern moral anti-hero] is precisely the opposite of all contending, of all sense of being in struggle: the incapability of resisting becomes morality here, blessedness lies in peace, in gentleness, in the inability to be an enemy".[96] The inertia of the modern age, then, is little more than a conspiracy of weakness, implemented by a wilful attachment to that "most bizarre of equations",[97] "Reason = virtue = happiness".[98]

This is indeed a provocative thesis, and one for which its author has achieved notoriety, but one has only to examine Nietzsche's conception of the modern hero and the noble values that he embodies in order to understand more sympathetically the "philosopher's" contempt for modern society. Despite the vehemence of his polemical writing, Nietzsche is no reactionary, nor is he an unthinking

---

[92] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 37 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[93] Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, *Nietzsche : Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, p.372.

[94] Ibid., p.371.

[95] Ibid., p.372.

[96] Nietzsche quoted in Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, p.447. Nietzsche's stomach for ongoing struggle and the happiness of high tension did much to propel him beyond Schopenhauer's position. Thus, where Schopenhauer understands the will to be marked by a tranquillity or equipoise, and to be almost a metaphysical, indwelling epicentre which stands in contradistinction to the tumultuous world of form and appearance, Nietzsche construes it instead as a restless and volatile vortex which draws its energy from adversity and strife, and ever seeks an outward expansion, or a "self-overcoming".

[97] Nietzsche, "The Problem of Socrates" 4 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[98] Ibid., 4.

misanthrope; instead, he understands himself to be a "friend of Man",[99] to be the purveyor of the "Great Health"[100] – the convalescence of modernity from "that sick domestication that passes for health".[101] All around him, Nietzsche discerns "the pernicious modern effeminacy of feeling",[102] a decline in vitality and the attendant glorification of weakness. Yet, although the mark of the modern is "physiological self-contradiction",[103] it is certainly not unique in this regard. It has already been noted how Nietzsche's physio-psychology afforded him insight into the kinship of Christian theism and the atheistic humanism that succeeded it. From such a perspective, both ideologies are afflicted with an "impoverishment of life"[104] for which consolation is sought in "the will to immortalize"[105] – the former by its world-denying transcendentalism and its fraudulent metaphysic of God, soul, and Providence; the latter, by its predication of moral purpose and glorification of the virtuous man of principle. Humanity, then, can only begin to restore the "Great Health" once it relinquishes both the metaphysical ontology and moral teleology which has been bequeathed to it, for such harmful fictions have neither facilitated any otherworldly salvation, nor made our species any more moral:

> He [Man] is not the result of a special design, a will, a purpose; he is not the subject of an attempt to attain to an "ideal man" or an "ideal of happiness" or an "ideal of morality" – it is absurd to want to hand over his nature to some purpose or other. We invented the concept "purpose": in reality, purpose is lacking.[106]

It is precisely this acknowledgement – that though the world be meaningless and purposeless, it requires no justification outside itself – that is announced in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as the "death of God". This is no mere atheistic slogan,

---

[99] Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" 4, in *Untimely Meditations*.

[100] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 382.

[101] Laurence Lampert's poignant phrase which summarises so effectively Nietzsche's disgust at the moralistic-nihilistic culture of modernity. Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.410.

[102] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'Preface' 6.

[103] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 41 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[104] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'Preface' 3.

[105] Lampert's succinct phrase which can be used interchangeably, from a Nietzschean perspective, with "the will to conviction", "the will to system", or "the will to nothingness". (Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.402).

[106] Nietzsche, "The Four Great Errors" 8 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

commemorating the passing of the disfigured deity of medieval cosmology and the inauguration of a new enlightened humanism, for the death of God signifies at once the death of sloganism and the abandonment of idealism itself. Although, for Nietzsche, this event is a necessary prelude to the "Great Health", it is yet an "awe-inspiring catastrophe"[107] possessing a "monstrous logic of terror"[108] for it marks the decline of that grand Platonic lie of progress and transcendence, which, in multiple guises, has served to inoculate successive epochs of Western culture against the deadliness of "truth". What began as a "noble [and necessary] lie", propagated by the early Platonists, out of philanthropic consideration, out of love for humanity, was perpetuated by Christianity – that "vulgarized Platonism"[109] – but transmuted into a dogmatic formulation of hatred against self and world. The Platonic lie, however, came to outlive the Christian *mythos* in which it was attired, and prevailed into the modern age, this time in secular guise, as the tradition of rational optimism and the modernist's dream of the enlightened end of history. However, its illustrious career through Western history is fated to end at this point, as modern science's intellectual conscience begins to erode its optimistic tenets, and the belief in the commensurability of the true and the good begins to unravel.

For Nietzsche, this process of gradual "disillusionment"[110] has come to yield the despair of modern Nihilism, and it is not without reason that it is the madman who announces the death of God to the crowded market-place in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*,[111] for the abolition of our reverences is attended by a further loss of belief in both the self and the world:

> The most extreme form of Nihilism would be the insight: that every belief, every holding-for-true, is necessarily false: because there is no true world at all ... let us think this thought in its most frightful form: existence, just as it is, without meaning or goal, but inevitably recurring, without any finale into

[107] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III 27.

[108] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 343.

[109] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.364.

[110] A term employed in its most literal sense, that is, as the gradual dispelling of illusion.

[111] See "Zarathustra's Prologue" in Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, pp.39-53.

> nothingness: "eternal recurrence". That is the most extreme form of Nihilism: Nothing (the "meaningless") for ever![112]

The nihilist, then, is one deprived of faith in the old consoling icons of God and moral permanence, who embodies in his person the devaluation of what were perceived to be the highest values, and who comes to the realization that "the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of ... the categories 'aim', 'unity', 'being' which we used to project some value into the world".[113] This is a grave logic, for it invokes what Schopenhauer called the "terror and horror of existence",[114] but it is also Nietzsche's own logic, which he avows by declaring that he himself had "hitherto been a thoroughgoing nihilist".[115] However, if nihilism is a necessary intellectual-historical development, it is simultaneously a "pathological transition stage"[116] which must be traversed only in order to be finally overcome. Thus, while Nietzsche understands his most intimate audience to be "the first generation of unbelievers"[117] and therefore to be victims of modern nihilism itself, he nevertheless construes his own project as a "countermovement", as "a movement that in some future will take the place of this perfect nihilism".[118] But it is precisely because Nietzsche has "even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself",[119] that he is able to penetrate the psychopathology of the nihilistic universe and to understand it as a "consequence of moral evaluation"[120] itself. In other words, the nihilist is driven to discard inherited notions of self and world, right and wrong as mere contrivances of wishful thinking, but is cast into dejection by the

---

[112] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, I 55 quoted in Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, p.111.

[113] Nietzsche quoted in Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p.345.

[114] Ibid., p.344. Schopenhauer's apprehension occasioned his descent into what Nietzsche branded "romantic pessimism", marked by an "impoverishment of life" and "a nihilistic devaluation of life" (Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 21 in *Twilight of the Idols*). Nietzsche shared Schopenhauer's apprehension of the cruel chaos of the world, yet sought instead to transmute it into a "Dionysian pessimism", characterised by an "overfullness of life" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 370).

[115] Nietzsche quoted in Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, pp.385-6.

[116] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, I 13.

[117] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.291.

[118] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 'Preface' 4.

[119] Ibid., 'Preface' 3.

[120] Nietzsche quoted in Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p.345.

abandonment of such ideals, precisely because he yet hankers after the comfort of illusion. The nihilist still harbours the moralising, immortalising impulse, but is precluded from exercising it by scepticism towards the world and distrust of the self, and so comes to be stricken with an unresolved nostalgia for old, consoling forms. The result is a sorry figure who, wavering between discredited modes of valuation and the formlessness of the present, is given over to pessimism and whose universe reverberates with a perpetual "no". The nihilist, finally, is "... a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist".[121]

Nietzsche, then, recognizes the negating discourse of modern nihilism to be in fact the language of a humanity at variance with a seemingly absurd universe and alienated from the purposeless play of Nature. He understands, too, that instrumental utilitarianism – or the ethos of self-interest – is concomitant with the "*décadence-values*" of a nihilistic age, for once the world is divested of its divine mantle, and stripped of providential order and moral sanction, it becomes but a plaything of the ego and refuge from meaningless is sought in self-gratification, or what Nietzsche polemicised as "shameless self-seeking".[122] This is a striking analysis for it concurs with our own profile of eighteenth century pessimism, in which we averred that a *psychopathology of despair* was dialectically implied in the Enlightenment tradition of rational optimism. This optimism, we have observed, was continually assaulted by the common-sense naturalism on which it claimed to rest, until, in the throes of moral crisis, it came to yield to a creeping pessimism. Natural law appeared to lack any cosmological basis in a starkly indifferent universe, and morality increasingly seemed to be little more than social convention. What manifested itself in more adventurous thinkers as a radical nihilism, or "*moral pyrrhonism*", precipitated a revolution in the more accepted trammels of moral science, giving rise to a morality that marked the end of moral absolutism – the ethos of social utility grounded in the idea of "*natural rights*" and the social contract. What is significant, here, is that the utilitarian is at heart a cynic who

[121] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, III 585 A.

[122] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 36.

shares the nihilist's profound disillusionment with the world, and who, in a state of alienation, measures out life by the mere calculation of self-interest. As one Nietzschean commentator has so aptly put it, "when the virtue of honesty loses its power to sustain hope without losing its power to sustain action, the result is bitter cynicism for the wise few and petty egoism for the wised-up many".[123] Nietzsche denounces the modern cult of self-aggrandizement precisely because he understands it to be symptomatic of nihilism, and therefore to be the very antithesis of "power"; and he is likewise impelled to spurn the "delicate" liberal values, for he recognizes them to be in fact "*décadence-values*", a vehicle for that "contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats".[124]

If Nietzsche's disclaimer against the staid modern notion of the end of history is the "*critical historical sense*", exercised out of gratitude to our historical and natural rootedness, then his antidote to the modern pessimism from which it emerges, is the "*Great Health*". That this health is a movement both through and beyond the impasse of nihilism is made apparent when Nietzsche lauds the idea of the "*Eternal Recurrence*" as the highest expression of the will to power, for this is the self-same notion with which he characterised the nihilist's universe. More simply, Nietzsche embraces the trackless expanse of the nihilistic universe for its very destructive capacity – that is, because its perpetual "*nay-saying*" hastens the twilight of the idols – but he does so only to supplant finally the nihilist's "*Nay*" with the "*Yea*" of complete affirmation.

Nietzsche's "*Great Health*", then, is the abandonment of both the moralist's "*will to immortalize*" and the nihilist's "*will to nothing*"[125] – that is, of both the falsifying and negating impulse – in favour of the "*will to eternalize*"[126] everything that was and is "out of love and gratitude".[127] But this "highest form of assent"[128] – the

[123] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.293.

[124] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 38 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[125] See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III 1, p.97.

[126] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 370.

[127] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.405.

[128] Ibid., p.420.

willing of the "*eternal recurrence*" of the world as it is - is not without a "drop of cruelty",[129] for "it involves ... a preference for questionable and terrible things ... without any redeeming faith or hope".[130] Those "heroic spirits", who are Nietzsche's own private audience, we are told, "... say *Yes* to themselves in tragic cruelty: they are hard enough to feel suffering as pleasure".[131] The nihilist is condemned to frailty, for in consecrating his own victimhood, he precludes the recovery of strength; the Nietzschean hero ("*Übermensch*") by contrast, comes to transcend victimhood by consecrating suffering and sacrificing himself to the "painful voluptuousness of tragedy".[132] Where the nihilist and "ultramodern ... moral milksop"[133] suffer from an "impoverishment of life" and a sense of frustrated expectation, the *Übermensch* suffers instead from an "*overfullness of life*",[134] and, by a curious alchemy of the spirit which draws vitality from adversity, comes to transmute "*deadly science*" - deadly, because it is both post-theistic and post-humanistic - into "*joyous science*" ("*fröhliche Wissenschaft*").[135] It is precisely the mark of the modern hero that he is not paralysed by the collapse of inherited values, but rather enlivened by such a cataclysmic event, and so, becomes the creator of new values in full awareness of a senseless world offering no moral sanction, neither praise nor blame. Nietzsche's "*cheerfulness*" ("*heiterkeit*"),[136] then, is no self-induced anaesthetisation against the horror of the death of Platonism, but the natural disposition of one who, in defiance of the feebleness of the "all too human", would fain dance in celebration upon the tombs of all idols; of one, whose distinguishing feature is "the feeling of plenitude, of power which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of riches ...".[137]

---

[129] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, VII 229.

[130] Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, p.472.

[131] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, III 852.

[132] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, VII 229.

[133] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'Preface' 7.

[134] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 370.

[135] "*Ia gaya scienza*" in the Provencal tradition from which Nietzsche drew inspiration.

[136] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V 343.

[137] Nietzsche quoted in Denis Donoghue, *Yeats* (London : Fontana Modern Masters, 1971), p.57.

What then are we, the ecologically-minded readership, to make of Nietzsche's "*Great Health*", and how may this "*prescription-that-is-no-prescription*"[138] assist us further in our re-education? It has already been noted that, in pursuing the dehumanisation of Nature, Nietzsche disputes the modern notion of the goodness of Nature, a *prima facie* and largely unintelligible claim upon which much contemporary ecophilosophy rests. From this original divergence, the Nietzschean scheme grows ever more distant from that of our well-meaning ecocentrist, and it is little wonder that his idea of humanity's collective convalescence from past and present perversities is largely antithetical to the "ecological solution" of the late twentieth century. Arbitrarily drawing meaning from the rarefied atmosphere of postmodernism, the contemporary ecological philosopher assumes the authority to moralise Nature – that is, to construe the human-Nature rapport as a moral category, or to impart intrinsic moral value to the natural environment. The bold ecocentrist is no less subject to such imposture, for despite fulminating against the vanity of anthropocentrism, he is at heart a humanist who, instead of employing moral categories outright, merely weaves them surreptitiously into the very fabric of the universe – at the final count, the great bio-rhythm to which he listens so attentively is but his own echo.

Yet, although Nietzsche dispenses with the singular concept of the goodness of Nature, there is clearly discernible in his thought a willingness, if not to regard the natural universe as "good", then at least to regard it as perfect, or as complete in itself. Indeed, Nietzsche's "*Eternal Recurrence*" enshrines the idea of the world as containing its own justification, and therefore as neither impeachable nor perfectible. But, if, through this concept, Nietzsche approaches an unconditional acceptance of the world in all its gracelessness, he is only able to do so because he

[138] We are not alone in having to resort to knife-edge paradoxes in our Nietzschean analysis. Peter Berkowitz has appended the subtitle, "The Ethics of an Immoralist", to his highly-acclaimed study on Nietzschean thought (Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche : The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1996)), for in it, he endeavours to show that Nietzsche is as much a philosopher of morality as he is an epistemologist, and therefore that his claims about the world necessarily come to yield claims about the way life ought to be lived. Thus, Nietzsche is no simple reactionary, for, though he remains an immoralist in the sense that he subverts the moralising spirit, he too seeks to "... conceive a new human type ..." (p.8), and to offer "... an account of the best life" (p.4), and, in so doing, he preserves "... crucial elements of the tradition he sets out to overcome" (p.8).

banishes once and for all *Nature Romanticism*[139] and its facile talk of the "goodness" of Nature. Nature is perfectly self-contained, beyond reproof, but therefore beyond formal approval, and although the wide universe can be felt to be "good", it can never be articulated as such, save in the most expansive poetical terms; still less, can the idea of the "goodness" of Nature be employed as the doctrinal bedrock of a philosophical system. Thus, Nietzsche's dissatisfaction with naturalistic optimism and its unthinking doctrine of Nature's goodness is a reflection of his general distrust of language and its regime of form and category, which he understands to degenerate all too easily into a system of self-falsification and self-legitimation utilised in defiance of the world. Unable to escape the connivances of language, however, Nietzsche rebels against his necessary imprisonment by taking recourse to the only means remaining - *philology*, or the systematic subversion of language from within; and "*self-overcoming*", or the systematic subversion of subjectivity from within.

Despite his stylistic ingenuity, then, Nietzsche's greatest workmanship is executed at the point at which language, and more particularly linguistic artifice, begins to falter - he is the mariner of the "*open seas*", the grand destabiliser of verbal categories, and thus, master of the metaphor.[140] For, if anything, his physio-psychology has revealed to him precisely this - that knowledge of the *res extensa*, of the "thing-in-itself", is impossible, and therefore, that forms of knowledge are but metaphorical models. More pointedly, it has revealed that moral systems are no less metaphorical models, but which have grown obsolete and unhelpful, which have hindered the process of knowing and encouraged a self-contented complacency, and therefore which require to be overcome. Morality, whether deontological or utilitarian, is from such an angle very much part of the problem, and not the solution to the quagmire of the modern age, which, in effect, has become no more moral despite its pretensions to the contrary, and whose moral

[139] Even though the Romantic spirit might eulogise Nature as the ground of being and the source of a meaningful personhood, Nietzsche yet discerns in it the workings of a profound pessimism, not that of the Dionysiac, but one characterised by an impotence of soul, a feebleness which tries to forget itself in the refuge of nostalgia and tranquillity.

[140] It is precisely his impatience with language that has rendered Nietzsche a master wordsmith and a prose stylist of note, as borne out by the poetical brilliance of his great fable, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

self-understanding has merely served to exacerbate an already deep-seated illness. Yet, if this moralistic pathology is but a prelude to the grand convalescence of human "*being-in-relation*", then this "*moral period*" of history is transitory and is destined to be eclipsed; and, in announcing the "*Great Health*", it would seem that Nietzsche is ushering in a new dispensation which he understands to be a necessary evolution into the postmoral, and which, though still a promise of the future, bears all the authority of an event decreed by fate, or of one already present. Nietzsche is no mere recorder of historical vicissitudes; he is rather both an agitator for historical change and, in the prophetic spirit of Zarathustra, the living embodiment of such change. His is the dissenting voice, which, like that of a Levantine prophet, makes itself real by the act of writing – that is, which objectifies itself historically by the act of communication – and so, comes to engender a prophetic history necessarily culminating in the death of morality:

> As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness – there can be no doubt of that – morality will gradually perish now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe – the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles.[141]

Nietzsche, then, makes manifest in his person, in his "flesh and genius", that "act of supreme self-examination" which sets itself "in opposition against the mendaciousness of millenia".[142] Notwithstanding his own claims to be the "first decent human being"[143] to do so, however, Nietzsche is perhaps not unique in this

---

[141] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III 27. For all the robustness of his rhetoric, Nietzsche could be more properly regarded as a post-moralist, rather than as a brazen immoralist, for his is not an invitation to simple immoral depravity, but to a higher and more noble sense of value, which in order to be realised, requires a transcendence of commonplace morality. Principled immorality represents finally a slavish obedience and a weakness of spirit of no less profound a variety than that of the most principled moralist. Like that of the moralists, Nietzsche's quest is equally one for coherence and meaning in the continuum of human experience – that is, it is existential – but unlike the moralist, Nietzsche rejects moral categories as a vehicle for such meaning, purporting instead to have recovered it in a world unfalsified by moral pretensions. Albert Camus makes precisely this point when he writes that "... Sade and the romantics, Karamazov or Nietzsche only entered the world of death because they wanted to discover the true life. So that by a process of inversion, it is the desperate appeal for order that rings through this insane universe. Their conclusions have only proved disastrous or destructive to freedom from the moment that they laid aside the burden of rebellion, fled the tension that it implies, and chose the comfort of tyranny or of servitude". (Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (Middlesex : Peregrine Books, 1962), p.72).

[142] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a Destiny" I.

[143] Ibid., I.

regard, for although the Nietzschean spirit marks the point at which moral values have finally collapsed, fissures within the moral edifice had been long in evidence prior to Nietzsche's bold proclamation. As we have had occasion to observe in the preceding chapter, the "deadly" science with which Nietzsche flirts and the "*moral pyrrhonism*" which he brandishes with such devastating effect, were defining themes of eighteenth century thought and served as a sobering counterfoil to the rational optimism of that age. In proffering the final overcoming of morality, Nietzsche articulates an indissoluble reality which, but a century earlier, was an odious possibility envisaged by Voltaire, Diderot, Sade and others at their most pessimistic. The rise to prominence of biological science, the erosion of the divine cornerstone of values, the foundering of providential optimism, and the controversion of the idea of the "goodness" of Nature – these are familiar Nietzschean themes, but they carry no less within them that insidious logic which cast into dejection the most profound minds of the eighteenth century.

Despite his aversion to the naïveté of the early modern period and the rash optimism of the *Age of Reason*, Nietzsche refuses to disown the Enlightenment tradition, precisely because he understands it to mark the death of our reverences and the birth of our nihilism. His logic is indeed compelling: nihilism was conceived in the first apostatic moment, that moment in which God was first renounced, and humanity stood independent and alone, buoyed by the false belief that utility is served better by truth than by the divine fiction. The Enlightenment, then, is, in every sense, that "*pathological transition stage*" which anticipates the "*Great Health*", and which clings to its belief-system while yet convinced of its falsity. Hence, that dialectical commingling of both hope and despair which so distinguishes the *pathos* of the eighteenth century. What is significant, however, is that the psychopathology of the anti-natural requires first to be relived in order that it may be renegotiated and finally expunged. Thus, aware of the need for *catharsis*, Nietzsche stands in full deliberation within the Enlightenment tradition, but he does so only to "force it to take the next step ... to enlightenment about the Enlightenment itself".[144]

[144] Georg Picht, *Nietzsche* (Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1988), p.163.

The contemporary ecophilosopher, who foregoes mature analysis in favour of glib sloganism, would do well to take heed of Nietzsche's insight that the very act of, or even desire for, understanding facilitates a self-transcendence, a transmutation of the past in the present. Nietzsche understands that the one-eyed optimism of the Enlightenment has, by virtue of its extravagant claims, bequeathed a sense of disillusionment and diminished expectation to the modern age, but it is precisely in the light of such a recognition that he warns against "*misology*", "the hatred of reason for trust betrayed".[145] No simple act of renunciation will suffice to erase all that is amiss about the Enlightenment, and as any ecophilosopher is well aware, there was much that was amiss about the Enlightenment mindset; but we cannot recant a history of which we are a part, just as we ought never to refuse the dictates of our knowledge. Nietzsche's philosopher is precisely one who denounces denial itself, and who arrogates to himself all facets of (historical) experience, however burdensome, not in order to perpetuate old follies and obsolete paradigms, but because history will find no end and our canon of knowledge will never know completion. This is the gift of the critical historical sense which effects a reinvention of the present historically-defined moment – and therefore, a self-overcoming – by fostering an awareness of its own historicity.

The point is clear: for all its disapprobation of the Enlightenment spirit, much of contemporary ecophilosophy stands in its intellectual lineage and continues to transmit its legacy. Its naturalistic optimism, fashionable humanism and bland moralising are all of a kind with that with which eighteenth century thinkers unthinkingly extolled the praises of "natural" authority. Yet, it is destined to continue to transmit an ecologically bankrupt legacy, until it learns to wield the historical sense more courageously, and, in a willingness for self-scrutiny, comes to discard the old lie that history is the record of moral struggle, of a gradual edging towards the final moral apotheosis of the human universe. The Enlightenment, with its preposterous claims, represents as much the irrevocable decline, as it does the heyday, of rational optimism. Let us then not simply stigmatise the *Age of Reason*, and dismiss it from mind, but rather relive it in order

[145] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.309.

that we may finally rid ourselves of a harmful illusion; indeed, that we may recognise the contingency of our moral prejudices, and so begin a recovery from that nihilism which is their constant companion.

This, of course, is no easy task, and Nietzsche, himself, in negotiating a passage beyond a naive idolatry and that moribund nihilism, which invariably follows in the wake of iconoclasm, appears at times to emulate the perilous antics of that tight-rope walker described in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*,[146] who seeks to traverse the abyss, but whose tentativeness costs him dearly. "Man is a rope", Zarathustra proclaims, "fastened between animal and more-than-human-being – a rope over an abyss"; and thus, the path which is the "*Great Health*" is necessarily a hazardous one, "a dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still".[147] Yet, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* succeeds where the imperilled walker fails precisely because he revels in danger and embraces the "boundless enigma"[148] of the world as will to power. He is "the fearless" who, unassuaged by consoling illusion, renounces the meek ethos of self-preservation, and, in so doing, revives the orgiastic "will to life"[149] against all odds.

What is significant about Nietzsche's advocacy of a movement into the post-theistic, post-moralistic and indeed, post-humanistic, is that it is self-consciously "ecocentric" in the most expansive meaning of the term: his most profound revulsion is reserved for what he understands to be the sickness of the "anti-natural";[150] his "*Great Health*" is an effusive appeal for a recovery of reverence for Nature; he declares his "*Übermensch*" to be "the meaning of the earth";[151] and his far-seeing Zarathustra addresses himself to an age in which "the most dreadful

---

[146] See "Zarathustra's Prologue" in Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, pp.39-53.

[147] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue" 4.

[148] A paraphrasing of Laurence Lampert's description of the world as will to power. (Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.440).

[149] See *Twilight of the Idols*, Ancients 4, for Nietzsche's celebration of the life instinct and the symbol of procreation.

[150] See, for instance, Nietzsche's essay entitled "Morality as Anti-Nature" in *Twilight of the Idols*, pp.42-6.

[151] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue" 3.

offence" is "to blaspheme the earth".[152] The Nietzschean legacy – his revulsion for the modern "democratisation of the soul"[153] and sterile "morality of pity",[154] his derision of moral teleology and the cult of rootless subjectivity – is, at the final count, but a grand indictment of the Promethean paradigm which, in positing human desire as the defining principle of the universe, has brought about the denigration of life itself.

> Our whole attitude toward nature, the way we rape her with the aid of machines and the heedless inventiveness of our technicians and engineers, is *hubris*; our attitude toward God as some alleged spider of purpose and morality behind the captious web of causality is *hubris*...; our attitude towards ourselves is *hubris*, for we experiment with ourselves in a way we would never permit ourselves to experiment with animals.[155]

Few more emphatic rebuttals of modern utilitarian materialism exist in the broad span of Nietzsche's writings. However, what is especially noteworthy – and the ecological philosopher should pay due attention here – is that, despite lamenting the loss of reverence for Nature, Nietzsche at no point permits his sense of outrage to spill over into a "*return-to-nature*" mysticism or a sentimental naturalism. Indeed, his distrust of the romanticising spirit is well documented, and if anything, Nietzsche ridicules the injunction that Nature's example ought to be emulated. To do so, would be to truncate the self, to relinquish the creative spirit in the name of a binding fatalism; but, it would also represent the idolisation of a fundamentally unsound example. Like Schopenhauer and the Enlightenment pessimists before him, Nietzsche recognises the "authority" of Nature to be, at best, a dubious and inefficacious one which can neither offer any blueprint for correct living, nor embody a prescription for the "*Great Health*": The dark and wayward example of Nature is "wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at

---

[152] Ibid., 3.

[153] "... the democratic instincts of the modern soul!" Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 22.

[154] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'Preface' 6.

[155] Ibid., III 9.

the same time".[156] The deadliness of truth to which Nietzsche points repeatedly consists precisely of the observation that the world is "false, cruel, contradictory, misleading, senseless"[157] and that "the total character of the world ... is in all eternity, chaos".[158]

Such an appraisal could equally have been uttered by an eighteenth century pessimist or his cousin, the twentieth century nihilist, both of whom disparage the world for its lack of moral horizon; yet, Nietzsche does not offer his description as an indictment or a lament. He can not bring himself to renounce, like the Christian supernaturalist, a seemingly disfigured universe, for to do so would entail a renunciation of life itself. But neither can he eulogise the example of Nature, like the Romantic sentimentalist, because the dictates of his intellectual conscience prevent him from doing so. Acknowledging the irresolvable discord between self and world, yet unwilling to falsify the real, Nietzsche's cure for the malady of the "anti-natural" is *amor fati* – the love of fate. This is not a reluctant fatalism, a sober acceptance of odious necessity. Indeed, it would not be in character for Nietzsche to opt for the path of least possible resistance, begrudgingly chosen because we are but creatures of circumstance. Instead, Nietzsche proffers, in his *amor fati*, a final re-alignment of desire and circumstance, so that the distinguishing mark of the world becomes less its necessity – which any pessimist may acknowledge – than its *desirability*. For all the dolorous character of the world, the noble spirit wills its eternal recurrence, affirms unconditionally its entirety, and desires, as one desires an object of joy, that its manifold drama be re-enacted again and again, *ad infinitum*.

Nietzsche's naturalism, then – if it can be properly called such – does not consist of an attempted emulation of Nature's example, but neither does it represent a complete disavowal of Nature's significance for human self-understanding. For Nietzsche, as for the eighteenth century pessimist, Nature bears no normative

---

[156] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 9.

[157] Nietzsche quoted in Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, p.469.

[158] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, III 109.

authority, offering neither endorsement nor rebuke, but instead exists in the manner of an unconscious, cathonic agency manifesting itself in the unmeditated ebb and flow of energy. But where for others a confrontation with Nature's darkness invites but despair, the Nietzschean hero is enlivened by the encounter and succeeds in creating values where none present themselves. Nietzsche's naturalism does not entail slavish obedience to some external authority, for no binding authority exists, but a process of self-overcoming whereby the highest value comes to coincide with the highest power: "I too speak of a 'return to nature', although it is not really a going back but a going up – up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness ...".[159]

But, in speaking thus, does Nietzsche not pre-empt a new earth-centred spirituality – not a faithless idolatry, but a revival of an epiphanic art which effects a transfiguration of the self, and, thereby, comes to transmute, without denying, the dread appearance of the world into a vision of beauty and power? Nietzsche avers unequivocally that "art" is the definitive "counter-movement" of "the decadence forms of man";[160] he maintains, too, that "art" manages "the tension between the general knowledge of things and the individual's spiritual-moral capacities. Art exists so that the bow shall not break".[161] But Nietzsche's art is not a falsifying artifice which denies the deadliness of truth, but rather the ecstatic exercise of the creative imagination which beautifies the deadly character of the world. The highest art is but the highest power made conscious of itself; it does not stand as the amendment or improvement of the world, but as the world's justification of itself. But, since the highest power entails a commingling of pain and joy, and a joyous consecration of suffering, and the world is at once "fertile and desolate and uncertain", the highest art is necessarily the art of the "tragic".

> The individual must be consecrated to something higher than himself – that is the meaning of tragedy; he must be free of the terrible anxiety which death and time evoke in the individual: for at any moment, in

[159] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 48 in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[160] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 794.

[161] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.296.

> the briefest atom of his life's course, he may encounter something holy that endlessly outweighs all his struggle and all his distress – this is what is meant to have a sense for the tragic. And if the whole of humanity is destined to die out – and who dares doubt that? – its supreme task for all time is placed before it as the goal ... that it sets out as a whole to meet its coming demise with a sense for the tragic: all the ennoblement of humankind is enclosed in this supreme task; the definite rejection of this task would be the saddest picture imaginable to a friend of humanity.[162]

Modern science has furthered the tutelage of our species by postulating a "definitive death",[163] for "readiness for the absolutely sudden and annihilating belongs to the naturalization of humanity".[164] But the reality of a final, irreversible death is, in itself, but a "stupid physiological fact",[165] and its real worth lies in the possibilities for an epiphanic art which it bequeaths to a post-theistic culture. The art of the tragic does not mimic life, still less does it enshrine Nature, for "Nature, artistically considered, is no model. It exaggerates, it distorts, it leaves gaps",[166] but yet, it draws its creative sustenance from an encounter with the fecund darkness of the world. The sense of the tragic cries neither foul nor fair in the encounter, and, in this sense, is post-moral; neither does it study its object with a disinterested eye, and, in this sense, it is post-Cartesian. Instead, it is the profoundly personal art of the existential – of the living aspirant – and the materials it draws to its crucible are a sense of physical contingency and of the awkwardness of the personal within a seemingly impersonal universe. Yet, from such modest materials it fashions a poignant "*eschatology of the moment*", which, under conditions of distress, affirms unconditionally the desirability of the world.

---

[162] Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" 4, in *Untimely Meditations*.

[163] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.425.

[164] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.417.

[165] Ibid., p.428.

[166] Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 7 in *Twilight of the Idols*. Nietzsche's rejection of Nature as an artistic model recalls Oscar Wilde's own philosophy of art. In his sprightly essay, "The Decay of Lying", Wilde has one character – Vivian, Wilde's own mouthpiece – suggest that art serves to expose the flaws and frailties of Nature's example, "[her] lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition" (Oscar Wilde, *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. G F Maine (London : Collins, 1948), p.909). Indeed, in urging a revival of the "*art of lying*", Wilde advocates an authentic art of the imagination with which to supersede the dull, prosaic "anti-art" of the naturalists. This of course reflects Wilde's celebrated dictum that "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life", which finds its parallel in Nietzsche's characterisation of the Dionysian artist as the "creator" of value.

Harking back to the orgiastic fests of the pre-Socratic Greeks, Nietzsche propounds his tragic sense as "a Dionysian relationship to existence"[167]: *Dionysus*, the erotic Lord of the Dance, simultaneously reverent and profane, summoning his devotee to ecstatic rapture, while yet plunging him into the "painful voluptuousness of tragedy"; *Dionysus*, who, like "the Crucified One",[168] beckons his votaries to drink deeply from the chalice of bitterness, not however in order to blaspheme this life and to seek recompense in another, but that the self be transfigured and the world, disfigured and desolate, be recreated ever anew, in the anguished moment of self-immolation: "Dionysus, cut to pieces, is a *promise* of life: it will eventually be reborn and return again from destruction".[169]

After having traversed the wilderness of an irreverent nihilism, Nietzsche finally re-engages a sacralising discourse and prefigures the return of an earth-centred spirituality. If, however, he celebrates the revival of the "yea-saying" Dionysian spirit and the artistic redemption of the world, it is but a "redemption through illusion",[170] for Dionysus is an elusive, trickster figure, a metaphor-within-a-metaphor, who snubs the gravity of the icon in favour of the impish masquerade of eternal becoming, yet who is "superficial out of profundity".[171] Dionysus is all appearance, all spectacle, and yet is the supremely real. Indeed, in Nietzsche's art of the tragic, we are finally presented with the reconciliation of appearance and substance, form and value, a reconciliation which similarly holds out the promise of *rapprochement* between self and world, for Nietzsche's ecstatic identification with the petulant Dionysus is at once an ecstatic identification with the spirit of the natural universe. The Dionysian, he writes, is ...

> ... an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states,

---

[167] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 1041.

[168] Nietzsche's designation for the Christ-figure of the Christian tradition.

[169] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 1052.

[170] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W Kaufmann (New York : Vintage Books, 1966), 4.

[171] Nietzsche quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.305.

> an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change, the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life: the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction.[172]

Dionysus represents in every sense the apotheosis of the world, and the mythopoeic *saternalia* to which he invites the novitiate of the joyful wisdom, dances the world into a full-bodied sanctity, more profound than any graven image abdicated by God. The world, replete with its own unconditional holiness, requires no further justification, indeed cannot require such, because no further justification exists. Platonism is obsolete and transcendence is a lie, and so Nietzsche is compelled to dissolve whatever presentiment of the divine remains to him within the dark folds of organic Nature. For indeed, at one level, Dionysus is an *avatar* of the fertility gods of antiquity – unruly personifications of elemental forces who partake of the heat of blood and the mystery of procreation, and whose province is the profligacy of the ecstatic trance. Yet, as we have noted, Nietzsche is no primitivist and would dare not advocate a return to the crude superstition of old as a remedy for modern ills, and therefore, Dionysus is, at another level, an ultra-modern figure, a "philosophizing god", who stands as "the enigmatic union of mistrust and reverence",[173] and who marries an innate volatility to the calm and discerning vision of the "*Apollonian*".[174] Nietzsche's Dionysus, like his naturalism, is not a nostalgic retrospective, but rather a "going up", a movement beyond nihilism and therefore, within history, that is ever aware of its own genealogy. In this sense, Nietzsche's Dionysus is new, and the consecration of Nature to which he alludes,

---

[172] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 1050.

[173] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.330.

[174] The dialectical tension which exists between the "*Dionysian*" and the "*Apollonian*" is an abiding motif of Nietzschean philosophy. Although Nietzsche's usage of such categories is a versatile and complex one which warrants an extensive analysis in its own right, it can be briefly summarised as follows: The Apollonian realm, after the Classical deity Apollo, is associated with the world of appearance, the imagistic domain of dreams, and the visual arts. The gift of the Apollonian is illumination, and the sight, or insight, it thus affords, and therefore is associated with the principle of individuation ("*principium individuationis*"). The realm of the Dionysian, in contrast, is that of the ecstatic, of intoxicated rapture, and is thus more closely related to the nonimagistic realm of music. Where the Apollonian offers shades of sight, and the self-awareness that accompanies any act of observation, the Dionysian is suggestive of qualities of feeling, and urges instead a self-dissolution, or a self-transcendence through ecstatic identification with the entirety of the living universe.

presupposes the proper application of the historical sense: Nietzsche's invitation to the Dionysian frenzy is not a call to self-forgetfulness, but to self-awareness, and it is with supreme insight into the history of symbolic, cultural forms that he announces his "art of the tragic" as the necessary sequel to the nihilistic present and the two thousand year reign of the "anti-natural".

In certain respects, Nietzsche's *immanentism* is not dissimilar to that prescribed by contemporary ecotheology – both are suggestive of a return of reverence for Nature and speak metaphorically of the divinity implied within Nature;[175] both are unashamedly post-theistic and post-rationalistic. Witness, for example, the forceful intimacy with which Nietzsche personifies the vicissitudes of organic Nature: "Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of phenomena I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of phenomena".[176] Such an imprecation could equally have been issued in homage to *Gaia*, the Earth Mother's latter-day incarnation; but perhaps such dramatic concurrence serves merely to belie a more far-reaching disparity. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, unlike recent attempts at a feasible ecotheology, is not a style of spirituality selected for practical expediency – that is, it does not partake of the expediency of choice, but rather selects itself. Armed with a proper physio-psychology and a critical historical sense, Nietzsche discerns the "*Great Health*" to be the next necessary step – dictated by both our knowledge and lack of knowledge – within the socio-cultural genealogy of our species. Consequently, Nietzsche's *immanentism* is not primarily a solution, for the problem itself is existential and defies any formulaic diagnostic model; instead, it is better conceived of as an adventure, or better still, as a risk, for it entails the beautification of "deadly" truth. Nietzsche, too, discovers divinity within Nature, but it is not a mild and morally-upstanding *Consolatrix*, whose promise is one of

[175] It may be ironic (but it should not be surprising) that, in our quest for full-bodied divinity, we have made appeal to a thinker who will perhaps (and regrettably so!) always be remembered as the obituarist of God. We have learned enough in this study to realise that the distinction between theism and atheism is in many cases a blurred one, and that seemingly disparate ideologies may conceal in their outward form a commonality of origin, intent and emotion. As Dostoyevsky well recognised, "The absolute atheist stands on the last rung but one before most absolute faith" (quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.452) or as Camus would have it, "... if the rebel blasphemes it is in the hope of finding a new god" (Camus, *The Rebel*, p.73).

[176] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 16.

infinite loving-kindness, and who unfurls her finely-wrought being as a blueprint for social improvement. Against such flimsy abstraction, Nietzsche posits a wild and tempestuous figure – the intractable Dionysus, or *circulus vitiosus deus* ("a vicious circle made God"),[177] whose person represents the deification of sheer power:

> Let us remove supreme goodness from the concept of God: it is unworthy of a god. Let us also remove supreme wisdom: it is the vanity of philosophers that is to be blamed for this mad notion of God as a monster of wisdom: he had to be as like them as possible. No! God the supreme power – that suffices! Everything follows from it, "the world" follows from it![178]

Power, then, is the primary constituent of the universe, and the pageantry of organic life, at once glorious and terrible, is but a distillation thereof. As one commentator has remarked,[179] Nietzsche's *theodicy* is his *cosmology* – he defuses the problem of (natural) evil by denying that it exists, and by portraying the idea of good and evil as a symptom of a diseased consciousness. Indeed, if power is the measure of the universe, then the rhetoric of moral law is meaningless and the expression of power is neither subject to artificial curtailment from without, nor in need of justification before a higher tribunal. Consequently, the only crime that can be conceived is that perpetrated against life itself; that is, the ethos and aesthetic of "*ressentiment*" and the self-regarding weakness to which it is party.

One has only to inquire finally, with an eminent Nietzschean biographer, whether Nietzsche, in heralding a reverence of a higher order, has not merely made "a devil into a god by worshipping him".[180] We may reply, with a certain irony, that were Dionysus a simple deification of lumpen Nature, he would indeed manifest himself in the true likeness of the fiend. Yet, irony aside, it can be argued that Dionysus

---

[177] Nietzsche quoted in Daniel Chapelle, *Nietzsche and Psychoanalysis* (New York : State University of New York Press, 1993), p.77.

[178] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 1037.

[179] Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, p.440.

[180] Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, p.474.

does in fact retain something of the "demonic", or, more properly, that he represents the conflation of the divine and the "*daimonic*".[181] As biographer, HA Reyburn, has remarked, "He [Nietzsche] places the conscious worshipper on that broad seat of divinity beside the blind creator and destroyer of things, to revel consciously in the unconscious power lying at the heart of reality".[182] But, although the wanton Dionysus is a god extrapolated from Nature, whose identity is fashioned from the dark materials of the world, he is yet both natural and more than natural, just as he is at once a consecration of the human and the "more-than-human". Nietzsche does not seek the despoliation of humanity by obedience to brute instinct and unbridled passion, but rather the ennoblement of the species and the "spiritualisation of passion",[183] achieved by a vital contact with the organic, instinctual ground of being. Dionysus himself expresses perfectly this paradox, for though he is the complete embodiment – and therefore consecration – of this non-moralisable relation, he is yet a "judge",[184] an arbiter of value, and he is an arbiter of worth precisely because he represents the "conscientisation" of an unconscious identity. This, then, is the Nietzschean challenge, just as it is our own: to fully assimilate the full-bodied God of Nature, without forfeiting our very humanity, to contemplate wide-eyed the wanton and dissolute character of the world without the desire to falsify it or to seek refuge in the less-than-human, but in order that we may discover in the midst of our estrangement a more complete humanity.

[181] The Greek "*daimonic*", suggestive of a compulsive energy or indwelling force, does not evoke a moral ontology and is therefore preferable to the Christianised "*demonic*" with its theological and metaphysical overtones.

[182] Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*, p.474.

[183] "*Vergeistigung*". Nietzsche, "Morality as Anti-Nature" I in *Twilight of the Idols*.

[184] "Dionysus is a *judge*! – Have I been understood?" Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 1051.

CONCLUSION

BEYOND ETHICAL HUMANISM?

I too speak of a 'return to nature', although it is not really a going back but a going up – up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness ...

Friedrich Nietzsche

Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

W B Yeats

It is generally agreed in ecophilosophical circles that our present state of ecological exigency demands the revival of a culture of responsibility towards the living universe, which, in spite of all, yet remains our living medium – a culture of responsibility which can be most appropriately codified within the ideas of covenantal bond, loyalty to the Earth, or simply respect for Nature. Indeed, this is the very substance of the ecophilosophical enterprise, that it takes it upon itself to lend formal treatment to this sense of responsibility rather than to dispute whether it ought to exist. The present work has not sought to deviate from such an assumption, for it is itself a work of ecological philosophy, and it recognises the need, and indeed the obligation, to revision our relationship with the natural world if the doleful momentum of modern culture is to be redirected.

Yet, if a sense of allegiance to the earth is mutually acknowledged as a *summum bonum*, we have finally to ask ourselves whether this allegiance ought to be reasonable, or simply one without reason; that is, whether it ought to be merely

circumstantial, or, in fact, unconditional. At some point, it must be decided whether such a principle of loyalty to the Earth is to be upheld as a value for all time – one that encourages unconditional allegiance to the living universe, and therefore, which is impervious to the vagaries of historical experience – or whether it is simply a value for our own time – one that has been rendered useful by our own particular experience of the blight of environmental devastation. In other words, it may be viewed as a tenet of enlightened self-interest which is embraced because to do so under present conditions would be favourable to ourselves and to the continued growth of human life on the planet; or it may be upheld as a philosophical and theological *fundamentum*, as a tenet of knowledge, or self-knowledge, which exists apart from the calculation of self-interest, and which impels us to a critical re-evaluation of both our humanity and our divinity.

It may be supposed that this ideological dilemma reflects in turn the diversity that prevails in contemporary ecological philosophy, so that the former perspective represents those less rigorous schools of ecological humanism which conceptualise the ecological challenge in terms of enlightened self-interest and so prioritise the human "good", while the latter may be seen to coincide with the perspective of ecological radicalism, "deep" ecology, and those schools of thought which fall under the rubric of ecocentrism, and therefore which maintain that a meaningful sense of personhood cannot be established outside of a critical consideration of the human-Nature rapport. Yet, while such an ideological schema may be applicable theoretically, this study has endeavoured to show that those positions broadly characterised as anthropocentric and ecocentric are in fact not as dissimilar as may first appear, and that frequently ideological stances which impute to themselves the label of "ecocentric", rest on patterns of thought which are doubtless anthropocentric in nature. Of course, the ecological humanist may consider such a relapse into anthropocentrism as perfectly defensible, for, at heart, the ecological humanist deems the anthropocentric mindset to be not only unavoidable, but to be the one most suited to the gritty business of alleviating our environmental ills. In truth, a pragmatically-minded humanism has much with which to recommend itself, for the ecological quandary presents itself most palpably as a logistical challenge,

and, if anything, it will be the sedate intelligence of the pragmatist that succeeds in orchestrating the preservation of beleaguered ecosystems. Yet, although it cannot be doubted that the continuing viability of the planetary biosphere relies most immediately on the expertise of the social engineer – on the implementation of more efficient resource management and the establishment of a culture of sustainability protected by law – the problem of the ecology is certainly not reducible to an issue of logistics or management strategy.

This much has been urged repeatedly throughout the course of the present study, and it is an insight that serves as the organising principle of the ecocentric paradigm, for it is a mark of ecocentrism that it addresses the ecological challenge as less a crisis of action, than as a *crisis of meaning*. Expressed differently, the despoliation of the environment is, from the perspective of the ecocentrist, an interpretable event, and therefore an ideological challenge, but, more than this, it is a problem of living philosophy, and necessarily so, for it implicates to the profoundest degree the meaning of our humanity, and that of the divinity with which it is circumscribed. The humanist who eschews the philosophical implications of the ecological crisis and who prescribes without seeking to understand, cannot fail ideologically, because he risks nothing in the venture – success is assured by a simple lack of ambition. The problem, repeatedly simplified until resembles a statistical formulation, invariably comes to imply its own solution.

But if the hard-nosed utilitarian stance succeeds only by its lack of ambition and narrowness of vision, then, conversely, much ecocentrist thought can be said to fail on account of a surfeit of ambition. We may argue with the ecocentrist that the issue of humanity's relationship with the natural world does not require to be spiritualised, for it is already a spiritual problem – its ideological dimension is implied in its own self-description, and it is only by an effort of wilful narrow-mindedness that we may reduce it to something less. Indeed, we have repeatedly demonstrated that the history of ecological mismanagement is enmeshed in, and can only be fully appreciated by reference to, the intellectual history of the modern

period, and the ferment of ideological stances and spiritual deportments it describes. Once, however, we resolve to submit the ideological underpinnings of the ecological crisis to the scrutiny of a critical intelligence, its significance becomes increasingly problematic – it moves from being a logistical challenge, which admits a simple solution, to being an ideological problem to which a solution is far less obvious, or which, at best, suggests a variety of possible solutions. Much contemporary ecological philosophy fails in its purpose precisely because it mistakenly employs the ecocentric paradigm as a solution to environmental ills. It assumes that mindful application of ecocentric and world-affirming precepts will generate ideological solutions to the environmental crisis as assuredly as an economist might afford it a logistical solution. Such ecocentric rhetoric invariably degenerates into an empty sloganism and fanciful idea-mongering once it becomes apparent that its buoyant expectations are destined to remain unfulfilled. As has been well documented, such theoretical squeamishness represents a betrayal of the very internal logic of the ecocentrist position, and has engendered a host of unrigorous responses which combine pseudo-scientific myth-making, quasi-theological misadventure, and a bland and sententious moralising (the "strong" forms of the *Gaia Hypothesis* and *Anthropic Principle*; misappropriations of *quantum* and *Deep Systems theory*; and those relational theological models which suggest a dominant strain of sentimental naturalism).

The specific infirmities of each case have already been addressed in the body of this study, and further reiteration would be unnecessary at this stage. It is necessary to note, however, that such methodological aberrations have not emerged individually and in isolation, but partake of that intellectual licentiousness spawned by the culture of postmodernism, and significantly, this work has, in the course of its development, proceeded from a critique of specific instances of unsound ecophilosophising to a more general appraisal of patterns of postmodern, post-structuralist thought with which they profess affiliation and from which they derive their epistemological authority.

Postmodern semiology attests to a growing impatience with the monolithic credal formulations and absolute truth claims - the so-called "*transcendental signifieds*" - of the older philosophical systems as inadequate representations of a universe of increasing complexity and diversity, and its rise to prominence has testified to a corresponding decline of grand metaphysical narratives in the repertoire of human self-understanding. Much, of course, has been gained in the interim: the redirection of critical focus from the content of specific truth-assertions to the context of truth-making has yielded insight into the active role of the subject in the production of meaning; the world, far from possessing a fixed and determinate character which discloses itself alone to the dispassionate mind, has instead been revealed to participate in the polysemy of the symbolic, and therefore is derivative of humanity's own capacity for literary self-production; if indeed "truth" is contextual, then the quest for univocal meaning is an impossible one, for such meaning does not exist. But much, too, has been lost in this critical engagement and it is a loss which takes on a special poignance in view of the demands and dictates of an authentically ecocentric hermeneutic. It is a presupposition of the conversational, contextual paradigm of the postmodernist that meaning is invariably generated by the creative interplay of text and context, and that the politics of truth-manufacture suggests, equally, the creative interpenetration of subject and object; but if one admits the contingency of all texts and the changeability of all contexts, as surely a postmodernist must, then such a position comes to imply a crude subjectivism in which the very idea of "truth" has been rendered a fugitive and frivolous accessory - a mere ideological ruse with which to consolidate a programme of self-legitimation. The danger exists, and has oft been realised, that what we have called the "*rule of subjectivity*" - that is, the insight that all truth assertion incorporates a necessary interpretative bias - may be misconstrued as a "*right of subjectivity*" - the assumed licence to read with full deliberation our *desiderata* into the text of the world, that we may reconceptualise it in accordance with our desires. The result is a bewildering *laissez-faire* of the intellect in which every idea, but the most pernicious, is considered to be "true" by virtue of it having been articulated, and in which every quality of feeling, but the most brutal, is considered authentic by virtue of it having been expressed. Indeed, we might

lament, as did an eminent psychoanalyst, that the modern world has come to suffer from an "overproduction of truth".[1]

But does the internal logic of the ecocentric mindset not militate against this cult of uprooted subjectivity? Does it not serve to remind us that the incestuous humanism of the postmodern age can no longer be its own measure, and that a hermeneutic which fails to take cognisance of the inviolable communion of humanity and Nature, rests finally on an incomplete and disfigured notion of human personhood? And if so, is the ecocentric project not then a summons to not only a renewed awareness of the natural universe which, though external to us, is yet implied within our being, but more significantly, a convocation to that self-knowledge which the postmodernist deems impossible and so has come to abjure? To be certain, the ecocentric sensibility presages that we are not our own to reinvent, but that we belong to a broader history and a more expansive Nature, and so urges a recovery of that critical wisdom which has been increasingly peddled off to the modern ethos of utility.

Much contemporary ecological philosophy purports to speak in the service of precisely such a critical heritage, but has been unwittingly waylaid by the infirmities of a postmodern perspectivism which, it has been argued, compromises the founding aspirations of the ecocentric sensibility. By silencing the privileged epistemic subject and similarly dismissing its privileged epistemic objects – the notions of "truth", "fact" and "being" – the culture of the postmodern threatens to debunk the entire epistemological project and to supplant it with an unmitigated relativism in which the "real" is that which is "impossible", and to speak of "truth" in any seriousness is to risk both unintelligibility and embarrassment. To the extent that the contemporary ecocentrist has annexed what is effectively the sceptical and irreverent discourse of postmodernity, he finds himself in the untenable position of one who wishes to arbitrate the truthfulness of an assertion, while having yet disowned the very idea of "truth"; of one who urges a renewed

[1] "... for the time being I gave up writing – there is already too much truth in the world – an overproduction which apparently cannot be consumed!" (Otto Rank quoted in Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York : The Free Press, 1973), p.ix).

loyalty to the natural world while remaining unconvinced of the unequivocal and compelling reality of that same world. Were it indeed true, as the prophet of the postmodern asserts, that the present age has borne witness to the end of history and the death of philosophy, then such a fateful verdict would at once prophesy the eclipse of any meaningful concept of Nature; and if, in truth, an awareness of our immersion in Nature can no longer be considered as a category of human self-understanding, then we have in effect pre-empted ideologically the physical demise of the natural world. For indeed, *the end of Nature as a living environment is prefigured by the end of Nature as a living concept*, and it is here in the final abjuration of Nature as a nexus of meaning, and as an impetus to both knowledge and self-knowledge, that true nihilism finds its source.

The recovery of ecological wisdom, however, begins with the fostering of a *critical historical sense* which does not merely admit the historicity of all perspectives, as does the socio-linguist, but which penetrates to the very historicity of the postmodern mindset itself. We have averred throughout, that the mode of inquiry proper to the ecological philosopher is that of the genealogist, but in order to succeed in this capacity, the ecocentric ambition must remain loyal to its guiding insights into the organic rootedness of the human. The conscientious wielding of the historical sense, then, presupposes a proper *physio-psychology* which suggests "that all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text",[2] and therefore which stands as a corrective to the decentred and devalued pantomime of the postmodern subject. Such a physio-psychology implies precisely that the cognitive is but a distillation of the affective, that the ideational gesture conceals a somatic posture, and therefore that human history is less the chronicle of warring ideologies, than of conflicting dispositions towards life itself. This reconstitution of history as a *psycho-genealogy* is alone able to reveal the profound kinship that exists between seemingly disparate ideological stances – a covert affinity which has been most

[2] Nietzsche quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche : Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1968), p.182.

keenly illustrated in that dialectical commingling of hope and despair in the Enlightenment sensibility.

Though it eschews the inflexibility of traditional logocentric and onto-theological categories, and therefore avoids any interpretative dogmatism, such a position succeeds with equal adroitness at evading the twin peril of relativism. In fact, it rejects altogether the classic hermeneutical dilemma of dogmatism and relativism as a figment of false dichotomising. Thus, against dogmatism, it posits the fundamental instinctual ambivalence of the human, and is content to speak of tendencies and orientations – divergent modes of "*being-in-relation*" – rather than of anchored states of being. Having supplanted the classification of being with a classification of subjectivities, a sound physio-psychology dispels, in turn, the spectre of relativism by locating such subjectivities within a broader bio-historical narrative, and by deciphering this narrative as an ongoing confrontation with the living ground of Nature which at once defies abstract intelligibility and suggests the creatureliness of the human.

Regrettably, contemporary ecocentric thought falters where it ought to succeed precisely for want of a proper physio-psychology. This deficiency manifests itself in the confused tangle of meanings surrounding the notion of organic "*interrelatedness*" – in the ecocentrist we have one who typically holds that the living universe may be conceived of as a broad systemic unity, or, more colourfully, as a web of relationality. This is not unreasonable in itself, and such relationality has come to be accepted as a general feature of both physical and intellectual life. Yet, the ecocentrist proceeds, quite absurdly, to bemoan the fact that contemporary society does not in fact behave relationally enough: that is, the ecocentrist attempts to extract moral significance from what is, for all intents and purposes, a descriptive category, and one which has been applied axiomatically. In traditional parlance, one may level the charge against such reasoning that it falls prey to the *naturalistic fallacy*. The ecophilosophical fraternity is of course sensitive to the fact that it is especially susceptible to this charge, but attempts to rebuff it by simply censuring the rift between science and ethics – that between the

natural and moral sciences, or, more simply, between knowledge and value – and by declaring that a responsible science is a humanised science that accommodates an ethical imperative in its formation of knowledge. Such an appeal, however, rings hollow and will continue to be construed as an invitation to a methodological confusion, or even as motivated by a regressive and anti-scientific spirit, until it is rooted in a hermeneutic which can give expression to the concomitance of knowledge and value. More simply, any attempted *rapprochement* of knowledge and value will be merely cosmetic, until it can affirm an act of understanding which is, at once, an act of evaluation. It is not enough that we simply abandon the possibility of a non-evaluative knowledge, as does the postmodern critic; we must likewise renounce the possibility of a responsible evaluation that is disengaged from the desire for understanding. This dual transcendence can only be facilitated by a sound ecocentric hermeneutic which acknowledges its task to be less the categorisation of objective realities than the *ordering of subjectivities*, but which further understands that such ordering is impossible if our method of analysis does not reflect the bio-historical embeddedness of identity and ideology.

It is with some irony, then, that the ecocentrist agitator proclaims the resacralisation of science, and the realignment of the "true" and the "good", when one considers that the methodology that prevails in ecocentric circles, belies a fundamental scepticism towards the possibility of such a realignment. The methodology, in question, rests on the assumption that meaning is encoded within, and inseparable from, myth and metaphor, and therefore that the definition of the "good" consists of formulating the most expedient symbolic model of "knowledge". Not only does such rhetoric attempt to defuse the truth-goodness dilemma by simply blurring the conceptual distinction on which it rests, but it appears to dignify what is in fact a crude instrumentalist logic; thus, the neat methodological formula to which it gives sanction subsumes the "true" within the "good", and the "good" within the conscious working out of human desire. Accordingly, the perceived role of the ecocentrist agitator comes to approximate that of a propagandist whose task it is to promote, or, if necessary, to fabricate those mythological and metaphorical "truths" which may prove most serviceable to

the ecocentric agenda, and to denounce those which may prove harmful to it. This curious opportunism has engendered an eclectic blend of quasi-theological and pseudo-scientific constructions, which have little in common but for the partisan mindset that has put them to use. Unable to sustain belief in the commensurability of "truth" and "goodness" because he has abdicated the epistemological project, the ecocentrist is compelled to seek ecological sanity by the wilful imposition of value *from without* – that is, through the shrewd use of linguistic artifice. Such "*salvation by contrivance*" is fated to be ineffectual because it treats the natural world, its putative subject, as an epiphenomenon of language, while the myths and metaphors, which are its currency, are little more than eviscerated abstractions uprooted from their living context. Yet, the ecocentrist can do little else but traffic in "*floating signifiers*" for he lacks a physio-psychology with which to apprehend this living context, and therefore is unpossessed of a hermeneutical language with which to decipher that psycho-genealogy which is the ecological history of our species. Instead, history is perceived as a stockpile of ideological resources, and historiography as a brazen exercise in self-propagandising by which pre-existing ideas are sifted, appropriated or discarded.

The naïveté of this approach is matched only by its fundamental inconsistency, for the ends which it seeks to pursue are contradicted by the procedural logic with which such ends are to be served. Thus, the ecocentrist endeavours to engineer mythological "truths" which may serve to reinvest the natural world with sacred value and to revive an ethos of respect and reverence towards Nature; but it would appear that before such "truths" can become efficacious as vehicles for sacred meaning, their very status as conceptual contrivances must be forgotten. The simple reality is that the individual cannot be induced for long to submit to a "truth" which he or she understands to be a "myth" or "fable" – still less one which is a consciously crafted artifice – for to call it such, is to demystify it and to divest it of its symbolic resonance. Expressed differently, one might argue that awareness of the mechanics of the myth-making process is inimical to the potency of mythopoeic self-expression. Such awareness does not give us licence to replicate this process as one would apply a formula, for "myths" which stand for

the world but which have not evolved out of a creative and critical engagement with that world, are indeed not "myths", but expedient "truths", or, more simply, untruths. The postmodern ecocentrist, however, is compelled to straddle two conflicting paradigms, or realms of discourse – the analytico-rational and the mythopoetic – because he lacks the hermeneutical language with which to articulate their concurrence. Having mastered the anatomy of myth and metaphor, and the science of the symbol, the ecocentric theorist wishes to manufacture helpful mythologies with the sober intelligence of a vivisectionist, and yet, simultaneously, to immerse himself in the poetics of his own creation. That such an attempt is a failed one, is borne out by the reality that it relies finally on a methodological deceit.

An ecocentric future, however, continues to beckon because the swollen claims and sham epistemology of the postmodernist conceal their own philosophical mythology; but, more particularly, because this mythology possesses a genealogy which is itself a recapitulation of the eco-ideological history of the early modern period. Within this history may be descried the peculiar career of modern nihilism, for it chronicles the passing of belief in a divinely-infused universe, the subsequent floundering and fall of the tradition of rational optimism and the idea of the benevolence of the world-system, and the final, but not irrevocable, loss of a vital responsiveness to the living universe altogether.

We would do well at this point to recall Nietzsche's invocation of nihilism as the spirit of "*nay-saying*", which breathes forth the insight that "every belief, every holding-for-true is necessarily false; because there is no true world at all".[3] For the nihilist, the "*will to truth*", or the obligation to (self-)knowledge, can no longer be sustained because the world is no longer intrinsically knowable, but more significantly because the resultant sense of frustrated expectation has already proven fatal to the old consoling icons of God and moral permanence, and has induced the devaluation of what were regarded as the highest values. Yet, it is the

[3] Nietzsche quoted in H A Reyburn, *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher* (London : Macmillan, 1948), p.111.

very pursuit of knowledge that finally reveals the unknowability of the world, and so, comes to suggest the vanity of its own preconceived notions. Expressed simply, the pursuit of knowledge is perilous because it reveals what Nietzsche has designated the deadly character of the world, and so, in time, illumines the disjunction that exists between the quality of the living universe and the false categories of understanding with which humanity has fictionalised both the attributes of Nature and its own status within the natural order. Nihilism emerges precisely at the point where the pursuit of knowledge has proceeded far enough to make undeniable this disjunction. Rather than submit to an encounter with the darkness of organic Nature and the noetic decentredness it may invoke, the nihilist forsakes the universe altogether and abandons the "*will to truth*" in an effort to preserve the intellectual coherence and emotional integrity of human identity. What is significant, is that the nihilistic affliction is a seditious one, for it represents a reflex against the pursuit of (self-)knowledge for fear of the perils it has realised. The nihilist, therefore, eschews an intellectual, emotional and spiritual rapport with the living universe, and supplants it with a rankling distrust, for the non-human cosmos is felt to be an insidious counterfoil to the humanising project. Yet, having forsworn an ethos of critical self-examination, the nihilistic syndrome is able to pass itself off as a higher humanism, for it purports to fortify what it perceives to be the project of becoming fully human. It requires a thoroughgoing ecocentrism to discern that a humanism purged of commitment to both Divinity, which may offer hope to the humanistic project, and to a godless Nature, which can offer no such hope, is in fact a degenerate expression of anti-humanism. Nihilism represents the renunciation of the humanistic project, because it seeks the forgetfulness of a dangerous knowledge already won, and so endeavours to recant its own intellectual and spiritual history. It is an attribute of the nihilistic mindset, then, that it invariably comes to obscure the nature of its originating encounter.

The significance of an ecocentric hermeneutic is that it succeeds in locating such an encounter within the eco-ideological narrative of the modern period, but more particularly, in that, by deciphering this profane history, it establishes itself as a

corrective to both the wilful self-forgetfulness of the nihilist and the disengaged subjectivism of the postmodernist. By urging a recovery of the "*will to truth*" in spite of all, it summons one to a renewed confrontation with the non-human universe, not for the sake of ideological expediency, still less for that of practical expediency, but in the knowledge that the very mark of our humanity dictates that we do so. The same "*will to truth*" impels us further to reconstitute history as more than a purely human narrative, by contextualising it within an encounter with the organic madness of the world – an encounter that simultaneously suggests the possibility of self-transcendence, while yet threatening a descent into the ignominy of the "*less-than-human*".

Such is the risk implicit in the ecocentric ambition which invokes, as both the living medium and living reflection of human identity, an organic universe without moral horizon. Yet, much ecocentric philosophy has balked at the full challenge of its own paradigm by both underplaying the import of its founding precepts, and by altering the very terms of the wager it contains. While such intellectual duplicity has been facilitated by an ongoing dalliance with a postmodern epistemology which is effectively a thinly-disguised scepticism, it finds its most pointed expression in the ecological philosopher's unwavering – one might say, unthinking – adherence to the notion of the goodness of Nature. We might imagine that the idea of "goodness" is suggestive of a wide range of meanings, just as it may be reflective of varied ideological contexts, especially when applied to a qualitative assessment of the natural world. This is indeed the case when one considers alone the eco-ideological history of the early modern period, for which the authority of Nature was particularly significant. Here the goodness of Nature is construed as, by turns: *onto-theological*, or reflective of the goodness of its divine creator, as in classical theism; *teleological*, in that Nature favours a predominance of "good ends", as in the tradition of rational optimism; and *expressivistic*, or contingent upon the proper perspective and vision of the human protagonist, as in the sentimental naturalism of the Romantics. Such a schema represents a general pattern in the modern philosophy of Nature, but, significantly, it depicts as much the gradual decline of the myth of the goodness of Nature as it does its changing ideological

basis. Each principle delimits the multiple fronts on which the idea of the goodness of Nature has been propagated, but equally rebuffed. Yet, traces of each are discernible in the ideological apparatus of contemporary ecocentric philosophy, so that, in his attempt to offset the modern crisis of affirmation, the unwary ecocentrist has resurrected in new guise those failed principles and discredited notions which have themselves marked the descent into crisis.

In this, the ecocentrist project summons anew the tragi-comic *pathos* of the Enlightenment, of an age which sought confusedly to rebuild the moral edifice on the turbulent expanse of Nature, and instead, found itself wavering between the equally disheartening extremes of a one-eyed optimism and a "*moral pyrrhonism*". Galvanised by the perceived need for a genuinely humanistic ethos – one which celebrated the human capacity for self-determination and the decline of religious paternalism – the eighteenth century propagandist set out to realise the final and irrevocable union of Nature and Culture in a secular moral state founded on the authority of Nature, yet could only assert their final disharmony. Thus, the century begins by affirming moral self-definition as an expression of human "naturalness"; by its close, it had begun to propagate consistently the moral prerogative as that which distinguishes humanity from a brute creation which evinces little evidence of moral design.

The interim bore witness to a revolution in moral theory, as it began to divest itself of its cosmological pretensions in an effort to parry the unsavoury implications of human creatureliness. Thus the *Natural Law* of the Christian centuries gave way to the more abstract and understated "*natural right*", an assertion of value *ex hypothesi* which depended neither on divine sanction nor on the authority of some immutable moral law operative within the natural universe; the ideal of disinterested virtue was ousted by the idea of morality as convention and consensus, as a method of social hygiene which ensures the equitable management of human desire; and, intermittently, the moral theorist retreated inwards, to some vaguely apprehended moral sense or intuition – an interiorisation of moral meaning which served to insulate it from the barbs of eighteenth century naturalistic

thinking, while yet securing for it the nominal status of being "natural". Yet, finally, refuge was sought in the simple dissociation of the natural and moral sciences. The original severance of science and ethics was, thus, less designed to liberate instrumentalist science from moral constraint, as much ecological philosophy would have us believe, than to salvage for humanity that unique moral prerogative which exempts it from the common law of the natural universe.

Significantly, this estrangement of knowledge and value was prompted by the failure of the myth of Nature's goodness. It is with some irony, then, that much contemporary ecophilosophy has sought to heal the breach by reaffirming the domain of living Nature as a template for moral understanding. By spuriously reviving the myth of Nature's goodness, the ecocentrist has sought once more to press what is fundamentally an unfit handmaiden into the service of a higher morality, and it has required a combination of intellectual fraud, glib sentimentalism and simple wishful thinking to do so. Our suggestion, however, is not that talk of the goodness of Nature should be altogether banished from the canon of ecological philosophy, but that such rhetoric must be accompanied by a fundamental ideological reorientation beyond those traditional moralistic and humanistic discourses which are unable to communicate an authentic apprehension of Nature's goodness. Much contemporary ecophilosophy wields this notion axiomatically, or promulgates it as a truism, just as one would employ a *prima facie* case in mustering an intellectual defence. But once it aspires to the status of a doctrinal formulation, the idea of the goodness of Nature becomes increasingly problematic, if not unintelligible. Nevertheless, it appears to have become an accepted condition of the portfolio of ecological philosophy that it assumes the benevolence, or benign victimhood, of that which it seeks from the outset to defend. Yet, no matter the extent to which the ecophilosopher writes to a didactic purpose, the case for the goodness of the organic universe is far from obvious, if not wholly untenable, without metaphysical support.

It appears, then, that without appeal to a higher tribunal, there can be no rational defence of the idea of Nature's goodness which is not at once a falsifying defence,

and therefore which is not necessarily accompanied by the spectre of nihilism. Nor can we find succour in some "*return-to-Nature*" mysticism, for in urging an emulation of Nature, it advocates loyalty to a dark and wayward example – one which is "wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time"[4] – while in promising some instinctual equilibrium and the tranquillity of repose, it proffers that peculiar state which is reserved for the dead alone.

If, then, a culture of ecocentrism is finally to fulfil its promise as a grand countermovement to the "*pathological transition stage*" of modern nihilism, it is summoned to emulate Zarathustra's intrepid tight-rope walker and attempt a "dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still".[5] Though a perilous undertaking, it is one that cannot be averted, for it is already implied by the very terms of the ecocentric project – in asserting the creatureliness of the human as the keynote of ecological sanity, such a project in fact urges a reacquaintance with that "*dangerous knowledge*" which first precipitated the decline into crisis. It is not enough, however, that we merely acknowledge this dangerous knowledge, for such an apprehension admits equally of ecological folly as it does of ecological wisdom. If we are to secure our passage beyond the blight of "*nay-saying*", we are required not simply to recognise the monstrous logic of an amoral universe, but to conscientise it. The measure of our success will be the extent to which we are able to extrapolate divinity from Nature, and having recognised in it the guise of the "*daemonic*", yet consider it worthy of reverence; to understand our relationship with Nature to be fundamentally a non-moralisable one, and yet not discern in this an invitation to moral depravity; and to reflect on the thraldom of the organic condition, not finally to succumb to a reluctant fatalism, but to sanctify it as one would an object of eminent desire. An authentic ecocentrism urges precisely an

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R J Hollingdale (London : Penguin Books, 1973), I 9.

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Zarathustra's Prologue" 4 in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. R J Hollingdale (London : Penguin Books, 1961).

unconditional allegiance to the Earth, because it understands that we have every reason to seek dominion over Nature, and that every rational defence of allegiance is in fact a fraudulent one. Yet, it does not issue such a proclamation as a begrudging final appeal – it does so rather in the spirit of exaltation, for in that which may seem to assail the dignity of the human, it finds its very consecration.

WORKS CITED

Augustine of Hippo. 1934. *The City of God Against the Pagans*. Translated by John Healy. London, Dent.

Barash, David P. 1986. *The Hare and the Tortoise : Culture, Biology and Human Nature*. New York, Penguin Books.

Barbour, Ian. 1990. *Religion in an Age of Science*. San Francisco, Harper & Row.

Barkow, Jerome. 1989. *Darwin, Sex and Status*. Toronto, Toronto University Press.

Becker, Ernest. 1973. *The Denial of Death*. New York, The Free Press.

Berkowitz, Peter. 1996. *Nietzsche : The Ethics of an Immoralist*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Blondel, Eric. 1991. *Nietzsche : The Body and Culture, Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy*. Translated by Séan Hand. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Boff, Leonardo. 1990. *Trinity and Society*. Translated by Paul Burns. Tunbridge Wells, Burns & Oates.

Boothby, Richard. 1991. *Death and Desire*. New York, Routledge.

Brehier, Emile. 1967. *The Eighteenth Century*. Translated by Wade Baskin. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Brown, Norman O. 1959. *Life Against Death : The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*. New York, Vintage Books.

Bunge, Mario. 1979. *A World of Systems*. Boston, Reidel.

Callicott, J Baird. 'The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology', *Environmental Ethics*, 8 (1986).

Camus, Albert. 1962. *The Rebel*. Translated by Anthony Bower. Middlesex, Peregrine Books.

Capra, Fritjof. 1988. *The Tao of Physics*. London, Flamingo Books.

Cassirer, Ernst. 1955. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Translated by Fritz Koelln and James Pettegrove. Boston, Beacon Press.

Chapelle, Daniel. 1993. *Nietzsche and Psychoanalysis*. New York, State University of New York Press.

Clark, Mary E. 1989. *Ariadne's Thread : The Search for New Modes of Thinking*. New York, St Martin's Press.

Cobb, John B and Griffin, David R. 1977. *Process Theology : An Introductory Exposition*. Belfast, Christian Journals Limited.

Coulson, C A. 1953. *Christianity in an Age of Science*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Crocker, Lester. 1959. *An Age of Crisis : Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press.

1963. *Nature and Culture : Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press.

Daly, Martin and Wilson, Margo. 1983. *Sex, Evolution and Behaviour*. Boston, Willard Grant Press.

Darwin, Charles. 1964. *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.

1981. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

Davies, Paul. 1982. *The Accidental Universe*. Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press.

Dawkins, Richard. 1976. *The Selfish Gene*. New York, Oxford University Press.

De Chardin, Teilhard. 1971. *Christianity and Evolution*. Translated by Rene Hague. New York, Harvest Books.

Deane-Drummond, C. 'God and Gaia – Myth or Reality?', *Theology*, 95 (1992).

Des Jardins, Joseph. 1993. *Environmental Ethics : An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. Belmont, California, Wadsworth.

Dickens, Peter. 1992. *Society and Nature : Towards a Green Social Theory*. Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Diderot, Denis. 1937. *Diderot : Interpreter of Nature*. Edited by Jonathan Kemp. Translated by J Stewart and J Kemp. London, Lawrence and Wishart.

Dillard, A. 1974. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York, Harper's Magazine Press.

Donoghue, Denis. 1971. *Yeats*. London, Fontana Modern Masters.

Eco, Umberto. 1990. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Egan, Timothy. 'The Environmentalist as Bogeyman', *New York Times*, January 1992.

Eliot, T S. 1963. 'The Hollow Men' in *Collected Poems 1909 - 1962*. London, Faber and Faber.

Folse, Henry. 1985. *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr : The Framework of Complementarity*. New York, North Holland.

Foucault, Michel. 1965. *Madness and Civilisation*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York, Pantheon.

1976. *Mental Illness and Psychology*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York, Harper and Row.

Fowler, Robert Booth. 1995. *The Greening of Protestant Thought*. North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.

Freud, Sigmund. 1927. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by J Riviere. London, Hogarth Press.

1938. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Translated and edited by A A Brill. New York, The Modern Library.

1956. *Delusion and Dream and Other Essays*. Edited by P Rieff. Boston, Beacon Press.

1959. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by James Strachey. New York, Bantam Books.

1961. *The Future of an Illusion*. Translated by James Strachey. New York, W W Norton.

1962. *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. New York, W W Norton.

Gare, Arran E. 1995. *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*. London, Routledge.

Gay, Peter. 1964. *The Party of Humanity : Studies in the French Enlightenment*. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

1967. *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Rise of Modern Paganism*. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

1970. *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation – The Science of Freedom*. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Gibbon, Edward. 1972. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Edited by J B Bury. London, Methuen.

Griffen, David R (ed.). 1990. *Sacred Interconnections*. Albany, State University of New York Press.

Gunton, Colin. 1993. *The One, the Three, and the Many*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Hayward, Tim. 1995. *Ecological Thought : An Introduction*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Horkheimer, M and Adorno, T. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. London, Verso.

Hume, David. 1948. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. Edited by H D Aiken. New York, Haffner.

Huxley, Thomas H. 1989. *Evolution and Ethics*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

James, William. 1981. *Pragmatism*. Indianapolis, Hackett.

Kaufmann, Walter. 1968. *Nietzsche : Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Kealy, Daniel A. 1990. *Revisioning Environmental Ethics*. Albany, State University of New York Press.

Kitahara, Michio. 1991. *The Tragedy of Evolution*. New York, Praeger Publishers.

Kumar, Krishan. 1987. *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

La Mettrie. 1988. *Man a Machine*. Translated by Gertrude Bussey. La Salle, Illinois, Open Court.

Laing, R D. 1977. *The Divided Self : An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Middlesex, Penguin Books.

Lampert, Laurence. 1993. *Nietzsche and Modern Times*. Yale, Yale University Press.

Leiss, William. 1994. *The Domination of Nature*. Boston, Beacon Press.

Leopold, Aldo. 1949. *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lightman, Alan and Brawer, Roberta. 1990. *Origins : The Lives and Worlds of Modern Cosmologists*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Lindbeck, George A. 1984. *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia, Westminster Press.

Lorenzo, Konrad. 1967. *On Aggression*. Translated by Marjorie Latzke. London, Methuen.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. 1936. *The Great Chain of Being : A Study in the History of an Idea*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.

Lovelock, James. 1979. *Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth*. New York, Oxford University Press.

1988. *The Ages of Gaia*. New York, W W Norton.

Mansfield, Victor. 'The Opposites in Quantum Physics and Jungian Psychology', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, February 1990.

Manuel, F E and Manuel, F P. 1979. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

McFague, Sally. 1987. *Models of God : Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

McManners, John. 1981. *Death and the Enlightenment*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Merchant, Carolyn. 1990. *The Death of Nature*. San Francisco, Harper.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, Northwest University Press.

Mill, John Stuart. 1978. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Edited by John M Robson. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

Morris, Desmond. 1969. *The Human Zoo*. London, Triad Grafton Books.

Naess, Arne. 1989. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Translated by David Rothenburg. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1961. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Translated by R J Hollingdale. London, Penguin Books.

1966. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York, Vintage Books.

1967. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale. New York, Vintage Books.

1968. *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R J Hollingdale. London, Penguin Books.

1969. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale, and *Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York, Vintage Books.

1973. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by R J Hollingdale. London, Penguin Books.

1974. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York, Vintage Books.

1983. *Untimely Meditations*. Translated by R J Hollingdale. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

1986. *Human, All too Human*. Translated by R J Hollingdale. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Nitecki, M H and Nitecki, D V (eds.). 1993. *Evolutionary Ethics*. New York, State University Press.

Oelschlaeger, Max. 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

1994. *Caring for Creation : An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*. Yale, Yale University Press.

Olson, R (ed.). 1971. *Science as Metaphor*. California, Wadsworth Publishing.

Pascal, Blaise. 1967. *The Provincial Letters*. Translated by A J Krailsheimer. Middlesex, Penguin Books.

Pattison, George. 1996. *Agnosis : Theology in the Void*. New York, St Martin's Press.

Peat, F David. 1991. *The Philosopher's Stone*. New York, Bantam Books.

Pepper, David. 1993. *Eco-Socialism : From Deep Ecology to Social Justice*. London, Routledge.

Picht, Georg. 1988. *Nietzsche*. Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta.

Pollard, Sidney. 1968. *The Idea of Progress*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

Pope, Alexander. 1969. *Essay on Man*. Edited by Frank Brady. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Educational.

Popper, Karl and Eccles, J C. 1977. *The Self and its Brain*. Berlin, Springer.

Postgate, John. 'Gaia Gets too Big for Her Boots', *New Scientist*, April 7, 1988.

Rachels, James. 1991. *Created from Animals : The Moral Implications of Darwinism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Reisman, George. 1990. *The Toxicity of Environmentalism*. California, Laguna Hills.

Reyburn, H A. 1948. *Nietzsche : The Story of a Human Philosopher*. London, Macmillan.

Richters, Peyton E (ed). 1971. *Utopias : Social Ideals and Communal Experiments*. Boston, Holbrook Press.

Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Roszak, Theodore. 1993. *The Voice of the Earth*. London, Transworld Publishers.

Ruse, Michael. 1986. *Taking Darwin Seriously*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Russell, Bertrand. 1924. *Icarus, or the Future of Science*. London, Kegan Paul.

Russell, Colin A. 1994. *The Earth, Humanity and God*. London, UCL Press.

Sayre, Kenneth. 'An Alternative View of Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, 13, 1991.

Schacht, Richard. 1983. *Nietzsche*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Seielstad, George. 1989. *At the Heart of the Web : The Inevitable Genesis of Intelligent Life*. Boston, Harcourt.

Seymour, John. 1989. *The Ultimate Heresy*. Hartland, Green Books.

Sheldrake, Rupert. 1994. *The Rebirth of Nature : The Greening of Science and God*. London, Century.

Sheridan, Alan. 1980. *Michel Foucault : The Will to Truth*. London, Tavistock Publications.

Skolimowski, Henryk. 1992. *Living Philosophy : Ecophilosophy as a Tree of Life*. London, Arkana.

Storr, Anthony. 1992. *Human Aggression*. London, Penguin Books.

Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Torrance, John (ed.). 1992. *The Concept of Nature*. New York, Clarendon Press.

Van den Burghe, Pierre L. 1987. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. New York, Praeger.

Voltaire, Francois Marie. 1948. *Candide and Other Tales*. Translated by Smollet. Revised by James Thornton. London, J M Dent & Sons.

1952. *Voltaire's Notebooks*. Edited by Theodore Besterman. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Warnock, Mary. 1970. *Existentialism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Weber, Renee. 1986. *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages : The Search for Unity*. London, Arkana.

White Jr, Lynn. 'The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155, 1967.

Wilde, Oscar. 1948. *The Works of Oscar Wilde*. Edited by G F Maine. London, Collins.

Willey, Basil. 1972. *The Eighteenth Century Background*. Middlesex, Pelican Books.

Wilson, Edward O. 1978. *On Human Nature*. Harvard, Harvard University Press.

Wright, Nancy G and Kill, Donald. 1993. *Ecological Healing : A Christian Vision*. New York, Orbis Books.

Wright, Robert. 1994. *The Moral Animal*. New York, Vintage Books.