

PART ONE: CREATION

1. Three Classical Creation Stories

Creation stories not only reflect assumptions about the nature of the world
they are also blueprints for society
they reflect assumptions about how the divine and mortal, mental and physical, humans and other
humans, male and female, humans, plants, animals, land, waters, and stars are related
they reflect the worldview of the culture and mandate that worldview to its ongoing heirs

three creation stories have shaped the Christian world
its normative creation story is the first chapters of *Genesis*
Christianity incorporated from the Hebrew Bible
behind this story lies a more ancient Babylonian story, the *Enuma Elish*
it was read yearly to assure renewal of the cosmos
was probably composed in early part of 2nd millennium B.C.E.
Hebrew creation stories composed in sixth or fifth century B.C.E.
Third creation story, Plato's *Timaeus* composed in early 4th century B.C.E.
Reflects Plato's cosmology and the cosmology that would be regarded as "scientific" for the rest
of classical antiquity
Christians took the Hebrew story as theologically normative, but for 1,500 years they read it with
the cosmology of the *Timaeus* in the background

The Babylonian Creation Story

Babylonian story itself rooted in earlier Sumerian stories
these Sumerian stories begin with a primal Mother who is origin of both cosmos and gods
story is thus cosmogonic and theogonic

the Babylonian story also assumes intergenerational struggle between older and younger deities
struggle represents both the political conquests of younger states over older ones
and also the struggle to control land and water against "chaotic" social and natural forces

the *Enuma Elish* was reworked from earlier stories to celebrate the ascendancy of the city of
Babylonia
and its deity, Marduk, over other cities and their deities
in this reworking the ancient Mother goddess, Tiamat, and her subordinates are made to stand for
the forces of chaos
Marduk kills Tiamat in hand to hand combat
splits her body in half, raising one half upward as the sky
fashions the stars and planetary abodes in the underside of her body
Marduk then kills Tiamat's consort Kingu, fashioning humans out of Kingu's blood mixed with
clay

what are the social messages of this story?

- 1) the lords of the newly ascendant city-state did not assume they preexisted the world they knew they arose as a recent generation out of earlier stages of development
- 2) this earliest world is seen as matriachal
the female is dominant with male subordinates
this world is replaced by one of dominant male powers, with subordinate female consorts
- 3) the earliest model of generation is parthenogenetic gestation
Apsu, the primordial begetter of all things, commingles with Tiamat, who bears all things but with Marduk, the new model of power becomes military and architectonic
Marduk extinguishes the life from Tiamat's body, fashioning the cosmos from "dead" stuff
transition from *reproductive to artisan* metaphor
indicates deeper confidence in the appropriation of "matter"
makes the cosmos the private possession of its "creators"
- 4) the story mandates basic class hierarchy of rulers and slaves

The Hebrew Creation Story

continuities and differences from Babylonian story
in the Hebrew story the Creator coexists with the primal stuff of the cosmos
strife between Creator and primal Mother is eliminated
the Mother has already been reduced to formless but malleable "stuff"

the creation story is modeled on the work week they wished to enshrine in sacred law
humans are distinguished from animals by being made "in the image of God"
they are given rulership over all the animals of the earth
what are the messages of this story?

- 1) God is modeled after the intellectual power of the priestly class, who call all things into being through ritual naming
- 2) division between rulers and workers, between leisure and labor, is eliminated
god both works and rests, making this the pattern for humans, even for animals
humans, although servants of God, possess the servanthood of royalty rather than as slaves
- 3) was there no male domination or class domination in the original work of God?
On the surface the story mandates no class hierarchy
humans are thought of as a unified corporate entity made in God's image
the text leaves open the equality of male and female "in the image of God"
but the maleness of pronouns for God and for Adam suggest some hierarchy
thus a second story, *Genesis 2*, is appended which specifically mandates patriarchal relationship of husband and wife
- 4) environmentalists have criticized the idea of "dominion" Adam is given over the earth
no doubt the account is anthropocentric
the human is created last and given sovereignty over creation
yet an exploitative or destructive rule over earth is not intended

their rule is one of royal steward, not an owner who can do with it what he wills
humans are thus meant to take good care of earth, not to exploit or destroy it
human rights to the lives of other beings is restricted
the word for human, *Adam*, assumes a deep kinship of humans and earth
other Hebrew texts show a keen sense that human control over earth is limited

The Greek Creation Story

Plato starts by defining the primal dualism that underlies reality
the invisible, eternal realm of thought and the visible realm of corporeality
the invisible realm is thought of as primal and original

in between the two realms is the Creator or Demiurgos, the cosmic artisan
the Demiurgos creates by “making”
metaphor of cosmogenesis is taken from the work of the artisan, who shapes things from dead stuff,
not from the reproductive process of begetting and gestating
having been made rather than begotten demotes the cosmos to status of possessed object

Demiurgos first shapes space into primal elements
shapes these into spheric body of the cosmos
cosmos is geocentric and hierarchic
earth is at center and made of water and earth
the supralunary world of planets and stars is made of more “spiritual” element of fire
appropriate beings are placed in each realm

human souls are shaped from same elements as the world soul, but in more diluted form
this soul mixture is placed in the stars and given a celestial education into the eternal nature of reality
creating the bodies of these beings is too low a task for the Demiurgos and is assigned to planetary gods
once the souls have received their celestial education they are incarnated into male bodies
their task is to control the chaotic sensations that arise from the body
if they succeed they will shed their bodies, returning to their celestial home
if they fail they will be reincarnated in a second birth into the body of a woman
if they fail again they will be reincarnated into “brutes”
round of reincarnation will continue until the soul masters the body

what are the messages?

1) reality is divided into mind and body

the soul, mind, or consciousness is alien to earth and body

its true home is the world of the stars

2) hierarchy of mind over body is duplicated in the hierarchy of male over female, human over animals, also duplicated in class hierarchy of rulers over workers (in the *Republic*)

these three creation stories were shaped in patriarchal slave-holding world of early urban civilization

slavery is a central institution mandated by Babylonian story

Hebrew priests also inhabit this patriarchal slave-holding world

but they seek to modify it, rejecting the work-leisure line between divine and human

master/slave relation is inappropriate at least between males of God's chosen people

this equality is not extended to the male/female relation

in Plato's story, male domination, class hierarchy, inferiorization of animals are all part of accepted social order, manifesting primal division of reality into consciousness over body

Plato adds to this mandate for social domination an additional cultural attitude of alienation from the body and earth

The Christian Cosmological Synthesis

Western Christianity accepted Genesis 1 account but read it through the eyes of Greek science reflected in the *Timaeus*

thus the Christian view contains ideas not present in the Hebraic account

1) the understanding of God: eternally preexists the visible cosmos, but also creates the cosmos "out of nothing." This dogma of *creatio ex nihilo* is not part of Genesis nor the Platonic view

both of these assume some "stuff" there at the beginning

Christian theology objected to the eternal coexistence of "matter" since it suggests a source of being parallel to God

this doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* leaves Christianity with unresolved ambiguity about the ontological status of "matter"

basic problem of the God-cosmos division

Christianity developed notion of the Trinity to span the divide between divine transcendence "outside of creation" and immanence or divine presence "in" creation

Christian view seems to want to span two concepts of divine-cosmos relation

Christian cosmology inherits problematics from Platonic tradition:

1) the geocentric and hierarchal world picture

meshing of Greek world picture with Christian eschatology would bring Christian theology into conflict with science

2) the relationship between soul and body

Platonism holds body and soul to be separate, the soul preexisting incarnation in the body

Hebrew thought takes the soul as the life principle of the body

Christianity attempts various syntheses of these two views

3) Christianity rejected reincarnation to explain social hierarchy

thus there arises an unexplained division between equality of souls in relation to God

and yet inequality of bodies and status in society

God seems to will different principles in creation and redemption

4) notion of soul as created but capable of immortal, transcendent life apart from the body

reaffirmed in Christianity as sharp division between humans and other forms of life

the human-animal split is reinforced by the soul-body split

destiny of the human soul not an integral part of this bodily world

Thus despite the official continuation in Christianity of certain Hebraic concepts of the resurrected body and redeemed earth, operative Christian eschatology for the most part is one of an immortal soul that escapes from and is not limited by the mortal fate of earth's creatures. (29-30)

5) Christianity nevertheless harbors a view of the original earth as paradisaical

this posed a dilemma as to how evil came about

Christian solution has been to see all evil as a result of human sin

humans are rescued from this state of sin and death through Christ:

Thus the Christian world picture remains ambiguous, unable to close the loop between its vision of original goodness as a paradisaical state without rapaciousness or death, its sharp division between animals and plants, who lack "by nature" the capacity for immortality, and humans, who transcend this mortal fate. This imbues Christianity with two oddly conflicting stances toward the rest of life. (30)

1) humans are considered guilty for the inadequacies of the rest of nature

2) humans bear no responsibility for the rest of creation: animal and plant life can be exploited at will by humans as our possessions

the major theme of this book is to trace the extent to which the Christian world picture, with its inherent ambiguities, have contributed to ecological irresponsibility

Ruether's underlying assumptions:

1) Nature (in the sense of the sum of cosmic life) was not originally paradisaical and is not capable of completely fulfilling human hopes

2) human beings are the evolutionary growing edge of this imperfectly realized impulse to consciousness and kindness

3) an ecological ethics must be based on an acceptance of dilemma of human condition

a) our organic mortality, the limitations we share with other living creatures

b) our potential for growing in consciousness and in loving kindness

4) we pass on our ideals by shaping the future, but this reshaping is governed by the finite limits of the interdependence of all life in the living system that is Gaia

2. Does Science Have a New Creation Story?

The Breakdown of the Christian Creation Story

16th and 17th century see the breakdown of the unifying worldview for Western Christian/post Christian people

new physical and biological sciences pioneered a scientific account of the nature of external reality at variance with the biblical-Classical view Christianity inherited from antiquity

several stages of this struggle:

- 1) Copernicus and the heliocentric view: why did the Church leaders so strongly resist?
 - A) shifted emphasis away from earth-centered world, destroying a moral and spiritual system built on geocentric view
 - B) also destroyed the notion of different types of matter on which Christian eschatology depended
 - 2) Darwinian science of evolution
 - A) inclusion of humans into evolutionary history: humans were shown to be part of the animal world
 - B) evolution also suggested a much longer span of earth history than the biblical account
- fight over evolution has had two stages:
- 1) attempt to deny and repress teaching of evolution (Scopes trial in 1925)
 - 2) attempt to teach creation account as “scientific” (1970's and 80's)

in last 100 years the dual between conservative Christian view and physical and biological sciences has lessened by tacit agreement of each to demarcate separate spheres of authority followed dualist lines presumed by mechanistic science (She does not mention Descartes) dichotomy between *facts* which are empirically observed and measured by science and *values* which are subjective matters of inward experience thus religion and science coexist by tacitly agreeing not to communicate with each other

however from 1960's onward this insulation of religion and science began to breakdown

- 1) the assumption of science that religion was obsolete superstition began to breakdown nuclear bomb shattered naive faith in science growing evidence of irreparable damage to environment rendered by technology
 - 2) breakdown of the assumption that science is “value-free”
 - 3) scientific reductionism proved incapable of satisfying the longing of human spirit for aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual dimension of reality
 - 4) changing paradigm of science itself, both on macro-level of astronomy and micro-level of subatomic physics
- the new physics began to break down the distinction of spheres on which the separation of science and religion was based
- no longer possible to distinguish so clearly between matter and energy, fact and value

This means one also cannot abstract fact from value. What is constituted as the web of relationship will also be shaped by how we relate to it. The knower must take responsibility for shaping the reality that is known in ways that can be benign or destructive.

Deciding what is benign or destructive is itself a matter of definition. Ultimately all reality continues to be interrelated, yet the effects of one kind of relationship rather than another can appear on the biotic level as flourishing life or as deadly poisons. Thus the knower cannot avoid ethical responsibility, not only in terms of how the knowledge may be subsequently used, but also in terms of what kind of relationship is implied by the stance of knowing itself. (39)

how might the story of creation that has emerged from earth history function as a creation “myth” in the classic sense of a mandate for ethical relationships?

The Scientific Story of Cosmogony

Big Bang theory (Cosmic Egg): 18 billion years ago
will the universe continue to expand or will it collapse back on itself?
Closed system of the universe vs Open system

in present world picture the earth seems on the one hand more unpretentious and insignificant in the scheme of things than when it was first demoted from the center of the universe yet on the other hand, earth is still the only planet known where life exists
“In the form of humans, earth is where the whole cosmic process becomes conscious of itself” (43).

Reviews earth history and the origins of life
striking feature is the stepped up tempo of the history of biogenesis
each stage of development leads more rapidly to the next
entire evolution of land plants and animals has taken place in the last one-ninth of earth’s history
humans occupy less than one-tenth of 1 percent of earth’s history
development of earliest agricultural civilization occupies only 2 percent of human history
puts into light the anthropocentric claims to have been given “dominion” over the earth

accelerating human population:
12,000 years ago: 5 million
by 1650 C.E: 500 million
by 1750: 1 billion
by 1930: 2 billion
by 1975: 4 billion
by 2000: 6 billion (est.)

Development of humans seems to be rapidly outrunning their sustainable place in biosphere
face possibility of extinction

The challenge that humans face in the last decade of the twentieth century is whether they will be able to visualize and organize their own reproduction, production, and consumption in such a way as to stabilize their relationship to the rest of the ecosphere and so avert massive social and planetary ecocide. (47)

Nature's Laws and Human Ethics

ecology demonstrates the laws by which nature generated and sustains life

suggests guidelines for how humans must learn to live as sustaining rather than destructive members of the biotic community

suggests some restoration of the classical role of science as normative or ethically prescriptive

1) one of most basic lessons for ethics and spirituality is the interrelation of all things

suggests our kinship not only with all living things but even the distant stars

elements that make up our bodies were once stardust

were also once part of bacteria that floated in primal seas

2) coevolution of plants, air, water, soil, animals

our utter dependency on green plants

beginning of earth history no paradise

sustainable planet made possible by billions of years of evolution of green plants

basic codependency of carbon cycle

also nitrogen cycle, evolution of soils

water is also made usable to plants through evaporation by sun

took billions of years to produce fresh water

role of forests in cycle of evaporation and precipitation

stripping of forests lead to global warming

3) interdependency in food chain, cycle of production, consumption, decomposition

each stage of food chain must be one-tenth the size of the one on which it depends

excessive meat-eating threatens this chain

elite "beefeater" diet of British aristocracy became the American ideal

Western elite eating high off the food chain

also humans threaten the system of decomposition through failure to imitate nature in system of recycling

may be tied to cultural avoidance of death

4) sustainable systems also demand diversity

the more diversified the plant and animal life, the more various and sustainable the interdependency

large scale farming upsets this crucial balance based on diversity

5) debate over whether competition or cooperation is the main "natural" impulse

evolutionary slogan of "survival of the fittest" suggests that the lion slaying the deer is the model for those who should prevail in human society as well

this is distorted view of nature: greatly exaggerates the place of meat-eating in nature

much more cooperation rather than competition in nature

Gaia hypothesis: earth a living organism of complex interdependencies

Main thesis:

If the new cosmic stories of astral and atomic physics and ecology are to provide a new and shared planetary "myth" for ethics and spirituality, as well as scientific understanding, it is necessary to heal the splits between "fact" and "value," theory and practice, private and social, that have been created in Western thought. (57)

PART TWO: DESTRUCTION

3. Religious Narratives of World Destruction

role of apocalyptic narratives

prototype lies in ancient experience of real destruction

ancient Flood stories go back to Sumerian times

is prototype of Hebrew flood story

also stories of drought go back to Sumerian times

Hebrew world took over these prototypes but revised them in accordance with their view of God:
as one

as transcendent to the cycles of nature and fortunes of history

stories are moralized

world destruction becomes punishment by God, retribution for failure to obey

Noah story: after the flood God made a covenant not to destroy the earth by flood

yet life on earth is not as good as before

in the new covenant God gives man everything as food, not just green plants as in the first covenant

only limitation is that humans should not eat warm blood of animals

images of divine retribution still come through drought, war, famine

still these acts of divine retribution are not terminal

in the Hebraic accounts once Israel has repented their will be a renovated earth

God will bring an end to the reign of evil and peace and good times will prevail on earth

Jewish apocalyptic writings probably influenced by Zoroastrian thought

cosmic conflict of good and evil

final era of world history will bring a progressive triumph of good over evil

humanity will reach a state of near perfection

the world itself becomes immortal, purged of evil and mortality

in Hebrew versions the story becomes more militaristic and punitive, less universal

separation of righteous from wicked is permanent

there is glee rather than compassion among the righteous at the sight of the suffering inflicted upon
the sinners

sinners are destroyed forever

This is taken up by Christian eschatology (except for Origen) where hell remains a permanent place
of punishment

Jewish apocalyptic writings : the book of Daniel

written during period of captivity

there is no general resurrection

in early apocalypses resurrection function as a way to settle accounts of past unrequited justice
and unrewarded righteousness, not to overcome mortality

before the Greek period, Hebrew religion saw mortality as natural rather than a problem to be
overcome

its vision of blessedness focused on a healthy life, not an escape from mortality altogether
in Christian apocalypses there is a new focus on immortality

Christian Apocalyptic

book of Revelation

final battle between Good and Evil, not only evil, but also mortality will be banished

question of the inclusion of book of Revelation within the cannon
apocalyptic thought rooted in readings of Daniel and Revelation
became characteristic of marginalized Christianity

Montanism (?) 2nd century

Donatism 4th century

new era of intense apocalyptic speculation arose in late medieval period

period of English Civil War: Mary Cary

inherited by American popular protestantism

Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witness

Millerites in 1840's

Ellen White, prophetess of Adventists

cold war and nuclear threat proved fertile ground for new apocalyptic speculations

Hal Lindsey *Late Great Planet Earth* and *The 1980s, Countdown to Armageddon*

Concluding Reflections

easy for religious liberals and secularists to dismiss these apocalyptic visions as fanaticisms
but this would misunderstand the perennial attraction of these visions as ways of coping with social
chaos

end of 20th century with extremes of poverty and wealth, stockpiles of weapons, threats of disaster
and nuclear war, ecological collapse, is ripe for such magical shortcuts

Reagan administration appeared prone to such apocalyptic thinking

apocalyptic is the offspring of prophetic thought

carried messages of protest against dominant system

the belief that prophecy will be restored in the last days has been continuing mandate in radical
Christian movements for both class and gender role rebellion

but this empowerment to prophetic protest has been fatally corrupted by apocalyptic thought
because of its dualistic mode of thought: absolute good against absolute evil

This does not mean that there is no such thing as good and evil, but this distinction should
be defined in a quite different way. Good and evil need to be seen as different kinds of
relationships, rather than different kinds of "beings." (82)

fundamentalists however reify good and evil

treat good and evil as though these were opposite substances, embodied in opposite cosmic principles, God and Satan
they imagine some combination of right belief and behavior to align oneself absolutely on the one side

Moreover, this reified dualism of good and evil is identified with sectarian and tribal-national hostilities

identification of God's chosen people with a particular nation

England, then America has been identified as that elect nation

a select people will be vindicated, their adversaries punished and exterminated

extermination of evil is tribalized,

impulse to apocalyptic thus becomes genocidal

the God of apocalyptic becomes a tribal-warrior God

a God whose extermination of evil is pictured in terms of military force on behalf of his people

massacres of enemies are fantasized as instruments of righteousness

this projection of absolutized evil shuts off the wellspring of compassion

basic characteristic of war mentality

like Platonic eschatology, apocalypticism is based on the fantasy of escape from mortality

the very nature of the life of the biosphere, rooted in mortality and renewal through disintegration, is denied

life and death are absolutized as opposites

one imagines that through destruction not only the "enemy" humans

but the earth itself, and death, can be finally eliminated

while life can be immortalized

foundation for this fantasy is a certain model of God

a God unrelated to earth, body, or mortality

A God who is absolute good against absolute evil

allows apocalypticists to imagine themselves to be safe from world destruction

indeed world destruction is the means by which they can escape

apocalypticists are cheered rather than concerned about the evidence of destruction

may even oppose efforts to ameliorate poverty, prevent war, clean up ecological damage

some militant environmentalists are not immune to their own form of apocalypticism

if we are to prevent recourse to these shortcuts to salvation we must acknowledge the deep fears on which they are based

need to shape an alternate spirituality and ethic that channels these fears more realistically and more lovingly

particularly important in last decade of 20th century

4. New Narratives of World Destruction

narratives of world destruction arising from ecologists in the last decades of 20th century carry no assurances of subsequent renewal as in Hebraic account

The ecological message is that humans have usurped such power over the foundational life forces of the planet itself, and this power has been used so unwisely, that we are facing at the end of the 20th century the real possibility of irreparable destruction of a biosphere that took 4.5 billion years to develop. (86)

we have no home outside earth

so our destruction of this home is the permanent destruction of ourselves

we must learn how to be cocreators of the earth before this destruction becomes terminal

cannot be done by an adversarial or dominating relation toward nature

nature, even in its destruction, is following its basic laws of energy

only by understanding how the web of life works can we also learn to sustain it rather than destroy

not simply a task of intellectual understanding, but of *metanoia* in the fullest sense of the word:

of conversion of our spirit and culture, of our technology and social relations

we must act quickly, we do not have thousands of years

exponential speed-up of these patterns of destruction

by 2030 C.E. it may be too late

we have not been prepared by human psychophysiology and culture to anticipate disasters on a global scale, disasters that reach into the foundations of the biosphere

many aspects of Western culture mitigate against such foresight and effective change:

our adversarial political divisions; our class, gender, and race antagonisms, which suggest to the powerful that they can ride out the crisis, transferring the costs to a growing number of victims; and finally, the disinformation and fragmentation of our communication systems, long misshaped to distract people from reality, rather than to inform them intelligently. (87)

this chapter will trace several major trajectories of the accumulating crisis and point to the likely results in the next forty years

the crisis involves the multiplication of all these factors

and their interconnections with each other

Population and Poverty

exponential growth of population

along with its interconnection with level of human consumption

expressed in formula: population X consumption X technology = environmental impact

this means that the same size population that primarily uses human body for labor and transportation, that has a subsistence economy, will make much less of an environmental impact than the same number of people who consume a great variety of foods and goods transported over long distances

if we imagine the first group as having an environmental impact of one

the second group as consuming ten times more than the first
employing technology that uses ten times more energy
then the environmental impact of the second group is one hundred times the first
this is in fact the difference between the environmental impact of the average American versus that
of the poor of the third world
affluent Americans have several hundred times the impact of a poor third-world person

yet this does not allow us to regard the impact of poor populations as unproblematic
poor populations must scavenge the scraps of work and waste from the tables of the wealthy
farming and grazing of such people will erode thin soils
wood gathering will strip remaining rain forests
water supply is polluted
living in misery and degradation
high consumption of wealthy few and low consumption of the many are not separate, but
interdependent realities

most rapid expansion of population has taken place in the 20th century
in 2nd half of the century most of this growth is in the third world
improved life expectancy has not been matched by improved birth control

Feeding the World's Human Population

60's and 70's optimism about ability of improved technology in food production has now turned to
pessimism about the failure of the Green Revolution
intensive use of petroleum based fertilizers burn out soil
other costs of high-energy large-scale farming:
mechanized farm equipment adds to pollution
fertilizers build up toxicity of soils and water
air pollution in form of acid rain
all take their toll in reduced yield
soil erosion
loss of cropland to spread of concrete
wood gathering, overgrazing by cattle, lead to desertification
farmland also threatened by global climate changes
all point to finite limits of the ability of world agriculture to increase harvests to meet expanding
population growth
yet most of world famine in 80's caused by inefficient food use and distribution
much grain used to feed cattle to be slaughtered for meat
elite British and American pattern of meat eating contributes to food crisis
10% of food produced is lost to those who most need it
the longer the transportation chain the more food is lost

Energy, Climate, and Pollution

energy crisis is twofold:
rapid depletion of fossil fuels
filling of atmosphere with gaseous byproducts

petroleum age is less than one hundred years old
in hundred years have used up the oil it took billions of years of accumulated solar energy to create
enough coal to last several hundred years
but oil will run out by the middle of next century

gases in atmosphere from burning fossil fuels
chlorofluorocarbons delete ozone layer
leads to greenhouse effect and more global warming
drastic climate change, melting of polar ice-caps, flooding of coastal areas
leads to plague, famine, violence and mass death of humans and animals

deforestation:
deforestation of rain forests
acid rain in forests of Europe

toxic wastes in soil, water, air cycle through food chain
chemicals such as DDT are not broken down

nuclear wastes

Extinction

extinction of biotic diversity
when species are extinguished, not just one species, but whole communities of interdependent
plants, animals, and insects are wiped out
result in a degraded whole

loss of aesthetic imagination that can sustain human biophilia
moral urge to value life itself

Militarism and War

PART THREE: DOMINATION AND DECEIT

5. Classical Narratives of Sin and Evil

Are our ways of naming evil usable in helping us to understand the destructive capacity of humans?
Fundamental to human experience is that things are not as they should be
categories of absolute good and evil are absolutized extrapolations from more concrete experiences

the danger of translating into absolutes is that we imagine these absolutes to exist
problem is compounded when the evil side of the polarity is identified with other people and things
with other groups of people over against our group
with women over against men
with bodies and the physical world over against our minds
this false naming of evil as physical and social otherness creates ideologies that justify the doing
of evil to others as a means of overcoming evil
three traditions of naming evil that have shaped Western cultural tradition

Hebrew Views of Evil

Jewish thought, in Hebrew scripture and Talmud
did not accept the concept of a fall that rendered humans incapable of doing good
and therefore needing a savior to render them acceptable to God
humans retain their freedom to choose good or evil
early rabbinic ethics speaks of “two impulses,” the impulse to good and the impulse to evil
both part of human nature

some apocalyptic thinkers in the Jewish tradition imagine a cosmic fall
in which human history had fallen under the sway of evil
but humans still thought of as capable of choosing good
God would eventually intervene to put an end to evil and vindicate the righteous

what exactly is being named “evil” here?
Here we find a problematic mixture of ethical and ethnocentric-cultic judgments
God is all holy and the places where God can be approached must be pure and holy
defilement renders a person unacceptable to approach holy places

concept of evil as the unholy is identified with the gentile world
intrusion of artifacts from alien cults defiles the holy
pollution is also closely associated with sexuality and reproduction
especially female blood of menstruation and birth
male bodily wastes, especially semen spilled in “wet dreams”
and bodies of the dead are also defiling
deep anxiety about sexuality

concept of purity and pollution creates a pattern of carefully delineated separations
the sabbath from ordinary days
sanctuary of the temple from outer courts
Jew from gentile, male from female

definite hierarchy of more and less pure
in order for men to approach God, they had to separate from women and abstain from sex
segregation in the synagogue

as Israel is the elect nation there is a mandate to be a holy people
through this greater proximity to God's holiness they are situated in a central relation to God's
work of creation and redemption
God created the world on their behalf
this mandate to holiness provides Israel to a land claim
the land of Canaan designated by God as their promised land
they have a superior right to the land because they alone can make it holy
the polluted people who live there deserve to be driven out

book of Joshua manifests the most extreme version of this ethnocentric-cultic concept of Israel's
relation to God
empowers Israelites to enter a land whose soil it had not tilled
seize cities it had not built
and to put to the sword all inhabitants, sparing neither women nor children
modern archeology has thrown into doubt historical accuracy of the account of Joshua
the problem with the book is not its historical accuracy but its mandate for later people
in 17th century English Puritans read their struggle with Native Americans in the mirror of Joshua
claimed a divine right to exterminate indigenous peoples and take their land
in 19th century Dutch Puritans read a similar mandate to slaughter Zulus
in 20th century Jewish Zionists and Palestinians

other Hebrew texts show a different ethical sensitivity to just human relations
unjust treatment of the neighbor, particularly those who are poor, becomes the sin
Book of Amos written in mid-eighth century
a sharp change from amoral ethnocentricity of Joshua
in Amos the special relation of Israel to God becomes a liability rather than a privilege
Amos particularly attacks those who think that favor can be won from God by purely cultic activity
those who think their special relation to God guarantees them victory are in for a shock
Israel's crimes against justice will result in exile
fierce ethical judgmentalism of Amos moves toward increased universalism
book of Jonah represents perhaps the fullest development of Hebrew universalism
4th century writer of Jonah satirizes Jewish exclusivist nationalism
climax of the book has God explaining to his reluctant chauvinist prophet
his equal concern for all the beings of his creation
God is a universal creator, like a tender gardener, loves all his "plants" equally

Platonic and Gnostic Views of Evil

from Platonic tradition and its exaggeration in Gnosticism
Western culture derived the view that evil resides in the physical body and material world
over against the conscious mind
Platonic thought assumes fundamental dualism of mind and matter

when the soul is united with the essences it is capable of subduing the body
but the soul also contains lower forces of unruly passions
when the soul loses its contemplative union with the Forms and capitulates to the passions
then it is governed by rather than governing over the body
for Plato this is the root of all evil
the soul that has fallen under the power of the passions becomes “forgetful”
falls prey to variable opinion and to vice
the soul thereby loses its capacity to return to its heavenly home at death
is condemned to a cycle of reincarnation

the *Phaedrus* supplements the *Timaeus* with a mythic presentation of the mixed nature of the soul
when the soul loses sight of the eternal essences it falls to earth, taking on mortal body
depending on how far it has lost sight of truth, it takes on various levels of social status
it may incarnate into animal, in which case there is no escape from cycle of reincarnation
no mention of women!
Vice is expressed in excesses of emotion and desire
virtue is control that maintains balance and harmony
virtue is possible only if soul remains united with vision of eternal, unchanging truth
vice is the result of losing that vision and capitulating to principle of mutability
mutability, the substratum of matter, is the basis of vice and mortality

Platonism sees the cosmos as hierarchically ordered
upper levels of planetary spheres were immortal
lower, sublunar regions, between moon and earth was region of evil spirits
earthly bodies were those bodies subject to decay and death

in Gnosticism this hierarchical cosmos of Platonism has fallen into more total dualism
the entire cosmos, including its upper planetary regions have been demonized
the divine world of spiritual goodness lies beyond even the upper regions of the cosmos
the cosmos is a multilayered realm of ignorance and alienation
the earth and its embodied beings lie at the dark center of this cosmic prison

within some elect human beings there are sparks of divine being
through withdrawing its life force from the body and the passions the spirit begins the journey out
of the body, up through the planetary spheres, finally beyond to unite with the divine community
evil is seen as variants of the mutability in the soul

The Christian Concept of the Fall: From Paul to Augustine

fusion of Jewish ethical and Greek metaphysical views of evil
evil is located both in the freedom of will and its choice of disobedience
and in the flawed ontology of mortal being
this compounded the dilemma of human entrapment in sin and evil
humans are both culpably guilty and incapable of escaping through their own “natural” capacities

Paul laid foundation of this concept of sin and evil

although full development awaited work of Augustine in 4th century
Paul's theology blended apocalyptic and Gnostic modes of thought
profound dualism between two modes of existence
existence according to the "flesh", a state of sin and slavery
existence in the Spirit, through rebirth in Christ a promise of immortality

the problem in Paul's thought lies in the extent to which he identifies this evil condition with natural or created life and thus sees redeemed life as transcendent to our original created potential in Romans I, Paul declares that all people have the capacity through their created nature to do good but they have chosen evil, so God has abandoned them to evil

Paul's main concern is to reject special privileges of Jewish people in relation to God because of Adam's sin the choice of sin becomes a state of sin from which people are unable to extricate themselves
Jewish law in no way helps, it only reveals what god wants
doesn't give the power to overcome state of sin

in Romans 5-7 Paul expounds a profound theological anthropology of divided self
it is Christ who delivers us from evil, provides us with power of goodness
two types of existence: one derived from Adam, which is sin and death
the other derived from Christ, which is goodness and spiritual life
death and resurrection of Christ breaks the power of evil
through baptism we die to our Adamic mode of life and rise in the Christic mode of life

baptism does not complete the transformation
the old Adamic power of sin is still present "in our flesh"
the baptized live between the fallen and the redeemed "age"
Paul looks forward to a second stage of transformation in which the fleshy and mortal mode of life will be finally destroyed and the self will be transformed into a sinless and immortal state of being

confusion of creation and sin lies in concept of the relation of sin and death
were humans not subject to mortality prior to Adam's sin?
Paul never says this, but the church fathers come to this conclusion
in this identification of sin with death,
and goodness with immortal life we see Paul's quasi-Gnostic cosmology
baptism in Christ frees us from the power of the demonic spirits that enslave us
when Paul speaks of "sin" whose "wages" are death, what does he have in mind?
The overwhelming emphasis is on violations of relationships to other people
some sins relate to abuse of the body, others to sexual excess and "unnaturalness"
others to violations of the true understanding of God, idolatry and sorcery

Paul is also notable for what he does not think is sinful:
the whole body of Jewish laws about kosher food, sabbath, and holy day observances
central to redemption in Christ
is liberation from belief that such observances make a salvic difference

Christ frees the Christian from these laws
salvation is a gift from God given by faith, not the result of keeping commandments

yet Paul is no antinomian
we must walk in a path of conduct of love, joy, peace, kindness, faithfulness, self-control
strong emphasis on the morality of loving relations is rooted in the understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ
the prime indicator of being in Christ is to be in the Church as a community of loving relationship
despite this communitarian ethic, Paul thinks the solution to evil is to free the self from the “flesh”

this dualistic cosmo-anthropology was so difficult to grasp it seems to have been set aside for a generation for the more commonsensical Jewish ethic of free will and the “two tendencies”
in mid 2nd century Pauline view was radicalized by teaching of Marcion
Marcion read the Pauline “antitheses” of slavery and freedom as expressions of two divine powers
lower divine power was the jealous and angry God of the Law
Christ was the son not of this lower Creator God, but of an unknown higher God
whose nature was love and forgiveness apart from the Law

dominant Christianity of 200 c.e. rejected such radical dualism in favor of a reaffirmation of the Jewish view of the essential goodness of creation
this is the “cosmic Christology” of the anti-Gnostic church fathers
yet they also presupposed the Pauline identification of sin with death
problem: how is this redemption from sin reconciled with redemption as renewal and fulfillment of creation?
Irenaeus’s solution was to suppose the original creation in the “image of God” was an immature state
free will is the root of sin, but also of the final perfection of creation

Origen attempted a more Gnostic solution
a bold effort to connect original and final creation too radical for dominant Christianity
had more lasting effect on Eastern Christianity
for the Eastern fathers, redemption is a transformation that allows us to gradually withdraw the powers of the soul from the sinful body
abstinence from sex, fasting, even curtailment of sleep
lead to restoration of the original “spiritual body”

these teachings on nature, sin, mortality, and redemption from sin were refined in teachings of St. Augustine in late 4th and early 5th centuries
in his youth attracted to Manichaeism, a Gnostic dualistic religion
later repudiated it in favor of Christian Neoplatonism
rejected Gnostic dualism in favor of ontological monism
only one source of being, God
both soul and body of humans are essentially good, but non-divine
humans are endowed with freedom of will
the choice of evil is not impelled by an evil power

but an irrational choice
evil is thus defined as a defect, a negation of good

despite his affirmation that all that is, if from God
there remains in his thought the Platonic version of the anti-body hierarchy
the intellectual journey to truth and the moral journey to goodness
is one with the journey from bodily beings to disembodied Being

Augustine's conflict with Pelagianism in early 5th century
Pelagius held to the affirmation of the essential goodness of human nature as "image of God"
creation itself was gift of God
God also gave complete freedom of will, thus capacity to choose good or evil
rejected the view that humans were immortal prior to original sin
the exercise of free will does not change the essential capacity to choose good
through exercise of free will we can become closer and closer to achieving perfection

these teachings were compatible with most of Eastern church
but the North African church, especially Augustine, were enraged by this confident moralism
Pelagius' view of nature and free will was an insulting negation of Augustine's conversion
experience
Augustine's belief resonated with the Pauline sense of divided self, unable to do what it wills

Augustine shaped Western Christianity with an anthropology of transcendent grace
of fallen self that has lost freedom to do what it wills
original human had the capacity to will and to do good
but this capacity was lost when Adam chose sin and self-will over God's will
all human acts are thus corrupted by self-will
this state of bondage can only be remedied by transforming grace through redemptive work of
Christ
this redeeming grace is given by God without regard to prior meritorious acts
leads to his distinctive teachings on predestination
for all eternity god has chosen and predestined some to receive his grace
the redeemed state is not simply a return to, but an improvement on original state

Augustine's concept of original, fallen "man", closely related to his views on sexuality and women
although women are equally redeemable, they are "by nature" under male subjugation
the male alone possesses the "image of God"
an essential result of the fall is the loss of the ability to perform the sexual act for procreation
sinlessly, that is, without lust
sinful nature of the sexual act, even in marriage
is the mechanism of the transmission of original sin from Adam to all descendents
basic struggle to do good was thus paradigmatically a sexual struggle
struggle against sexual desire
only through gift of divine grace was Augustine able to give up sexuality and lead a celibate life
lead to concept of marriage as lower status of virtue for Christians

strikingly absent here is any idea of sex as an expression of a loving relationship

Conclusions

classical Christian heritage of sin as both metaphysical and ethical

mixed heritage to Western world

these problematic aspects of the Christian view must be rooted out before its positive elements can be reclaimed in a new form

notion of original sin laid upon Christians an untenable burden of guilt

the pre-apocalyptic Hebrew view that mortality is our natural condition which we share with all other earth beings

and that redemption is the fullness of life within these limits

is a more authentic ethic for ecological living

the evaluation of mortal life as evil and fruit of sin leads to an earth-fleeing ethic and spirituality contributed to the neglect of the earth, to denial of our commonality with plants and animals

excellent statement of nihilism

“Death as deliverance from mortality is preferred to the only real life available to us” (139-40)

also mandated phobic relations to the death side of the life cycle

phobic patterns have been used to structure social apartheid along gender and ethnic lines

both Jewish and Greek traditions contributed to the compounded Christian scapegoating of women

negation of women as the “mortal other” also extended to other victimized groups

conquest, subjugation, and genocide has been justified

reconstruction of the ethical tradition must begin by a clear separation of the question of finitude from that of sin

central issue of “sin” as distinct from finitude is the misuse of freedom to exploit other humans and the earth and thus to violate the basic relations that sustain life

Christian definition of sin has served to promote, more than avoid, the cycle of violence

there are recoverable elements for an ethic of eco-justice from our Christian heritage

one is the Hebraic understanding of evil as unjust relations between peoples

and the destructive effects this has on the earth

6. Paradise Lost and the Fall into Patriarchy

examines a new “fall” story emerging in ecofeminist movement

story of the fall into patriarchy

this story presumes that both human and nonhuman nature has capacity for biophilic mutuality

though there is often the suggestion that human females are relatively or absolutely better

further suggested that there was an original social order in which women and female modes of relationality dominated

this original state of matriarchy was lost about the time of the emergence of early urban civilization

Ruether agrees with some of the underlying values of this story but also sees dangers of reversed forms of scapegoating and untenable assumptions about “nature” as “originally” paradisaical
seeks to summarize some of the major forms of this hypothesis
then examines work of some contemporary paleoanthropologists to ask if this hypothesis can be historically verified
then to sort out psychic and social aspects of this theory to see what is useful and what is misleading about it

The Lost Paradise and Radical Ecology

two major roots of story of lost paradise: biblical story of Eden and Greek story of Golden Age
Eden story envisions idyllic time when first man and his wife dwelt in a garden
in Hesoid’s Golden Age myth there was once a happy race of mortals
but Prometheus’ theft of fire and Zeus’ punishment of sending Pandora ended the Golden Age
both of these stories are shaped by males to blame women
both stories are compounded of two elements:
an idealized memory of preagricultural societies and an idealized childhood
woman-blaming for lost paradise may have psycho-familial roots that go back to primal human social patterns

ecofeminists theories of lost paradise often include idea of original matriarchy
story of a time prior to patriarchy when women ruled over men is found in many cultures
19th century version of this story regarded the development of patriarchy as a higher stage of development, a stage in which the “transcendent Spirit” triumphs over “nature”

some feminists such as Matilda Joslyn Gage see the time of original matriarchy as a time of high culture
the worship of the Mother Goddess was the divine principle of this benevolent female rule
this Golden Age was overthrown by regressive influence of patriarchal religion
which Gage particularly identifies with Jewish and Christian tradition
in order for women to be liberated, they must throw off this Jewish and Christian heritage

mainstream anthropology rejected the theory of original matriarchy in 1920's
but theory was revived and popularized in 60's
theory has been popularized in radical ecological, feminist, and ecofeminist writings
one expression is in creation spirituality of Matthew Fox
Fox asserts an understanding of creation as originally and essentially good
fox stresses the primacy of original blessing citing the great age of the cosmos, 18 billion years before the appearance of humans and the appearance of sin
Fox suggests sin began only four to six thousand years ago
Fox sees human alienation as deepened by false Christian theology of fall and redemption
his creation spirituality stresses forms of meditation, liturgy, and therapy designed to free us from cultures of alienation and restore our harmony with the original blessing

another version of lost paradise is found in deep ecology and Earth First! movement

radical environmental activists seek a return to an ideal of a harmonious relation of humans to nature as found in hunter-gatherer societies
in contrast to ecofeminism they stress anthropocentrism rather than patriarchy as the problem seem to reflect a masculine imagination quite different from the “good life” that appears in ecofeminism
this movement is criticized by animal rights ecofeminists

hypothesis of lost paradise also found in radical feminist Mary Daly
like Fox, she comes from Roman Catholic tradition
but unlike Fox she repudiates not only Roman Catholicism but Christianity as a whole as a religion of unredeemable evil
increasingly separatist feminism
seems to regard females as having radically different “nature” from males
Daly accepts original matriarchy
before patriarchy a gynocentric world flourished
major message is a powerfully stated dualism of good and evil, life and death
women have the capacity that men lack for
true life that is vigorous, and in dynamic communion with animals, earth, and stars
parasitic maleness is the source of evil, the basis for a fallacious world of delusion
spreads a network of death over the fabric of life

Carol Christ another feminist of Christian background
also rejects Christianity as essentially a culture of patriarchal oppression and war
also believes there was a gynocentric world of peace and gender equality
agrees with Fox that the problem is with Christian theology of fall and redemption
but rejects Fox’s belief that there is an alternative “true Christianity” that is ecofeminist
she has focused in recent years on archaeological evidence from early urban agricultural towns

particularly the work of Marija Gimbutas, which she sees as proving that such a gynocentric, ecologically harmonious world once existed
the 7th millennium town of Catal Huyuk, excavated in 1960's cited as proof
lack of centralized buildings, female-identified cult objects, etc
cited as evidence of shared leadership between men and women
also focuses on other towns in “old Europe” that provide evidence of egalitarian society
matrilineal societies, central focus of worship was the Goddess

Gimbutas sees this peaceful, egalitarian, ecologically harmonious world as violently overthrown by a series of invasions from patriarchal pastoralists
this storyline popularized in Riane Eisler’s *The Chalice and the Blade*
Ruether questions whether it is really history
questions the projection of these values on ancient Neolithic peoples
scanty archaeological evidence
cites other evidence that challenges the conclusions of Eisler and Christ

7. Constructing Systems of Domination

a survey of major elements in social structure and culture that shaped and reflected the systems of patriarchal domination in the West

how these social and cultural patterns of domination were shaped by the synthesis of asceticism, apocalypticism, and Christianity in the Middle Ages and then reshaped again in Calvinism, the scientific revolution, colonialism, and industrialization in the 16th to 19th centuries, giving us the world of poverty, war, and ecological crisis that we now face

does not suggest that the Western Christian tradition is uniquely responsible for these evils

The Ancient Mediterranean Empires: Mesopotamia

the difficulty of tracing the early stages of development of patriarchy

Sumerian cities of Ur, Uruk, Nippur, Kish, Lagash planted between 4000 and 3000 B.C.E.

Earliest tablets that record laws, legends, etc date a thousand years later

these records show that the patrilineal family, slavery, aristocratic priesthood, warrior nobility, are all firmly established

patriarchal reordering of family, definition of land as patrilineal property, scribal religious elites, development of war, warrior nobility and slavery probably all emerged as part of an interconnected process

importance of slavery in Sumeria is suggested by the fact that it provides dominant metaphor for all hierarchy, including divine-human relationship

gods created humans so they could be freed from physical labor

the analysis of women's history through three millennia of Mesopotamian city-states and empires is rudimentary but seems to suggest the status of women gradually declined

in earlier times women, queens and princesses, seemed to hold some status

but always dependent upon husbands and fathers

in mythology, goddesses remain very powerful, but increasingly subordinate to male deities
recounts myths in which female-identified cosmic power is increasingly domesticated

Women in Ancient Israel

women's status in ancient Israel varies, for the record spans a thousand years and quite diverse political and economic systems

but record shows strongly patriarchal society from the beginning

difference with Mesopotamian society is resistance to class hierarchy

Hebrew society held to an ideal of equality between male householders

yet females are rigorously marginalized

women do not receive the Torah

they are banished so that men can be pure

they are excluded from initiation into the covenant with God

excluded from studying the Law

cannot inherit property, except as placeholders for male heirs

cannot testify or make contracts
in relation to both God and society, woman lacks autonomous personhood and is represented by the male head of the family

Hebrew myth expresses subordination of female power
even suppression of the memory of it
story of the creation of Eve banishes entirely the birthing mother as source of human life
male is defined as original, woman is created as secondary being, adjunct to her husband
story of Abraham attempted sacrifice of Isaac
highlights need for a male heir
the mother's right to her children is so totally negated as to be absent as a factor in the story

in Davidic period institution of kingship and city life conflicted with earlier male egalitarian ideal
evidence of elements of Goddess worship for much of the history of Solomonic temple
but rigorously banished by Yahwist reformers who shaped existing biblical documents

in Hebrew scripture the covenant of God and Israel is imaged as a marriage
the male is the divine "Lord"
while the human community is the subordinate wife
in Hebrew thought the line between the divine and human is more rigidly drawn
gender hierarchy is used to demarcate the realm of the divine and the holy
procreational potency is denied to the female and the earth
is appropriated by a male divine power that stands above and outside the earth

Women in Classical Athens

in classical Athenian culture we find strong goddess cults
myths testify to archaic female power
but also a vehement struggle to subdue matricentric power
Hellenistic culture stood on ancient Mycenae, a patriarchal and warrior society
which stood on Minoan society
efforts to portray Minoan society as totally egalitarian probably exaggerated
but perhaps more than in early Mesopotamian world, women stood as peers in palace elites
goddesses predominate as symbols of the source of all life

in 6th century Athens reorganized into male-citizen society by Solon
the laws of Solon women are forbidden all citizen roles and made permanent minors
banished to the back of the house in strict division of public and private
Pandora story from Hesiod: Zeus's gift of woman as wife is punishment for Prometheus's sin
she brings evil into the world
Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy works out a subordination of motherright to fatherright
Earth Mother powers are tamed and henceforth dwell under the Aeropagus as peaceful
collaborators with patriarchal power

cites one study of 5th century Athenian culture
the free Greek male-citizen seeks to establish his identity by subduing and banishing the non-

Greek, nonmale, nonhuman from the citizen circle
depiction of battle between Greek soldier and Centaurs and Amazons

struggle between Greek society of free and equal male citizens against the Persians
the representatives of “slavish, effeminate” Oriental society
this broke down in Peloponnesian War in which Greek battled Greek
after Alexander with the defeat of the Persians there is a merger of Hellenic and Asian
Plato and Aristotle work out new relationship of Greek male to female, barbarian and animal
through new metaphor of hierarchy
the female, the alien, the animal are seen as “natural” inferiors in hierarchical “chain of being”
slavery becomes central to new metaphor of hierarchy
slavery became model of all relationships between dominant Greek males and “others”
in Aristotle this social hierarchy is explicitly correlated with slavery
ruling class Greek males are those in whom reason and the capacity to rule predominates
in descending order woman, barbarians (as slaves), and animals are seen as beings without this
rational capacity
Aristotle also developed view of female impotency
procreative power is appropriated as solely the capacity of the male
the female is a defective being, lacking in full rationality, moral will, physical strength
thus unsuited to autonomy
thus, as in Hebrew myths, the female and the earth are deprived of generative power

metaphor of ontological hierarchy as social hierarchy with descending levels of rationality
would be appropriated into Christianity in early centuries of common era
we see also the beginning of the flight from the woman, the body, the earth into ascetic negation

The Ascetic Flight From Earth

asceticism dominated Christianity almost from the beginning until the Renaissance and
Reformation
remaining influential to the present
but it did not originate in Christianity
its roots lie in movements in Judaism and Hellenism
express increasing pessimism with capacity of male elites to create a “good earth”
and thus their desire to escape from the mortal bounds of the body and earth altogether

in Plato the “fall” of the soul into body
ideal state of the soul is as a disembodied spirit

in era of Roman imperial conquest (late first century B.C.E. to first century C.E) mood of
pessimism, world alienation, expressed in Gnosticism and apocalypticism deepened

both Gnosticism and apocalypticism contained elements of social protest against patriarchal and
imperial domination

Gnosticism contained elements of gender emancipation

Christian system of thought that emerged in 4th century with Augustine
a conservative fusion of patriarchy, asceticism, and apocalyptic
reflects innate inferiority of women, subjugation to the male
celibacy is the optimal state of life to prepare for the end of the world and immortal world to come
Augustinian synthesis of Gnosticism, apocalypticism, Christianity shaped the Latin medieval
world
otherworldly pessimism reinforced by collapse of Western Roman empire
for next thousand years western Europe would live in the shadow of this collapse
seeing its own world as one of decline in preparation for the end of the world

primary causes of this collapse was economic
but three millennia of exploitation of land also took its ecological toll
process of salinization turned fertile crescent of Tigris-Euphrates Valley into a desert
forests of Lebanon, Greece, and Italy were denuded
epidemics in crowded cities such as Rome caused by inadequate disposal of wastes
almost all wild herds of larger mammals wiped out in Greece in classical period

much ecological damaged has remained
but collapse of the empire, return to subsistence farming, fading of cities
all helped restore the land
Christian asceticism played a positive role in its hostility to accumulation of wealth
monastic communities not only preserved literary culture
they also created a new union of subsistence agriculture with egalitarian spiritual community

heritage of Christian asceticism is Janus-faced
one side with its hostility toward women and the earth reinforces patterns of neglect of and flight
from the earth
but asceticism also can be understood as rejection of exploitation and excess
thus a return to egalitarian simple living in harmony with other humans and the earth
fasting can be symptom of neglect and flight from the body
or a means of restoring a healthy body
in this sense Asceticism can be seen as a “restoration of paradise”

deep ambivalence toward women
on the one hand, by adopting celibacy women overcome “curse of Eve”
on the other, female sexuality and child-bearing seen as essence of sin and death

ambivalence toward women closely related to ambivalence toward nature
nature is the lowest rung on the hierarchical ordered cosmos
wild nature is the “devil’s realm”
view of demonic, unredeemed natural world also directed against women
witch-hunts of 15th to 17th century

The Reformation and the Scientific Revolution

Calvinist Reformation and scientific revolution two expressions of a crucial turning point in Western concept of nature

the medieval Christian struggle between the sacramental and demonic was recast

Calvinism radicalized the split between nature and grace in Christian thought

it saw nature as totally depraved

for Calvin, since the fall, the ability to know God through creation has been broken

can only know God through God's revealed Word in scripture

there could not be any experience of God in art, mysticism, or experiences of nature

nor could there be any traces of authentic knowledge of God in non-Christian peoples

hostility toward visual art in churches

Calvinist worship is barren of all visual symbolism

only the ear was the aperture of experience of God

the word and music were primary means of divine presence

all other senses were suspect

victory of word culture over visual culture

everything "pagan" including the Roman Catholic Church, was demonized

women were the gateway to the Devil

Calvinists became primary witch-hunters

and major formulators of the patriarchal family as key institution of church and state

the Reformation era of 16th and 17th centuries

brought major changes in social hierarchy and relation of domestic sphere and public life

new class hierarchy of capital and labor

women were further marginalized in the private sphere of the family

Ruether takes a new look at the relationship between Puritanism and scientific revolution

the rhetoric of Francis Bacon, the "father" of scientific method

replete with images drawn from witch-hunting

scientific laboratory is described in language taken from Inquisitor's chamber

nature is "vexed" and forced to reveal her secrets

several effects of this imagery still shape scientific thought

one assumption is that the laboratory situation yields the purest truth about nature

second assumption is the objectivity of the "inquisitor"

Bacon's thought pervaded by images of nature as a female to be coerced, "penetrated,"

conquered, forced to yield

language of rape and subjugation of women

Bacon ties the scientific revolution to Christian myth of fall and redemption

scientific knowledge is fundamentally a tool of power

the capacity to subjugate and rule over nature

Descartes:

Descartes' method yields radical version of dualism between mind and matter
nature is mindless and soulless, a machine

Descartes' view of animals as mere machines used to justify vivisectional experimentation
the cries and withering of animals were seen as only mechanical reflexes

Descartes severed the continuum between organic body, life, sensibility, and thought
dualism of mind and matter also reflected a dualism of two truths:

truths of religion and truths of science

this dualism permits a split between fact and value

science is considered "value-free" and "objective"

the "university" of discourse was split with fateful effects that only recently have been recognized

Newtonian physics, mechanical universe, demanded a "clock-maker"

nature was "exorcized" of both benign and evil "spirits"

animist traditions of science were defeated

mechanical model in firm control of science up to the present time

as nature became completely de-souled

the human spirit need no longer interact with nature as a fellow being

could see itself, like the clock-maker God, as transcendent to it

knowing it and ruling it from outside

soon the presupposition of God itself could be discarded

leaving science in charge of passive matter

Colonialism and Industrialism

application of science to technological control over nature marched side by side with colonialism
new science married early to technology of war

era of colonization decisively reshaped human, plant, and animal ecologies of colonized regions

development of capitalism depleted wealth

leaving these regions impoverished and dependent on economies of colonizing nations

optimistic vision of endless "progress" has turned into late 20th century nightmare

Conclusions

is civilization salvageable for sustainable life on earth?

Elements of tragedy and sin in this story

tragedy in the finitude of human perspective: unable to see what destruction may be set in motion
by human behavior; but also culpable evil in patterns of domination

denial of male interdependency with women and human interdependency with biotic community

cultures of deceit which justify exploitation

three elements for an ecological culture:

1) rebuilding of primary and regional communities, responsibility for ecosystem

2) just relations between humans, the right of all members to an equitable share

3) overcoming the culture of competitive alienation and domination for compassionate solidarity

PART FOUR: HEALING

8. Healing the World: The Covenantal Tradition

will explore two lines of biblical thought and Christian traditions that have reclaimable resources for an ecological spirituality and practice

she is *not* assuming that these are the only or the best religious traditions for ecological ethics and spirituality

also *not* assuming these traditions can be reclaimed without change

several presuppositions:

1) there is no ready-made ecological spirituality in past traditions

the ecological crisis is new to human experience

only after Hiroshima and Nagasaki...

2) each tradition is best explored by those who claim community in that tradition

this does not preclude conversions into other traditions or communication between them

we must draw upon all our spiritual resources in a global community of interrelated spiritual traditions

Christian tradition has profoundly valuable themes for ecological spirituality and practice

also has problematic defects and bears significant responsibility for the legacy of domination of women and nature

The Covenantal Tradition: Hebraic Roots

particular line of biblical interpretation shaped by 19th century European Protestantism

emphasizes sharp dualism between history and nature

history was seen as the true realm of the human

ascendant over “nature”

and the authentic sphere of the presence of the true “God” of the Bible

“Nature” was understood as subhuman

the realm to be negated in order to ascend into humanness and freedom

divinities revealed through nature were by definition false gods

but this is not the only possible interpretation of the Bible

more recent interpretations suggest this modern dualism distorts biblical perspective

Hebraic understanding of the God of Israel did not set history against nature

God is the Lord of heaven and earth

there is one lived reality not differentiated into separate spheres of “creation” and “redemption”

Hebraic view of relationship to God is undoubtedly androcentric, anthropocentric, ethnocentric

but this does not preclude more inclusive perspectives

this chapter focuses on the testimony to a God who relates directly to nature

although the Creator God is an artisan

God is seen as creating a living world, not “dead things”

God “rejoices” in the world “he” creates

quotes from Psalm 29 and 65 to this conception of God rejoicing in his creation

in Job, God's presence is found not only in spheres of nature under human cultivation but also in places and times in nature to which humans have no access
God also provides for wild animals not under human control
God is present not only in blessings in society and nature but also in social and natural disasters
to differentiate "social" from "nature" reflects too much the modern dualism

much of ecological critique of the Bible focuses on concept of "dominion" over nature yet the biblical picture is one of keen awareness of the limits of human power
moreover, human authority over nature is always delegated authority
nature is not man's private property
but stewardship over an earth that remains ultimately God's
to abuse this trust is to bring divine wrath upon one's head

humans can hope for God's blessings if they are faithful to God and just to one another
but even "good works" are not assurance of blessings
for God sometimes makes the righteous suffer

Hebrew thought knit the covenantal relation to God in a close relationship to the gift of the land on the one hand this concept of the 'promised land' can be acted out in ethnocentric violence but the other side of this is the understanding of Israel's own tenure in the land is contingent on its righteousness

one major fruit of Hebraic understanding found in sabbatical legislation
series of concentric cycles, 7 day, 7 year, 7x7 or Jubilee
in each cycle, land, animals, and humans are to rest and be restored
in the 50th or Jubilee year
earth lies fallow, periodic righting of unjust relations, undoing slavery
norm of a just community is one of free householders with land equitably apportioned
this vision of periodic righting of relationships also is projected on a more absolute messianic future
this future time will bring a final fulfillment of the covenant of creation

The Covenant in Christian Tradition

this intimate unity between justice and right relations to nature is largely lost in New Testament
it may have been important in Jesus' own understanding of the coming Kingdom
the fullest account of the Lord's prayer in Matthew shows an understanding of God's Kingdom as the establishment of justice and right relations on earth
a hope for earthly renewal
points to the text from Isaiah which Luke has Jesus take for the inauguration of his ministry
also reflects the Jubilee tradition
but in both these texts the sabbatical legislation about restoration of the land is absent
the concern focuses on interhuman justice

As Christianity developed even these concerns for this worldly justice would fade

replaced by cosmological and spiritualized understanding of Jesus as Messiah
the covenantal concepts of relationship to the land is discarded

the covenantal idea lay fallow for most of the Middle Ages
16th century saw recoveries of this concept among Zwinglian and Calvinist Reformers
also the radical, Anabaptist wing of the Reformation
Anabaptist reformers suggest the conflict between church as a covenanted community
and the state
they saw the church as a redeemed community that stood for countercultural values
radical equality of persons, rejection of war and luxury

this concept of covenanted community played a major role in shaping American political identity
cites from John Winthrop 1630 Puritan vision of covenanted commonwealth
Winthrop links this understanding of the colony as covenanted community with that of a promised
land that will thrive if the people are righteous
Puritan use of covenant theme played major role in the idea of the American Constitution
these biblical and Puritan roots of American national identity are a source of
the best and worst in American culture

biblical concept of covenanted people was patriarchal, androcentric, anthropocentric, ethnocentric
in 19th and 20th centuries the United States would see a series of reform movements
that would seek to redress these limitations
the goal, still not perfectly achieved, has been for equal civil status for all adults, regardless of
religion, race, gender, or “previous condition of servitude”
this has also meant widening of the “religious-ethnic” limits of American covenantal community

The Covenant and the Rights of Nature

until the 1970's there was little challenge to the anthropocentric assumptions
recently several movements have begun to ask whether beings other than humans might have “civil
rights”
environmentalists ask about the “rights of nature”
“do trees have standing”
animal rights activists seek to extend civil rights to animals

she gives an interesting account of the conflicting interests of these two movements
animal rights ethical philosophy focus on the rights of animals as individuals
focusing primarily on domesticated or captive animals, and the abusive treatment of animals in
factory farms and scientific laboratories
environmentalist focus on species rather than the individual
they are critical of the animal rights movement for extending rights to “favorite” animals
the traditional line between humans who possess “soul” and animals is extended downwards
but is still drawn somewhere between a category of beings to be respected on the basis of sentience
and beings who lack sentience and thus also “rights”
mentions the writings of Tom Regan
for Regan animals have an unconditional right to life because they are sentient beings

animals are moral patients but not moral agents

Regan is critical of environmentalists who are concerned for species and biotic communities rather than for individual animals

environmentalists are concerned with the maximization of diversity

thus they are more concerned about the life of a few insects of an endangered species

than about the life of the 2 millionth deer in a park where deer are overrunning the carrying capacity

concern for endangered species is often defended on anthropocentric grounds

but the value of species goes beyond utilitarian criteria

each species has unique value in its own right

although natural evolution leads to extinction of species

human interaction has greatly accelerated the process

environmentalists see animal rights activists operating out of a misplaced sentimentality for particular favorite animals

sometimes a concern for the species requires culling of individual animals

Ruether tries to find a middle ground between these concerns

she leans toward environmentalist concern for sustainable biotic community

but recognizes the concern of animal rights activists

needs to be a place for moral sensitivity to the quality of life of highly sentient animals

not sure however whether these concerns add up to a mandate to eliminate entirely

meat eating and the use of animals in the laboratory

does not find the argument for absolute vegetarianism morally convincing

however, she does find compelling moral reasons for a mostly vegetarian diet

particular for affluent people (others may have no real alternative)

refers to interesting suggestion of Christopher Stone, philosopher of law

Stone suggests environmental ethics has suffered from "moral monism"

various schools of environmental ethics and animal rights ethics have sought a single set of principles

either through utilitarian or deontological approach

the result is that many concerns are ignored or fitted into an inappropriate scheme

Stone suggests a need for "moral pluralism" in ecological ethics

not moral relativism, but an approach that would enable

different rules of ethics for different contexts or "planes" of reality

she finds most interesting here a recognition of both the usefulness but also the inadequacy of defining "nature" solely through the rubric of "individual rights"

need to be able to think in terms of community relationships

need a "rich tapestry of rights, values, and duties of humans to the other life forms toward which we must assume the responsibility of guardianship"

need a restoration of the covenanted relationship between humans and all other life forms

as one family united by one source of life

each life form has its own distinctive relation to God as source of life

9. Healing the World: The Sacramental Tradition

this chapter traces a line of Christian tradition that regards Christ as cosmic manifestation of God appearing both as the immanent divine source and ground of creation and its ultimate redemptive healing

since late Medieval and Reformation periods this holistic vision has been ignored by Western Christianity

thus modern searches for a cosmological spirituality assume it can only be found in non-Christian traditions

the cosmological tradition in Christianity needs reinterpretation in order to be adequate for ecological spirituality

but nonetheless it has not been absent from Christian tradition

Once the cosmos becomes the mediating context of all theological definition and spiritual experience, how does this change our understanding of both “God” and “humans”?

Hellenistic Roots of Cosmological Christology

traces early Christian theologies of cosmogenesis adapted from “Oriental Hellenism”

early Christianity tried to mask its role as synthesizer of Hebraic, Oriental, and Greco-Roman thought

as in the Hellenistic Jewish apologetic myth that Plato learned his philosophy from Moses

Ruether suggests Christianity’s role as synthesizer of major Hebraic, Oriental, and Greco-Roman thought should be seen as a strength, rather than a secret to be denied

she finds in these writings an affirmation of the cosmos as the expression of immanent divinity within which humans stood as microcosm to macrocosm

the cosmos is seen as originating in a transcendent divine being, who is the source of all things

Philo, the major philosopher of Hellenistic Judaism, saw God bringing forth a secondary expression

the divine Logos, who is the manifestation of the divine mind

from this Logos radiate the energies that create the world

the cosmos is sustained by this immanent Logos

each human soul is a reflection of the divine logos

Humans and cosmos are seen as “brothers” and parallel “sons of God”

The Christian Synthesis: Cosmic Christology

the term *Christ* originally referred to a figure in Jewish apocalyptic thought that was seen as appearing at the end of world history to destroy forces of evil and renovate the universe

the Christianity reflected in the synoptic Gospels lacks the identification of Christ with cosmogonic Logos

she finds an identification of Christ as redeemer with the cosmogonic Logos in the more speculative Christian thought found in Paul, the Gospel of John, and the book of Hebrews

Christ is seen as the power of the new creation

not severed from the cosmos created in the beginning
but the principle through which this cosmos was originally created

this bold effort to unify cosmogony and eschatology in early Christianity
was jeopardized by conflicting strands of Hebrew and Greek thought
the Hebrew concept of creation demanded a cleavage between the being of God
and that of created beings, including humans
Jewish thought originally saw humans as essentially mortal

Greek thought saw the relation between God and cosmos as emanational
the world soul and the human soul partake in the being of the divine Logos
but Greek thought also sees the cosmos as split between a higher planetary realm of immortal
being
and a sublunar realm of mortal being
the task of the soul is to escape from the body and return at death to immortal blessedness

Classical Christianity came up with several attempts at synthesizing these views
with Hebrew thought, Christianity insisted on the psychophysical union
the body was essential for wholeness of existence
resurrection of the body was intrinsic to salvation
Christ must also have a real body, not merely an appearance of one
this caused considerable difficulty for those imbued with Platonic thought

at the same time Christianity accepted the Platonic prejudice against “becoming”
transience and mortality of material existence was evil
the solution, found already in Paul, is the concept of the “spiritual body”
a vehicle of the soul, but stripped of mortality
Christians shared with Hellenism the idea that the cosmos was alive
pervaded by the energy of the divine Logos of God
even plants and animals had soul
human psychophysical existence was inseparable from this cosmic whole
within which humans stood as microcosm

one ambitious effort to create a theology in which creation, incarnation, and consummation are
unified in a cosmic whole
is found in 2nd century anti-Gnostic Irenaeus
creation is considered an incarnation of the Word and Spirit of God
Christian sacraments are paradigmatic of this deeper mingling of body and spirit
refutation of Gnostic negation of the body
but since for Irenaeus (all Christianity subsequent to Paul!) salvation has to do with transcending
mortality, the only way he can think about redemption
is by assuming that through being infused by the immortal life of the divine
it will overcome its mortality
at the end of the world, the whole cosmos will be transformed
into a new heaven and earth, immortalized and united with the divine life of God

this final union fulfills the promise of original creation
this effort to incorporate the Hebraic view of earthly blessedness into eternal salvation
was dropped by mainline Christianity after the third century
the millennial reign of Christ has no effect on renewal of nature
nor does it bring forth a new era of justice between humans
dominant Christianity sees the earth as going downhill toward destruction

Disintegration and Renewal of Cosmological Theology

the view of the cosmogonic Logos as principle of creation
continued in medieval Christianity, both Eastern and Western
view of nature as an ontological “ladder” of ascent to God
the “way down” from God to the humblest creature is also the “way up”
the contemplative ascent to God begins with the contemplation of visible things
this worldview began to disintegrate in late medieval period
nominalist view that the universe no longer disclosed divine essence
but merely the “ordained will” of God
God dwelt in a transcendent otherness radically inaccessible to the human mind and spirit
the ladder of ascent has been broken, ontologically and epistemologically
distance between God and man could only be bridged by divine revelation
not by any speculative or mystical capacities of humans

nevertheless, Renaissance period saw a revival of cosmological mysticism
reinforced by new access to ancient Hellenistic sources
Renaissance magicians like Paracelsus and Bruno saw themselves empowered to roam the cosmos
communing with the nearest plants and farthest stars through faculties of the soul
but Bruno was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1600
a chastened form of Neoplatonism continued in the Cambridge Platonists
who sought to bridge the sharp dualism of revelation and reason
by reestablishing the ontological relation between the divine and human mind

18th and 19th centuries saw continual stream of idealism
which sought to bridge the division of mind and matter
concept of the divine as source of both thought and physical things
for Spinoza God was the underlying substance from which arose the physical world and the human
mind

in reaction to these trends Christian theology would seek to establish its “purely biblical” roots
by rejecting any presence of God in nature

Types of Contemporary Ecological Theology

discusses three somewhat different versions of Christian cosmological theology in the contemporary quest for ecological spirituality

- 1) Creation-centered spirituality, represented particularly by Matthew Fox
- 2) followers of French paleontologist-philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
- 3) process theology of Alfred North Whitehead

10. Creating a Healed World: Spirituality and Politics

in these two traditions, covenantal and sacramental
we hear two voices of divinity from nature
one that speaks in thunderous masculine tones: “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not”
one that speaks from the intimate heart of matter
long silenced by the masculine voice
this is the voice of Gaia

we need both these voices, Gaia and God
cannot depend on volunteerism alone to save rain forest and endangered species
we need the laws from the voice of God
we also need the second voice, else our laws will have no heart
no roots in compassion and fellow feeling

in order to define an ethic for ecological living
we need to revisit the questions of good and evil, sin and fallenness
how we define the nature of the problem will determine our solutions

for the Hebraic tradition, the problem lies in the will to disobey
the solution does not lie outside history
but must be worked out within the bounds of historical existence

for the Greek tradition, the fault is metaphysical
we are a dualism of eternal mind and mortal body
we need to withdraw into the mind and control the body
ultimately the solution lies beyond death, in discarding the body

Christianity fused these views and thus compounded the understanding of sin
sin is both historical and metaphysical
something for which we are totally guilty and yet which we are powerless to resolve on our own
there is much in this combined sense of guilt and helplessness that speaks to our situation
yet it can lead to many perversions that reinforce the problem:
passivity
contempt for what is possible here and now
the desire to flee to imagined perfections outside embodied existence
scapegoating of victims as the cause of the evils we seek to repudiate

need a foundation for ethical theory that is not based on dualistic negation of the “other”
whether woman, animal, body, pagans, gentiles, barbarians
evil does not lie in some “thing” out there
evil lies in “wrong relationship”
all beings live in community
yet there is a tendency in the life drive itself
for each species to maximize its own existence and hence to proliferate in a cancerous way
this is not just a human tendency

the life force itself is not unequivocally good
but becomes “evil” when it is maximized at the expense of others
“good” lies in balancing our own life drives with that of others
so that the whole remains in life-sustaining harmony

only as the system of exploitation reaches its maximal stage
does it begin to undermine the quality of life for those at the top
the first instinct is to accelerate the exploitation in order to maintain life-style
eventually the whole system collapses
this has happened before
the difference now is that the system of exploitation is global
and the possibility of destruction is correspondingly global
in our Christian culture we inherit both
cultures of domination and deceit
and cultures of critique and compassion

Envisioning a Good Society

goal of “healthy societies”
vision must start with a principle of equity
between men and women, between human groups regionally and globally
equity between humans and all other members of the biotic community
equity between generations of living things

rebuilding a sustainable earth will require more than technological fixes
demands fundamental restructuring of all these relations
from systems of exploitation to one of biophilic mutuality

need incremental shifts guided by a holistic vision to transform all the patterns of destruction
need to phase out petroleum and fossil fuels as primary energy source
to renewable sources such as solar, wind, water, thermal, biomass, human and animal
greatly increased efficiency of machinery
better control of emissions
finally the organization of the system itself
in the case of transportation, the private automobile is unacceptable
need whole new system of transportation
this means reorganizing the locations of living, working, recreation, etc
this is related to building organic local communities

need mass development of sustainable home technologies
this demands political mobilization, locally and regionally
need to shift control and decision making from multinational corporations
to local and regional organizations
the age of megacorporations is put in question
need sustainable food production and distribution
phase out long transportation chains

need to return to eating lower on the food chain
greatly reducing meat-eating in favor of vegetable foods
need to withdraw subsidies from agribusiness, revealing its true inefficiency
organic farming and pest control, renews soils
need rooted farming communities that are tied to the land and prepare for the next generation
need land reform to reverse five-hundred year trend of land confiscation
reversing trends toward urbanization
less mechanized labor would enable more people to work and live off the land

ecological sustainable society must terminate as much as possible all disposable waste
“unnatural” toxic wastes need to be phased out altogether
need composting systems to recycle human and animal wastes
true environmental costs must be paid for by consumers rather than passed on to general public

significant curbing and eventual reduction of human population is also necessary
there is no real alternative to population control
do we want it voluntarily, before conception or violently by war, famine and disease?
Need effective birth control
relationship of patriarchy to reproductive patterns
empowering of women as moral agents of their own sexuality and reproduction
integral part of any authentic population control
female child needs to be valued as equally as the male
need double transformation of both women and men in their relation to each other and to nature
male life-style needs deeper transformation
need to overcome the illusion of autonomous individualism
domestic-public split must itself yield to a new sense of holistic culture

dominating type of masculine ego finds its most global manifestation in militarism
military state operates out of polarized, totalitarian worldview of absolute good against absolute evil
earth is reduced to resource to be used
interdependency with nature or other people is denied
need genuine demilitarization across the board, including United States and Israel

Building Communities of Celebration and Resistance

need strong base communities of celebration and resistance
three interrelated aspects of the work of such communities
1) personal therapies, spiritualities, corporate liturgies by which we nurture and symbolize a new biophilic consciousness
2) utilization of local institutions over which we have some control
homes, schools, churches, farms, locally controlled businesses as pilot projects of sustainable living
3) building of organizational networks that reach out, regionally, nationally, globally in a struggle to change the power structures
start with *metanoia*, or change of consciousness

struggle to change the death system must be rooted in joy and goodness of life
need to recover boyd-psyche-spirit nexus
to learn to breathe again, feel life energy
need to release stifled intuitive and creative powers of our organism
need to begin now to live an ecologically healthy life in our own communities
these can only be pilot projects that can set example, raise consciousness

leads to third role as political bases of organization and action
local “green communities” link up and put pressure for change on larger system
need global consciousness
we have until about 2030 according to Worldwatch Institute
before major disasters of famine and collapse of life systems

we need neither optimism nor pessimism
we need committed love