Editorial

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With this issue of *Ecotheology* we complete the twin themed issues on ecotheology and postmodernity that commenced with issue 9.2. The contributors to these issues have been exploring the challenges and opportunities presented to ecological theology by postmodern and poststructuralist thought on the one hand, and by the purported 'post-modernisation' of society on the other. In the last issue, Philip Goodchild developed an understanding and critique of the 'juggernaut' characteristic of modernity in terms of the way that money has come to serve as a supreme value, a kind of realized eschatology which seems to offer a perfect coincidence between knowledge and world. Then, Elaine Graham critically discussed three recent books which in different ways attempt to ground an ethics of biotechnology in a notion of 'human nature', arguing such a project can best be developed within a theocentric horizon in which nature is understood as 'posthuman' in its transcendence of human interests. Peter Manley Scott then argued for the embracing of hybridity as a central feature of our creatureliness, that we necessarily exist in relationship with things. He further insisted that the creaturely relationship with the transcendent creator is one that requires us not to divide the world between the pure and the hybrid, but by seeking to discern in what way necessarily hybrid, contingent practices and objects might be related to the disinterested love of God. Finally, John Reader used the ideas of Jürgen Habermas to insist that ecotheology must not totally reject the tradition of occidental reason, but at the same time drew on the work of broadly poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray to point out ways in which Habermas' understanding of the relationship between reason and unreason needs to be modified.

I hope that readers of *Ecotheology* have appreciated the opportunity offered by from this encounter between two discourses – the ecothe-

ological and the postmodern – which have hitherto proceeded almost totally in isolation from each other. The current issue continues this theme, and opens with a characteristically challenging article by Paul Fletcher. He starts by relating the exploration of the nature of angelic existence in Wim Wenders' film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987). The angels in the film, Daniel and Cassiel, endure an infinite, timeless, monochrome existence, detached from materiality and contingency – a mode of being which for Fletcher recalls the detached, deracinated gaze of modern science. The mortals in Wenders' film, by contrast, inhabit a rich, sensuous world of colour – yet one which is postmodern, with its lack of any overarching order or narrative. Yet Wenders' ending, Fletcher notes with some disappointment, seems to allow Daniel and his mortal lover Marion to achieve a Romantic fusion of mind and matter.

Fletcher uses different understandings of passages in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1972) to illustrate the way that such romantic attempts to reinvest the modern word with colour and meaning can fall into the trap of confirming the very positivism that they seek to contest. He reminds us of the failure of seventeenth century theologians to recognize the metaphysical challenge that science posed to Christianity, suggesting that 'contemporary theologians are once again in danger of tacitly accepting the metaphysics of science while, quite sincerely, they attempt to 'humanise' its processes and goals'. He cites the work of the ecotheologian Celia Deane-Drummond (1997) approvingly, yet argues that she too falls into 'Wenders' trap' of imagining a future, Romantic overcoming of the opposition between science and its others, one which reproduces the aporias of science through trying to overcome them.

Importantly, Fletcher also points out that the apposite object of Deane-Drummond's critique of scientific reductionism and objectivism seems to be Newtonian science, whereas science since the middle of the twentieth century has taken a very different form. The rise of the new genetics, with its metaphor of code, argues Fletcher, implies a very different metaphysics, one closer to the monism of Spinoza than the dualism of Descartes. The objectivity of pre-formed bodies, known from outside as a craftsman knows the objects he manufactures, has been replaced by an immanentist world of bodies-in-form, in which life is understood as a radically immanent principle which serves only itself. Using works of popular science, Fletcher shows firstly how the discourse of the new genetics is tightly bound up with Christian ideas of creation and eschatology, but now made radically immanent, and secondly how this theology of immanence is itself complicit with a global managerialism which reduces everything to its sheer usefulness, and with a 'will to experiment' which elides history and regards the future as a continuously available

frontier. Fletcher thus highlights the challenge to ecotheology to catch up with the specific nature of this contemporary technoscience.

But if Fletcher wants to reject *both* positivistic science *and* Romantic Wisdom, what path is left for ecotheology? In the closing pages of the article, Fletcher develops his eschatological, Pauline alternative: a politico-theology based on the notion of messianic time, 'a time between time and its ending', in which the law is still in place but has been rendered inoperable. By adopting a messianic comportment, Fletcher argues, citing 1 Cor. 7.29-31, the Christian lives *hōs mē* – 'as though not'. This mode of comportment seems to echo the technoscientific will to experiment, in its insistence that the law is suspended, that the world can no longer act as a guide for the future, that the 'extended present' is the only point for intervention. Yet a messianic ecotheology would refuse the 'Gnostic' promises of science (or indeed Wisdom) to heal the diremptions of fallen existence through 'perfecting' nature. Instead, it would understand the perfection of nature as prefigured in the groaning of all of creation, its desire to be unfallen.

The second contributor, Kevin O'Brien, argues that any adequate ecotheological ethics must be able to take account of complexity, and suggests that the work of the feminist historian of science Donna Haraway (1989, 1991) has much to offer ecotheology in this task. He starts by articulating Haraway's concept of natureculture, through which she sought to problematize dualisms, and in particular any idea of a clear distinction between nature and culture. Using border figures such as primates (between humans and nature), cyborgs (between organism and machine) and OncoMouse™ (between nature, economy, technology and politics), Haraway argued that the material nature of our being-in-the-world is only ever partially distinguishable from the representational practices we use to understand it, and advocated the inhabiting of the border zones between categories as a kind of liberatory practice.

O'Brien brings out the way that the normative implications of Haraway's notion of natureculture involve not a decoupling of human agency from nature, but the taking of greater responsibility for one's actions. He draws attention to her notion of bearing 'modest witness' to the world, which demands an awareness and assertion of interrelationship, of the partialness of perspective, and of one's location as a perceiving and acting individual. This in turn implies a suspicion of monolithic metanarratives such as those of modern science, but at the same time the modest witness must not erase their subjectivity in the style of scientific writing. Haraway's understanding of the relationship between science and politics is complex here: science, properly conceived, should itself be a form of witnessing, but only if it can be open to the multiplicity of reality.

O'Brien then traces connections that can be made between Haraway's work and ecotheology. In a sense, he reconstructs her as an ecotheologian; remarking on Haraway's own awareness of the roots of her thinking in her childhood Catholicism, O'Brien draws attention to the way that she draws on Catholic sacramentalism in her denial of dualisms (suggesting, however, that in this she is perhaps insufficiently inattentive to internal critiques of such religious traditions). O'Brien points out that Haraway's insistence that we move from nature to natureculture as the basis for thinking about the world is consistent with Judeo-Christian ideas of *creation* as opposed to *nature*. Flowing from this refusal to think of nature and humanity as ontologically separable is also a shared conviction that flourishing is something to be hoped for for the world as a whole, not just for humanity.

O'Brien concludes the article by drawing three lessons from cyborg ethics. Firstly, like Fletcher, Haraway reminds us of the complexity of the world that ecotheologians face – not least given the emergence of that hybrid of technology, science, economics and politics she calls 'technoscience'. For OncoMouse™ is not just a breaching of God-given categories, but a revelation, as Scott put it in the last issue, of the world's hybrid nature. Secondly, he reminds us, the notion of 'modest witnessing' implies the need for caution in our descriptive and normative claims about nature. Thirdly, O'Brien suggests, this very modesty requires us to be open to revising our theological traditions.

The third contributor, Richard Roberts, notes how the depth and complexity of modernity's understanding of the world has been gained at the expense of primal immediacy, leading to what commentators have called the world's 'disenchantment'. At the same time, this desiccated character of the modern world provokes a compensating yearning for a sublime 'other'. But in the flattened, postmodern, post-theological world, the singular metanarrative of cosmic origin is displaced by a proliferation of micro-narratives, multiple attempts to remythologize the world, neither of which can claim hegemony over any other. Echoing Graham's contribution in the previous issue of *Ecotheology*, Roberts warns that they should not – that questions of ultimacy should always remain *questions*, and become idolatry when turned into determinate answers. Roberts thus puts under suspicion the mythologization of matriarchal religion, the sacralization of a particular gender, suspecting it of a shared 'will to power' with the very patriarchal religion being opposed.

Yet, at the same time secular reason seems inadequate to the task of mediating our relationship with non-human nature. Roberts uses the work of the German social theorist Klaus Eder (1996) to press the point that modern, instrumental rationality does not seem to contain the

resources within itself to correct the irrationally destructive relationship with nature that it has engendered. Even the limited truths of *homo faber*, the human being understood as the wielder of technology, truths which are restricted to the instrumental relationship between the 'first nature' of primal physical reality and the 'second nature' of manufactured artefacts, are being further distorted by the rise of a 'third nature' of signs and meanings that have been disembedded from any lifeworld context and reconstituted into the world of global managerial capitalism. This world of simulations and virtual reality propel us in an ever-accelerating, repetitive choreography dedicated only to its own reproduction. Within such a context emerge fantasies of a God-like manager class, who can comprehend and steer the repetitions of third nature, but any humanist possibilities in this are undercut by the tendency for all other values to be squeezed out by the single, systemic commandment of performance maximization.

Against this background, that of the deracination of contemporary culture, attempts to re-enchant nature appear more as a symptom than a cure. For some, the romantic yearning for primal, first nature engendered by the contradictions of modern culture is redirected onto third nature, in the post-natural possibilities seemingly offered by developments such as virtual reality and cyborg enhancement. Yet Roberts worries that all such strategies collapse into a 'Gnostic' flight from genuine engagement, or a 'kitsch' recomposition of the sublime. With the abandonment of religious traditions, identity markers become a free-floating resource for postmodern, subjectivised processes of mythic self-identification or mystical self-negation. Against this, Roberts insists that it is in an ecological reconstitution of the monotheistic tradition, with its elective affinity with an enlarged conception of reason, that we can find the resources to resist the dual allure of the false gods of global capitalism and the 'ludic sublims' of third nature.

Bronislaw Szerszynski completes the themed section of this issue by developing his own thoughts on some of the questions explored by Roberts. He starts by noting the increasingly 'postmodern' understanding of nature: the growing awareness of the multiplicity of ideas of nature in the contemporary world. Against this background, the deployment of monolithic ideas of nature – either the use of narrowly technical ideas of nature by environmental groups, or the kind of sacralised cosmologies offered by writers such as Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry (e.g. Swimme and Berry 1992) – can seem anachronistic and unhelpful. By contrast, a number of European social theorists, such as Ulrich Beck (1992) and Klaus Eder (1996) use the postmodernization of nature as the starting point for their own theories of ecological democracy. Rather

than offering specific substantive descriptive and normative accounts of nature and the human relationship with it, they offer different historical explanations for the existence of competing understandings of nature within society, and different recommendations for the form of society that can mediate between these different understandings in a way that is most ecologically 'rational'.

Szerszynski then argues that this area of social theory has concealed theological underpinnings. He argues that Beck's version of ecological democracy, in a similar way to that of Jürgen Habermas, relies on a heretical Christian theological position – that of a realized, but spiritualized, eschatology, in which not only is the law suspended as in Fletcher's position above, but also individuals are released into the pure immediacy of individual reflexivity. By contrast, he suggests that Eder's own, more agonistic version of ecological democracy – one which is dominated by negotiation and market relations – is underpinned by a pagan understanding of ontological difference, a difference which was merely temporarily concealed by the institutional monotheism of the Christian era. He contests this aetiology of the postmodern difference internal to modern society by setting out an alternative historical account that narrates it as a contingent outcome of the monotheistic tradition. Christian existence in the world was constituted by the hiatus between a divine and a worldly power no longer seen as continuous, which opened up a new space for individual belief and conscience. But changes in the understanding of divine sovereignty in the early modern period were accompanied by parallel changes in conceptions of the human subject, which itself came to be reified as something sovereign and incorrigible over its own experience of the world.

In the rest of the article Szerszynski tries to show how a more orthodox theological position – orthodox in relation to both the nature of divine being and eschatology – can avoid both the pagan agonism of Eder and the 'angelic' tendencies of Beck and Habermas. Firstly, he uses John Milbank's interpretation of Augustine's *The City of God* to contrast the original violence of paganism with the original peace envisaged by Christianity. Whereas in pagan thought peace is always a contingent achievement, the staying of violence through violence, in Hebrew and Christian thought the act of creation itself is a peaceful donation of Being, a calling into relationship. Such an ontology, he suggests, can undercut Eder's reification of difference and therefore his agonistic vision of ecological democracy. Secondly, however, Szerszynski points out that the messianic nature of Christian temporal existence would also rule out the possibility of unmediated reflexivity, and of a consensus arising from the power of public reason alone. Against both these views, Szerszynski

offers a 'gothic' version of ecological democracy, one built in the 'complex space' of an associational polity harmonized not through negotiation or propositional agreement but 'musically'.

A final article by Jan Deckers completes the current issue. Deckers argues that the adoption of panexperientialism is necessary for the development of a weak anthropocentric ethic of nature. He opens by exploring arguments linking Christian thought with a strong anthropocentrism which regards nature as only valuable insofar as it is useful for human purposes. Despite a number of qualifications of this familiar argument, Decker concludes that 'any theology which draws a sharp line between active, producing Creator and passive product of creation, and which encourages an analogous understanding of humans versus non-human world, is likely to foster a strong anthropocentric ethic'.

Deckers then discusses various attempts to counter strong anthropocentrism that have been made from within the Christian tradition. He starts by considering theocentric ideas of stewardship, pointing out ways in which they fail to dispense with strong anthropocentrism: that 'stewards' are motivated out of respect for God rather than for nonhumans; that perhaps we need to intervene less in nature rather than more; and that stewardship tends to neglect the creative powers of nonhumans and overplay the role of humans in nature. As an alternative, Deckers then considers the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead – or panexperientialism as he prefers to call it. Like materialism, panexperientialism involves the belief that there is only one kind of substance in the world; however it insists that this substance has mind-like properties. Thus, events in the world cannot simply be explained by reference to efficient causation; entities are internally (and not just externally) related to their past, but they are also open to their future, selecting between alternative routes of development.

Deckers then explores how an ecological ethic could be grounded in this panexperientialism, by taking account of the *depth* of experience available to different beings. He first considers the utilitarian ecological ethic that Birch and Cobb derive from process foundations, but raises some problems with this approach, before developing his own 'weak, egalitarian speciesism'. Deckers defends the idea that it is not only natural but right to value our own species above others, but denies that it is right to discriminate within the human species on the basis of richness of experience. He concludes by reiterating his claim that an adequate ecological ethic can be grounded not in materialism nor dualism but only in such a panexperientialist ontology.

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