

*Can I wear Emily Culpepper's red "Witch
Shoes" to work?*

*An exploration of theological ethics and
their application in the graduate
workplace.*

Department of Theology and Religion
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
August 2010

Eleanor May Ellis

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

This thesis proposes the potential for theological ethics, defining them as based in three key concepts: immanent divinity, interconnection and the web of life, and different constructions of power. These three concepts are explored through an in depth engagement with a seminal publication from four key theologians, Carol Christ, Melissa Raphael, Paul Reid-Bowen and Starhawk. The concepts are interrogated for their ethical implications including discussion on a theological problem of evil, the Goddess' influence in the world, and the web metaphor as a positive model within theological ethics. Additionally, Gaia theory and Chaos theory is adapted to and explored within a theological framework. The ethical framework arrived at is then applied to the issue of graduate employment and the notion of a "theologically friendly" career is delineated. Furthermore, this thesis offers and experiments with the idea of a theological methodology as based in critique of the subjective/objective binary, active promotion of the creative and subjective voice, embodied thought and politically aware scholarship.

Regarding red “Witch Shoes”

Scriptural passages were read by two women (Cohorts)... Emily Culpepper, wearing her bright red “Witch Shoes,” read from the “new” testament, specifically from Pauline epistles. I Re-Call the look of absolute satisfaction and glee on Emily’s face as she intoned from 1 timothy 2:11: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection,” and so on, and on.¹

Regarding thanks

This thesis is sponsored by tea, cake, long evenings with delicious food and bottomless wine, Birmingham Canal network, Maddy Parkes and Deryn Guest.

Without any one of these elements none of this would have happened. You make me want to accomplish Something, be Someone and inspire me strap on those red “Witch Shoes”.

¹ Mary Daly, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (London: The Women’s Press, 1993) p138

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One	
Research Recipes: Theological Methodology.....	10
Chapter Two	
Immanence.....	31
Chapter Three	
Interconnection and the Web of Life	52
Chapter Four	
Power.....	68
Chapter Five	
Wearing the red “Witch Shoes” to work: Theological Ethics and the Workplace	83
Concluding Remarks.....	97
Bibliography.....	102

Introduction



We have been taught that God is male, that he transcends the earth and the body, and that he is the light shining on the chaotic darkness of the natural world. Yet the Goddess is female; the earth, the body, and nature are her image; and the darkness as well as the light are metaphors of her power.¹

The discussion of ethics in Goddess spirituality emerges in an organic way out of lived beliefs and practices. There are two fundamental research findings from this thesis: firstly, that theological ethics do not derive from theoretical discussion that happens once “scriptures” and “authorities” have been consulted, and secondly that theological ethical thought does not produce a definitive reference guide. Immersing myself in the ethical discussions of four key theologians for the last two years has led me to conclude that theological ethics are not clear, concise or static. Some of the most valuable elements of the research for this thesis have taken place outside of the academic setting when I have found words written by Melissa Raphael, Carol Christ, Starhawk and Paul Reid-Bowen infusing my ethical decision making in personal and professional dilemmas. Ethical decision making appears to be woven into the fabric of a theological worldview, where belief and ethical prescription are inseparable and exploring theological ethics is not an ivory tower exercise. Where relevant and appropriate, I will attempt to convey this personal experience of lived theological ethics alongside the more rigorous academic commentary to enhance and ground the discussion.

This thesis endeavours to be a study into an emergent discussion in theology. At present, there does not appear to be a theologically sympathetic code of practice that tells us how to act ethically; what does appear in literature is implicit in discussions on

¹ Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 1997) p89

belief or is limited to a few articles and chapters.² Believing the Goddess is female, that earth, body and nature are her image and that light and dark are both manifestations of her power leads us to a curious place emotionally, rationally and psychologically. Upon reaching this place, certain issues and questions become pertinent which perhaps were not so significant previously: our relation to earth, to society and to each other, our purpose, our motivations and our actions. This is not an experience unique to thealogy, however the issues and questions raised by thealogy are distinctive as they are based in an immanent, distinctly female and intimately interconnected worldview. The reasoning behind decisions we take whilst living in the world is called into question. This thesis will explore reasoning surrounding one of these areas: working life.

How would we approach employment if we were committed to taking the Goddess to work as well as having her dwell behind closed doors at home? What shape would theologically based workplace ethics take? Alliance with the Goddess does put specific constraints and pressures on decision making, although these have not been clearly and consistently delineated, if indeed delineated at all. Rather Goddess ethics, as they

² The two fullest discussions on theological ethics to date come from Carol Christ in *Rebirth of the Goddess*, pp160-177, especially pp166-170, and from Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) pp97-115. A selection of material with implicit ethical reflection: Paul Reid-Bowen covers a significant amount of philosophical ground and presents a discrete picture of theological ethics in *Goddess as Nature: Towards a Philosophical Thealogy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Starhawk explicitly considers "Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion," in Spretnak (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*, pp415-422. See also chapter three "The Ethics of Magic," in *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics: Fifteenth Anniversary Edition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997; previously published 1982, 1988) pp33-44; chapter three "The Sacred: Earth-Centered Values," in *The Earth Path: Grounding your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2004) pp29-40. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991) is often cited as contributing to practical ethical guidance, whilst not explicitly delineating theological ethics. Theological responses to specific dilemmas are often explored, like matters of the environment, ecofeminism, the anti-nuclear movement, reproductive rights etc., however what is missing is an exploration of the idea of a common ethical framework within which these ideas sit.

would impinge upon one's career choices and working life, have instead been discussed in concluding chapters of books, short papers in edited volumes and journals, and are often implicit in treatments of other topics as opposed to explicitly examined.³ There is no dedicated treatment of this topic to date, perhaps exacerbated by the tendency in theology to insist upon a plurality of stances such that no one can categorically say what theological ethics are based upon. This thesis endeavours to provide a basis for such a treatment: exploring theological ethics and dispositions in a structured and sustained manner, concluding with a discussion on the practical application of theological ethics in terms of career choice informed by practical grass-root experience.

Defining terminology

The plurality of approaches to divinity in theology is such that it might be more appropriate to refer to 'theologies' as opposed to one definitive theology. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I have chosen to refer to theology in the singular throughout this thesis, however this does not reflect a lack of insight into the diverse nature of individuals and groups that fall under the theological umbrella.

Cynthia Eller explains the differing understandings of divinity within theology:

There is also theological debate, though rarely very heated, over the nature of the goddess: whether she exists, how she acts or interacts with humans, whether she is metaphor or personality, one goddess or many goddesses, or all of the above.⁴

³See footnote above.

⁴ Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press 1993/1995) p4

There are two broad camps. Non-realist theologians, such as Nelle Morton, Naomi Goldenberg and the earlier work of Carol Christ,⁵ exemplify the Goddess as a metaphor i.e. not having an ontological existence outside of words on a page: 'Each woman makes the Goddess real by allowing the Goddess archetype to do its transformatory work through her own liberated consciousness.'⁶ By contrast, realists have a literal approach to the Goddess: 'treating the Goddess as a divinity having a real existence separate from that of the women who invoke her'.⁷ In addition to the two areas identified, a post-realist camp is emerging which questions the non-realist/realist dichotomy and considers instead the more complex and fluid nature of religious language and in particular language describing the Goddess.⁸

⁵ See Nelle Morton, "The Goddess as Metaphoric Image," in Plaskow and Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989) pp111-118; Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); Carol Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in Christ and Plaskow (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979 and 1992) pp273-287

⁶ Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p56

⁷ Ibid, p54. Realist representations of the Goddess are can be seen with the greatest frequency in writings from Wiccans like De-Anna Alba and increasingly among grass-roots spiritual feminist groups. Additionally, some of the later work of Christ reflects a more realist understanding of the Goddess. See De-Anna Alba, *The Cauldron of Change: Myths, Mysteries and Magick of the Goddess* (Oak Park, IL: Delphi Press, 1993) esp p19; Raphael, "Monotheism in Contemporary Feminist Goddess Religion: A Betrayal of Early Theological Non-Realism?" in Sawyer and Collier (eds.) *Is There A Future for Feminist Theology?* pp139-149; Christ *Odyssey with the Goddess: A Spiritual Quest in Crete* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

⁸ Ruth Mantin and Beverley Clack are key theorists in this area. See Mantin, "Theological Reflections on Embodiment," *Feminist Theology*, 12, 2004, pp212-227, and "Blurring Boundaries and Moving Posts: Where Does a Feminist Stand for Justice?," *Feminist Theology*, 11, 2003, pp293-306; Clack, "'The Many-Named Queen of All': Theology and the Concept of Goddess," in Deborah F. Sawyer and Diane M. Collier (eds.) *Is There A Future for Feminist Theology?* pp150-159 and "The Denial of Dualism: Theological Reflections on the Sexual and the Spiritual," *Feminist Theology*, 10, 1995, pp102-115

Similarly, there is no identifiable consistency between individuals regarding use of the definitive article or capitalisation when referring to divinity, regardless of its realist, non-realist or post-realist status, and no set of rules to follow. I have chosen to refer to this divinity as “the Goddess” for several reasons. Firstly, the definitive article is used by three out of the four key theologians I have chosen to engage with, as is the capitalised “Goddess”. Reid-Bowen, as the exception to this, has coined his own term “Goddess/nature” to compound the connection Goddess feminists make between divinity and the natural world.⁹ I have not chosen to adopt Reid-Bowen’s term because I find “the Goddess” as a term is more readily recognisable and evokes a more emotional and personal response in the reader. I have also chosen to use Goddess as a singular not as a plural; this is a conscious decision, relating to the holistic way immanent divinity and interconnection is understood in thealogy which will hopefully become clearer in chapters two and three. This is not a monotheistic assertion, nor a denial of the multiple manifestations of immanent divinity or the image of the triple Goddess. I use the definite article capitalised “Goddess” to represent the diverse and fluid understanding of divinity in thealogy. Additionally, this is the term I favour in my private musing.

There are other terms used here which need identification and explanation. Where thealogy and theologians refer to those either in the academic sphere or with significant influence on the academy, Goddess feminism and Goddess feminists refer to those outside of the academy, often at the grassroots/political activism end of the spectrum. Starhawk occupies a unique position among the four theologians selected to appear here in that she bridges the two groups: she is firmly a grassroots political activist with the Goddess on her shoulder, and is so extensively published and spoken that her work

⁹ This discussion is continued in chapter two, p37

has informed the work of academics who refer to her work almost routinely and in substance.

It is important to mention that this plurality in theology and Goddess feminism does not inspire animosity in its adherents. In fact, there is almost an insistence on plurality, where theologians and Goddess feminists alike are encouraged to define and explore the meaning of the Goddess for themselves:

What is perhaps most significant about these agreements and disagreements is that dissention is so readily tolerated and the urge to create dogma so readily suppressed...there are opinions. And opinions. And more opinions.¹⁰

Research recipes

Adopting a cookery metaphor, Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown envisage research as a recipe, with the researched and research methods as the ingredients and research methodology as the justification for the research recipe selected; 'how and why this way of doing it was unavoidable – was required by – the context and purpose of this particular enquiry.'¹¹ Envisaging this project as a recipe, in order for it to produce a coherent and successful end product, it does require careful consideration of aims, ingredients and the recipe itself. These elements will be briefly outlined here and expanded up on in the next chapter regarding theological methodology.

¹⁰ Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, p4

¹¹ Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown, *A Student's Guide to Methodology* (London: Sage, 2002) p17

This project has three broad aims. Firstly, I aim to explore, delineate and provide commentary on the notion of a theological ethic or ethics as extrapolated from key theological concepts. The second aim of this piece is to consider the practical efficacy of a theological ethical framework by opening the discussion on theological ethics and employment, with particular reference to graduates who choose to align themselves with the Goddess. Thirdly, I believe that there is the scope in theological literature to explore the notion of a theological methodology, or at least theologically sympathetic methodological approaches. I endeavour to not only outline and commentate upon theology and methodology, but also experiment with employing this methodology in my research.

These aims divide the project into five chapters. Chapter one will brief the reader on methodology and theology, identifying and commenting upon the four main elements I argue shape a theological notion of methodology: critique of the subjective/objective binary, active promotion of the creative and subjective voice, embodied thought and politically aware and ethical scholarship. This chapter will then go on to outline how this will be utilised in my research recipe, including justification of the ingredients selected and how they will be used. Chapters two, three and four will consider three pivotal concepts in theology - immanence, interconnection and power-from-within - and the influence these have on ethical decision making. Chapter five will begin to conclude the thesis by applying the points made in the previous chapters to the practical issue of graduate employment, and will be followed by concluding remarks of a more personal nature and suggesting further research potential.

Due to the diverse character of theology, a full survey of literature that falls into rubric of theology would be larger than this thesis allows. For this project, one seminal work from four key writers has been selected and studied in detail, firstly to deduce the central theological concepts around which chapters have been constructed, and

secondly to analyse these concepts in depth, extrapolating ethical discussion from them. Introduction of these four writers and defence of their selection will follow in the section half of the coming chapter as this is important to forming my own research recipe. Presently, we turn to outlining and assessing the notion of theological methodology.

Chapter One
*Research Recipes:
Theological Methodology*



I did overcome methodolatry, however, by “asking nonquestions and... discovering, reporting, and analyzing nondata.” That is, I asked women’s questions – “questions never asked before” – and offered “ideas that did not fit into pre-established boxes and forms.” So my creativity began to find its full range.¹

The notion of a theological research recipe has been marinating in my research from my first encounter with theology in the academy in 2006. At that time I could not name what it was about theology that led me to a new way of thinking, reading and researching, nor did I have the ability to draw it into a coherent, critical whole. It began with juxtaposing methodological advice we had been given as undergraduates: I would move from one lecture where the use of personal pronouns was virtually taboo, to the theology class where we would learn that ‘[t]he whole personal experience of women is now as much a resource of feminist scholarship as other people’s texts.’² I was struck by the critique of the objective/subjective binary and the active promotion of subjective and creative voices by theologians. A different way of thinking came into view, embodied thought, and although I later discovered that embodied thinking was not unique to theology, the spiritual justification of it was distinctive. The final bow to a theological methodology emerged in the imperative to activism and political transformation: why invest so much time, money and heart in a project if it does not have relevance to the real world? Again, political awareness in scholarship is not unique to theology, however it is a vital element of theological methodology. In what follows, I will expand and comment on these points.

¹ Daly, *Outercourse*, p190, citing Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (London: The Women’s Press, 1973; this edition, 1986) p12, 11

² Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) p13

It is my opinion that material already exists to build a theological methodology and books have been written utilising the spirit of this method. The pertinent question is if this methodology has not been delineated, from where does this 'spirit' emerge? The opening quotation for this chapter is from Mary Daly, a highly influential feminist academic at the inception of theology and throughout its evolution. Daly published *Beyond God the Father* in 1973, and encased in this was her critique of formal theory and "Method" that she believed was treated like a false god, unquestioned, unchanging and omnipresent. In identifying that the choice of method frequently defines the problem instead of the problem defining the method, she opens up the potential to craft new (non)methods to discover the (non)data previously excluded from traditional methodologies. Daly was not a theologian, yet the spirit of this methodological protest infused the work of theologians to come and can be interpreted as inspiring this 'spirit' to emerge in some academics.³

Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook identify four key elements in literature on second wave feminist methods: reflexivity, action orientation, attention to the affective components of the research act and use of the situation at hand.⁴ Theology, as

³ This is a critique she continued throughout her work, not only moving "beyond god the father" towards a position more akin with a spiritual feminist outlook in her absolute advocacy for repressed women's voices and perspectives, but also "beyond god the method" with her continued use of her quite unique writing style which eventually gave rise to *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language, Conjured in Cahoots with Jane Caputi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), detailing her worldview and use of language to construct it.

⁴ Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, "Back to the Future: A Look at the Second Wave of Feminist Epistemology and Methodology," in Fonow and Cook (eds.) *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp1-15, concepts presented pp2-13. Reflexivity defined as: 'the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process' (p2). Action orientation is being constantly aware of politics and interpretation of feminist research by politicians and policy makers. Attention to the affective components of the research, particularly with reference to pleasant and unpleasant emotional by-products of research for the researcher and the researched. Use of the situation at hand relates to creative, spontaneous and improvised methods and research questions.

developing in the context of second wave feminism and feminist theology, instinctively adapted and added to these methodological markers. Already suspicious of second wave feminist methods,⁵ the addition of personal experience as a research method led to much theological work being charged by the mainstream academy as intellectually vacuous, the work of sloppy thinkers unwilling to interrogate their subject matter in the traditional manner.⁶ However it is this creative and “sloppy” work that furthers our understanding of theology introducing fresh concepts and resources, pushing the boundaries of that which is considered academically acceptable. Additionally, to impose rigid structure and traditional norms on theology would be a misrepresentation of defining theological principles:

This open texture of theological discussion is not a mark of intellectual laxity but belongs to a world view that recognizes that knowledge does not stand over and against the individual as dogma ‘out there’, but is embodied and lived and therefore shifts with mood and time.⁷

Suspicion of academy norms, alongside the imperative to explore experience as a research resource and the deepening understanding of immanent divinity has led theology to explore new methods of conducting research.⁸

⁵ Ibid, p13

⁶ Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” p278

⁷ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p13

⁸ Jone Salomonsen’s ‘deep account of Reclaiming Witchcraft’ involved ‘indulging in material as a participant observer’ in an interdisciplinary manner: *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) p11. Tanice Foltz and Wendy Griffin’s personal reflections on ethnographic study of a Dianic coven adds an extra dimension of understanding to their research: “‘She Changes Everything She Touches’: Ethnographic Journeys of Self-Discovery,” in Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (eds.) *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (California: Alta Mira Press, 1996) pp301-329. In fact, I would recommend *Composing Ethnography* to all researchers interested in non-standard qualitative research methods and writing. It is both very useful and fascinating. Additionally, the inclusion of practitioners like Starhawk, Zsuzsanna Budapest and DeAnna Alba as first hand resources and dialogue partners further augments theological discussion.

It is important to consider whether subjecting theological to academic and methodological theorising is actually an appropriate action to take. Raphael voices these concerns in *Introducing Theology*: ‘to theorise theologically might be to adopt the kind of disembodied, elitist God(dess)’s-eye-view on the world that has been to characteristic of patriarchal scholarship.’⁹ The project of analysing theological publications to reflect and interrogate ethical thinking is, I would argue, more theologically friendly than subjecting theology to such methodological thinking. However I would also argue that if it is conducted in an appropriate and sensitive way, methodological discourse is not necessarily anathema to theology. It simply requires considering method in a different way, of recognising common themes in theological discourse and considering those in the light of less rigid theories:

The theological attitude to method closely parallels the ‘anything goes’ approach to science championed by Paul Feyerabend, or the conceptualization of ‘philosophy as conversation’ argued for by Richard Rorty.¹⁰

Just because theology looks or feels different to the author or the audience, it does not mean that understanding, studying and preserving its method or methods and their theory is a futile project.

In a similar manner to Fonow and Cook, the methodological markers I identify are broad themes and the product of repeated observation in theological literature. Additionally, what is presented here is not intended to be a definitive guide to theological methodology. As far as I am aware, the idea of a theological methodology has not yet

⁹ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p11

¹⁰ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p31. Citing Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: Verso, 1978) and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980)

been outlined or appraised,¹¹ therefore what follows is an introductory discussion on the four key themes a theological methodology would be centred around: critique of the subjective/objective binary, active promotion of the creative and subjective voice, embodied thought, and politically aware and ethical scholarship.

Critique of the subjective/objective binary

A theological methodology begins with a critique of objectivity as the gold standard for academic work. Carol Christ, influential theologian and one of the founding mothers of the term theology with her seminal piece “Why Women Need the Goddess” (1979), presents a sustained analysis of objectivity and subjectivity in the first chapter of *Rebirth of the Goddess*. Her critique centres on the assertion that objectivity is a myth, and that this myth is neither possible nor desirable.¹² The main reason she gives for advocating at least recognition of the value of subjectivity in the academy is that what has been traditionally presented as “objective fact” stands upon a plethora of unquestioned assumptions that have had and continue to have serious political implications.¹³ Contesting the absolute value of objectivity, theology finds itself embracing the affective dimensions of religion identified by Reid-Bowen as emotions, embodied-thinking, experience and ritual practice.¹⁴ Theologians approach metanarrative, universalism and authority with deep suspicion and instead are drawn to a more experimental, open-

¹¹ However Reid-Bowen has gone part of the way in making parallels between theology and expository, hermeneutical and constructive approaches to research. *Goddess as Nature*, pp27-28

¹² Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p31

¹³ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p33

¹⁴ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p30

ended and reflexive methodology.¹⁵ In short, methodologically they are predisposed to a subjective approach.

Historically, issue has been taken with the subjective approach and its suitability for the academy. Subjectivity has traditionally been presented as a straw man to objectivity: irrational, chaotic and passionate, which cannot be tested, predicted and controlled and as such is a form of “nonscholarship.” Christ’s insights are fair when considering academic norms at the time she published “Why Women” and context in which she left the established academy in the late 1980s. Elaine Graham et. al. cite the meting out of experiences from theologies of liberation into Western theologies as contributing to the transition from “applied theology” to “theological reflection,” a process which has taken place over the last twenty years.¹⁶ Theological reflection has been developed in a largely Christian context, however its methods are not too dissimilar to those being advanced here. Graham et. al. set out seven methods of reflection: speaking in parables, telling God’s story, writing the body of Christ, speaking God in public, theology-in-action, theology in the vernacular and theology by heart. The final four methods map particularly closely on to theology, with theology by heart being the closest:

God is experienced as immanent, personal and intimate, speaking through the interiority of human experience. Records of such experience – journaling, autobiography, psycho-therapeutic accounts of self – are vehicles of theological reflection and construction.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid, p30

¹⁶ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005) pp2-4.

¹⁷ Ibid, p13

Theological reflection is to explore experience rather than claim authority, to use it this way is considered by some as ‘ideological misuse’ as “good” theological reflection ‘between theology and practice... leaves neither unchanged.’¹⁸

Theology, as a discipline, is transforming even as I write this thesis, and it would be erroneous to still describe it as the monolithic discipline with anti-subjectivity tendencies as Christ did in 1997.¹⁹ As a movement concerned with the context of female-ness and divinity, it makes sense for thealogy to have conflicted with traditional theology of the time and that history still smarts. It would also be naive to claim that this was no longer the case as resistance to thealogy is still strong in places. Yet with transitions towards reflective academia and the continued impact of the wave of post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-feminism, allies of thealogy are growing. Alongside post-structural and postmodern accounts is the changing perception of meaning and subject construction as “nomadic.” Mantin interprets Rosi Braidotti’s idea of the “nomadic subject” with theological eyes, arriving at the notion of subjectivity and sacrality as process.²⁰ The implication of this for methodology is the recognition that even subjectivity is a narrative and the recognition of journey in thought becomes even more significant.

If the critique of the subjective is not unique to thealogy, then firstly why are theologians still having negative experiences in the academy and secondly what is distinctly theological about theological methodology as I am proposing? I think these two questions are partially linked. Other markers of theological methodology, discussed more fully below, single out creativity, active promotion of subjectivity and embodied thought as important elements of theological reflections. Additionally the orientation

¹⁸ Judith Thompson, Stephen Pattison and Ross Thompson, *SCM Studyguide to Theological Reflection* (London: SCM Press, 2008) p26, 27

¹⁹ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, pp35-36

²⁰ Mantin, “Blurring Boundaries and Moving Posts,” citing Rosi Bradotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)

towards political, practical and ethically aware scholarship as consistent with the ethical concerns of theology, see chapters two to four, can make theologians conspicuous.

Active promotion of the creative and subjective voice

As mentioned above, in addition to critiquing the subjective/objective binary, theologians go a step further in privileging the creative and subjective voice. Alongside post modern scholarship theologians have come to embrace written, oral, local, plural, particular, changing and imaginal ways of knowing: 'The whole personal experience of women is now as much a resource of feminist scholarship as other people's texts.'²¹ The subjective voice is actively promoted as a tool to help prevent misunderstanding and aid the facilitation of a more healthy and constructive academic environment.²²

A theological methodology is also deeply revisionist and creative. Particularly with reference to history and prehistory, research is side by side with imagination in re-envisaging a theological worldview. Raphael refers to 'a spiralling underground passage of rewritten, reversed, recycled knowledges', identifying this 'willingness to negotiate

²¹ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p13. Additionally, Norene Vest's assessment of the imaginal as credible methodology is helpful in understanding this approach as she grounds her appraisal in Marija Gimbutas' research. See 'Is Reverie to be Trusted? The Imaginal and the Work of Marija Gimbutas' *Feminist Theology*, 13, 2005, pp239-248

²² Christ, citing Rita Gross, makes the following remark which this undergraduate in particular took solace in: 'Acknowledging that the judgements we make are finite, we can overcome personal bias by situating our work in a community of discourse in which it can be affirmed, amplified, and criticised from standpoints that are both similar and different from our own. If we do not pretend that our standpoints are universal, then we do not claim to present universal truth. This means that criticism of our perspectives is no longer a mark of failure, but an expected, accepted and welcome part of scholarly dialogue.' Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p36, referencing Rita Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) p51

with the past' as 'deeply postmodern'.²³ In any theological text, academic and grass roots, the reader is invited to respond creatively to the material presented to them, generating new possibilities as part of the experimental, open-ended and reflexive process.²⁴

The acceptance and employment of non-traditional work by theology has led to friction in the academy. Emily Culpepper identified this as a problem even twenty years ago: 'There also is the continuing problem that certain sources are more credible in academia, and hence become disproportionately the focus of feminist scholarship.'²⁵ In the quest for academic credibility, theologians have to ask themselves how far they are willing to travel down the creative and subjective path. Beverley Clack and Ruth Mantin utilise the work of women relevant to their discourses. The same citations appear in publication after publication: Nelle Morton, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Grey, Donna Haraway, Melissa Raphael, Lisa Isherwood, Dorothea McEwan, Marija Gimbutas, Judith Plaskow, Rosi Braidotti and the slightly different figures of Carol Christ and Starhawk.²⁶ I cannot speak as to whether Clack and Mantin venture out of this apparent canon of theologians in their research outside of publication, but if one only

²³ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p25, 26

²⁴ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p30

²⁵ Emily Erwin Culpepper, "Contemporary Goddess Theology: A Sympathetic Critique," in Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles (eds.) *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture* (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Press, 1987) pp51-71, p53

²⁶ Carol Christ and Starhawk are mentioned here in a special category due to them being "crossover" figures between the academy and the grass-roots. Christ has written extensively about her abandonment of the traditional academy for her life in Crete and the setting up of the Ariadne Institute for the Study of Myth and Ritual. Having had a presence within the academy and continuing to successfully publish outside it, Christ appears to be "safe" to include in this selection of authors. Starhawk, who has also published heavily from her position in feminist Wicca, is also a crossover figure who not only heads covens, but also has lectured in higher educational institutions.

accesses theology via these selective bibliographies then a very anaemic field surfaces.²⁷ For example, Clack's discussion in "The Many Named Queen of All" on realism and non-realism in theology overlooks voices like De-Anna Alba, a realist monotheist and feminist witch.²⁸ The article in dialogue with Clack in the same volume, Raphael's "Monotheism in Contemporary Goddess Religion,"²⁹ highlights the contribution of Alba to the discussion on realism and non-realism, and polytheism and monotheism in theology.

Raphael and Paul Reid-Bowen appear to have travelled a safer path with their key publications; Reid-Bowen cites Carol Christ, Monica Sjöö with Barbara Mor and Starhawk as his primary resources in *Goddess as Nature*, with secondary insights coming from, among others, Donna Wilshire, Zsuzsanna Budapest and Charlene Spretnak.³⁰ This selection of resources serves his purpose well as his insights come across as considered and appropriate for his purpose, to explore the application of philosophical questions of coherence, ontology and metaphysics in theology.³¹ Raphael's *Theology and Embodiment* is arguably the most complete assessment of theology to date, largely due to the inclusive list of resources she cites in the preface:

²⁷ Mantin does reference outside of this "canon" when recommending further reading on the relationship between Paganism, witchcraft, Wicca, feminism and the Goddess movement, pointing the reader to Margot Adler, Ursula King, Asphodel Long and Kathryn Rowntree, but these voices do not feature heavily in her main discussion. See Ruth Mantin, "'Dealing with a Jealous God: Letting go of Monotheism and 'Doing' Sacrality,'" in Lisa Isherwood (ed.) *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains* (Oakville and London: Equinox, 2007) pp37-49

²⁸ Beverley Clack, "'The Many-Named Queen of All,'" pp150-159

²⁹ Melissa Raphael, "Monotheism in Contemporary Feminist Goddess Religion," pp139-149

³⁰ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p26

³¹ Isherwood praises Reid-Bowen for his 'analytic reading of many... theological texts'; unlike Raphael who intended to address diversity in "theologies," Reid-Bowen's intention was to explore philosophical reflections of theology. Indeed, in 208 pages depth of analysis could have suffered for depth, a pitfall into which Reid-Bowen does not fall. See Lisa Isherwood, "Book Review: Goddess as Nature," *Feminist Theology*, 17, 2009, p262

My account of female sacrality is extrapolated from a selection of spiritual feminist writers (of whom Mary Daly, Jane Caputi and Barbara Mor writing with Monica Sjöö are the most significant). But none of their texts has a normative status. Spiritual feminists value their heterodoxy and, whole of a common temper, their work comes from diverse positions. For example, Starhawk, Naomi Goldenberg, Zsuzsanna Budapest and Diane Stein are all feminist witches (although Goldenberg is more Jungian in her approach than the others, and 'Z' is a Dianic witch). Monica Sjöö is more of a theological realist than Naomi Goldenberg, and Asia Shepsut is less 'woman-identified' than the rest and wants to restore a traditional pagan balance between male and female energies. Or again, Naomi Goldenberg, Alix Pirani, Barbara Koltuv and Clarissa Pinkola Estés have all practised or have been influenced by Jungian psychotherapy, though none of their texts requires readers to be versed in Jungian analysis.³²

The point made in this section is not that all theological writing is narrowly personal, merely confessional, self referential³³ or should begin with a large "I am here" faith statement. The subjective voice is necessary to enhance research where appropriate but it is not always appropriate as the sole research material. What is desirable in theology is a plethora of resources and approaches, from the philosophical enquiry of Reid-Bowen to the more journalistic and personal voice of Starhawk. The primacy of the creative and personal voices is built on a foundation of embodied thought, identified here as the third element of a theological methodology.

Embodied Thought

Embodied thought, as a method, is built upon the subjective/objective binary critique and active promotion of the subjective and creative voice. Additionally, it emerges though they key theological concept of immanence; if the divine is immanent/embodied

³² Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p11-12

³³ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p35

in the physical then to think theologically is to think through the physical.³⁴ Embodied thought asks us to ‘trust the knowledge that comes through the body’ which is third in Christ’s nine ethical touchstones³⁵ and a significant request for scholars who have experienced a traditional, dysfunctional relationship with embodiment.

Reid-Bowen cites the “method” of theology as being rooted in attitudes to embodied thinking. In principle, the immanence of the Goddess in nature makes experience of the Goddess accessible to all women,³⁶ significant for theology where ‘the only authority on which Goddess religion is based is derived from confidence in one’s own experience.’³⁷ Embodied thought, as a concept, was emerging at a similar time to the emergence of theology, and naturally the two converged. Despite having been subjected to scrutiny, it is still a prominent feature of theology and even other discourses. Marcella Althaus-Reid discusses the act of doing theology without wearing underwear:

From the images of the Peruvian Coya women in Latin America, who do not wear underwear under their colourful skirts, comes the metaphor of a Latina, feminist approach to hermeneutics. Coya women kneel in the church mixing the odour of their sexuality with their prayers, while their babies sleep on their backs wrapped in an apron.³⁸

And further:

What difference does it make if that woman is a lemon vendor and sells you lemons in the streets without using underwear? Moreover, what difference would it make if she sits down to write theology without underwear?... The

³⁴ Further discussion on immanence takes place in chapter two.

³⁵ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p167

³⁶ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p30

³⁷ Raphael, “Truth in Flux: Goddess Feminism as a Late Modern Religion,” *Religion*, 26, 1996, p201

³⁸ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004) p83

lemon vendor sitting in the street may be able to feel her sex; her musky smell may be confused with that of her basket of lemons, in a metaphor that brings together sexuality and economics. But the Argentinean theologian may be different. She may keep her underwear on at the moment of prayer, or whilst reflecting on salvation; and maybe the smell of her sex doesn't get missed with issues of theology and economy.³⁹

Removing underwear to 'write theology with feminist honesty' is what Althaus-Reid calls 'Indecent Theology.'⁴⁰

Embodied thought must be an element of the creative process, not be the whole process itself. Far from being a superficial form of scholarship, Christ claims that embodied thought works in tandem with other traditional research necessities like conscientious research and meticulous analysis, transforming them so we write with a voice constructed out of empathy, grounded in the body and interwoven with scholarly analysis.⁴¹

Politically aware and ethical scholarship

Christ comments that theological scholarship must be passionate, interested and aimed at transformation,⁴² and taking this into consideration brings us to the fourth point in our methodology. The aims of theological research should be in line with the ethical outlook of theology, what I have endeavoured to delineate in the chapters following. As

³⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) p1

⁴⁰ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p2

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p36

⁴² *Ibid*, p34

grounded in experience and subjectivity, theology has an intense awareness of its ethical and political context:

The political is a catchword for collective feminist action and worldly praxis. A concept of politics informs all Goddess feminist projects and theologies. For the Goddess feminist, the concepts of deity, femaleness and nature are all understood to be politically nuanced.⁴³

Research happens in dialogue with its context. Its subjects and aims should not only be to increase the body of knowledge for research's sake, it should be practically engaged with realms outside of the paper whether explicitly or implicitly. I anticipate being asked, "How is your work going to effect change in the world around you?," and I expect other theologians to be able to answer that question. Additionally, when employing a theological method, one must always be mindful of the implications of the work being written and consider how it could be utilised both for positive and negative effects.

Ultimately, a theological research recipe has these defining qualities: it is passionate, interested, embodied, based in experience, creative, experimental and reflexive. A theological methodology does not exclude participant and grass roots material, nor does it shy away from other non-traditional media such as journals, poetry, ritual or song. It does not recoil from away from "confessional" groups such as perspectives of Dianic and Reclaiming witches, Jewish, Christian or Muslim feminists, or those involved with Goddess pilgrimage. Reid-Bowen was faced with the possibility that he may be *doing* and writing theology the longer his research continued, and fully embraces this resource in his work.⁴⁴ In fact, I would go so far as to say that use of material of this nature should form an integral part of a theological research recipe to ensure a fuller and more rounded view is appreciated.

⁴³ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p25

⁴⁴ Ibid, p9

Upon these key methodological points research projects may be developed, although these ideas are not exhaustive or authoritative. I foresee these ideas shifting and moving on as the echoes of the second wave agenda fade and contemporary critical thought, for example post-feminisms and post-structuralism, questions the assumptions of early theology. This is dependent on theology moving on from the second wave background and reflecting on the context in which it finds itself today. This will only happen with the continued work of the current generation, Clack, Mantin, Raphael and Reid-Bowen are a few examples, and the generation after that. It is my aim to allow these methodological markers to critically inform this research project, in the hope that it will help create a passionate, interested, creative and experimental contribution to the theological dialogue and an under theorised issue.

Mix 150g theological ethics with 75g career choices... (My recipe)

My research recipe began by conceptualizing the finished dish: what ethical insights does theology provide a graduate wanting to craft a career with the Goddess on her shoulder? This was initially planned to be a project in two halves: firstly, to explore the presentation of ethics and ethical decision making in a selection of theological literature and utilise this to produce a working ethics of Goddess spirituality; and secondly, to use the ethical guide produced in the first section to explore what pressures an alliance with the Goddess places on career choices for young women. The concluding section on employment grounds the academic explorations in chapters two, three and four. The research material for this section is largely experiential; the insights gained from practically applying theological ethics to personal career decisions in my life and the lives of several peers I have been in dialogue with are invaluable. As young graduates striving for theologically friendly careers we have tested what is outlined and critiqued below, whether we knew it or not. With the limited space afforded by an MPhil thesis,

the natural choice appeared to be to focus the main body of the research on the theoretical ethics discussion and use the concluding remarks to ground the discussion in personal experience.

One of the most important stages of recipe development involved choosing my ingredients. The main body of this project on theology and ethics written from an in-depth engagement with four key writers in the field: Starhawk, Carol Christ, Melissa Raphael and Paul Reid-Bowen. Despite her confessional stance being that of a feminist witch, Starhawk is consistently referenced by other writers in the field and has published extensively from a practitioner, grass roots, political activist stance. Furthermore, she has explicitly explored the idea of ethics in Goddess feminism in various works; her paper from *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* entitled "Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion" will inform the discussion presented here, as well as *Dreaming the Dark*, which effectively 'combin[es] the world of magic and spirituality with the world of political and social change.'⁴⁵

Carol Christ's *Rebirth of the Goddess* was written to be her first systematic theology of the Goddess feminist movement and encompasses matters of definition, resources, history, relationships to the world and to each other, and ethics.⁴⁶ Her article "Why Women Need the Goddess" published in 1979, positions her as a determining figure in the Goddess movement, a figure who straddles the academic/grass roots divide, and a prolific publisher in the field. For this reason alone, I felt it important that Christ's insights into Goddess spirituality took an important place in my exploration and I chose

⁴⁵ <http://www.starhawk.org/writings/dreaming-dark.html>; accessed 18th March 2009

⁴⁶ Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p xv

to specifically engage with *Rebirth of the Goddess* as her most complete account of theology to date.

Melissa Raphael and Paul Reid Bowen are two figures who sit firmly in the academic realm and their key publications *Theology and Embodiment* and *Goddess as Nature* have played significant roles in the development of theology as an academic discipline in the United Kingdom. Raphael's focus on the immanence of the Goddess within female embodiment was nourished by her second aim to bridge the gap between academic and participant texts. She has a similar approach in her chapter on "Theology and Ethics" in *Introducing Theology*, which will also inform my discussion. This has been echoed by Reid Bowen's use of similar texts, however he explicitly utilises the work of those Goddess feminists who 'self-consciously mak[e] ontological truth claims through their use of metaphorical Goddess talk.'⁴⁷ He endeavours to open a dialogue between theology and philosophy, considering matters of metaphysics, coherence, time, cosmology and ethics.

Selecting such a diverse group of writers presents its own challenge, whilst providing breadth of insight do they work together as an ensemble? It is a difficult exercise when they each have different aims and audiences. Writing with such density and impressive technicality, it is evident that Raphael and Reid-Bowen are appealing to academic audiences. Conversely, Christ critiques much philosophical language as 'unnecessarily difficult and inaccessible' and strives to 'express the meaning I have discovered in the simplest language I can find.'⁴⁸ There are some subjects where only one writer provides sustained analysis, for example discussion on chaos from Raphael in chapter four and

⁴⁷ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p36-37

⁴⁸ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p xv

where appropriate her insights have been supplemented by others. A conscientious reader would also draw parallels between chaos and Starhawk's discussion on power-from-within, therefore these two ideas share the same chapter space. However on the subject of immanent divinity (chapter two) there was so much material from each writer, each with different purposes: to critique, to inspire, to illustrate and to provide new analyses. Whilst it might have been an easier project to remain in one semantic field and concerning myself either with academics or more grassroots theologians, I consider the breadth of my resources as enhancing this research and exemplifying a variety of theological opinions. Rather than keeping these diverse writers separate, I have brought them together thematically under the broad headings "immanence," "interconnection," and "power-from-within," chapters two to four respectively. These were selected due to their prominence in the four publications, to the point where one could argue them to be key theological concepts, and it appeared evident that these concepts had wider implications for ethics. Therefore a significant portion of the research for this project has taken place away from the page; presented here is a thematic commentary on immanence, interconnection, power-from-within and their influence on ethics an employment, as informed by Raphael, Reid-Bowen, Christ and Starhawk.

To begin with key beliefs and interrogate them for ethical insight appears to best reflect how theological thought regarding ethics has progressed thus far. Theological ethics do not appear to be separate from lived experience and ethical thinking is not something which happens once scriptures and authorities have been consulted, to be written and referred back to when a new dilemma presents itself. I agree with Raphael when she proposes that feminist ethics are practiced in a contextual and situated manner.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Raphael submits that whilst feminist ethics is a 'diverse terrain', it is unified by the focus on context and situation. She argues this focus is in part reactionary to traditional moral philosophical concentration on 'androcentric, disembodied and often absolutist ethical deliberations,' citing Carol Gilligan as a key

Indeed, I foresee this project being critiqued for attempting to artificially lay out an ethics of theology outside of a specific context or situation. However it is important to work through the beliefs that feed the idea of a theological ethic as well as develop at least a working framework within which one can begin to think and reason both ethically and theologically. This is crucial in beginning to understand the interplay between belief and action. Furthermore, it would be useful on a practical level to have a framework for ethical decision making, or at the very least a considered selection of relatively definite ethical statements which would find broad consensus amongst theologians. Raphael has outlined the basis for theological ethics with reference to Christ and Starhawk in particular, and explored ecofeminism and reproductive choice as two examples of theological ethics in action. This project has broader primary resources and is similarly considered in terms of lived decision making.

Thus we move to begin the project proper. The discussion of immanence and divinity was the most prominent notion in the work of my primary resources and it is from a belief of immanent divinity that much theological thought stems. Theology eclectically, inconsistently and often paradoxically draws upon religio-philosophical categories such as monotheism, polytheism, pantheism and theism,⁵⁰ yet despite this common threads can be identified: theological divinity is often singular not multiple, and emphasises 'immanence, proximity, presence or in-dwelling of the divine.'⁵¹ Some of the quotations I find most stirring locate their origin in the belief of an immanent, interconnected divinity. The reader will find these favoured excerpts scattered throughout this thesis,

instigator of feminist ethics in the early 1980s. *Introducing Theology*, p97. Gilligan, along with Nel Noddings, Sara Ruddick and others, represent one strand of feminist ethics, the ethics of care, whilst others are more critical of "care" as an essentialist notion. Regardless of this, the contextual and situated practice of ethics is a common thread across feminist ethics.

⁵⁰ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p57

⁵¹ Ibid, p70

especially focused in chapter five and concluding remarks. Before we move on to discussing immanence and its relevance to ethics, it is necessary to briefly explore how immanence is manifested in theology, the discussion of which opens the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Immanence



Yet another form of consciousness is possible... This consciousness I call immanence – the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting, and infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance.¹

In *Dreaming the Dark*, Starhawk explores the dichotomy of immanence and estrangement. Estrangement, as a form of consciousness, finds its power in the ability to compartmentalise the world into abstraction and actual, creating the urge to control the actual: 'True value is... found in some heaven, some abstract otherworld... Human needs, drives, and desires are... dangerous impulses in need of repression and control.'² Estrangement is intrinsically linked to discourses on domination and power over; when estrangement is the dominant form of consciousness in a society, humans become strangers to elements of themselves, to each other and to nature:

We see the world as made up of separate, isolated, nonliving parts that have no inherent value. (They are not even dead – because death implies life.) Among things inherently separate and lifeless, the only power relationships possible are those of manipulation and domination.³

She argues that estrangement permeates our (western) culture in fields such as religion, education, science, technology, attitudes to the environment, politics, sexuality, even down to the language we use, and is essentially damaging to ourselves and the world.

Immanence is an alternative form of consciousness, based on 'the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting, and infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance.'⁴ In a culture of immanence all issues are interconnected and value is found bodies, in nature, and in this world as

¹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p9

² *Ibid*, p10

³ *Ibid*, p5

⁴ *Ibid*, p9

opposed to an abstract otherworld. She prefers to use the image “Goddess” to represent the abstract term “immanence” firstly as ‘it evokes sensual and emotional, not just intellectual responses’ and secondly because ancient Goddess myths and symbols speak to her ‘of the powers of connectedness, sustenance, healing and creating.’⁵ She does however freely admit that many people may prefer other images or no image at all, which is also entirely acceptable. It is this belief in immanence (or Goddess if you prefer) that is arguably the central conviction of Goddess spirituality and theologians have dedicated much time to exploring the meaning and manifestation of immanence in theology. Immanence, as a theological form of consciousness, has become infused with notions of divinity. The concept of divinity as immanent in the world is the dominant image in theology, whether understood in a realist, non-realist or post-realist manner.⁶ This chapter will firstly outline the place of immanent divinity in theology as represented by Christ, Starhawk, Raphael and Reid-Bowen, and secondly explore the influence a belief in immanence has on ethical thought.

Immanence

A theological understanding of immanence begins with an understanding that the divine is embodied in the natural world, as opposed to being a transcendental phenomenon entirely other to this world. Whether this divinity is conceived of as a metaphor or as having some kind of reality which can be invoked, the link made between divinity and nature is evident: divinity is manifest in and reflected by the natural world. Reid-Bowen reflects this connection between the Goddess and the natural world in coining the term “Goddess/nature”. For many Goddess feminists, the Goddess is more than simply

⁵ Ibid, p11, 4

⁶ See Introduction, pp5-7

embodied in the natural world, 'but rather the whole of nature, the cosmos and the world are theologically conceived as being the living body of the Goddess.'⁷ The world is the Goddess' mode of being.⁸

However it is not necessarily true that Goddess and nature are two interchangeable nouns for the same thing: 'referring to the world as the Goddess is to say something significant about the world, rather than simply using an equivalent term.'⁹ It would be semantically correct to describe the 5000 barrels of oil a day leaking into the Gulf of Mexico as having a destructive effect on the body of the Goddess,¹⁰ and describing the natural world in this manner indicates an emotional and spiritual commitment to it. This term not only attributes sacrality to the natural world, implying the ultimate value in preserving and promoting that sacral nature as the embodiment of divinity, it causes the believer to reconsider their relationship to the natural (divine) world.

Immanence also describes the relationship of the Goddess to the world. Reid-Bowen argues that the Goddess' relation to the world is essentially pantheistic. Historically, pantheism has had pejorative connotations as part of a legacy from western Judeo-Christian scholarship; positions that emphasise 'immanence, proximity, presence or indwelling of the divine' have tended to be appraised as 'flawed, misguided and/or vacuous.'¹¹ However identifying the connection between theology and pantheism is important as theologians like Reid-Bowen have utilised work on pantheism to analyse

⁷ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p70

⁸ *Ibid*, p72

⁹ *Ibid*, p73

¹⁰ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/science_and_environment/10093904.stm ; accessed 13th May 2010

¹¹ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p70

and develop theology on a philosophical level in terms of consistency and coherence. Furthermore it also assists theology in debating and analysing the ways in which the Goddess may (or may not) act in the world. Christ asks these questions of theology:

If the Goddess is found in nature, is she simply an image for the sum total of natural processes? If the Goddess is found in the deepest self, is She simply an image for the deepest self? ... Is it being denied that the Goddess is in some sense a personality who cares about the world?¹²

Christ comes to the conclusion that the Goddess is at once all of these things: an image of nature and natural processes, an image for the deepest self, and a personality that cares about the world. This point is picked up and continued later in this chapter, especially considering to what extent an immanent divinity can influence and therefore be held responsible for our actions. Absolutes and dualisms do not accurately reflect theological thought which is often complex and paradoxical, and this extends to how theologians understand the perceived relationship between immanence and pantheism. Theology cannot comfortably be positioned in the pantheism category and Reid-Bowen does not attempt to do this. Instead, as Reid-Bowen has it, pantheism is both an ally and tool with which we can safely unlock deeper philosophical and spiritual understanding, although this is certainly not a common assumption.

Christ prefers the term panentheism as developed from process theology to describe that all is *in* God(dess).¹³ In Christ's later work, she utilises process theology in a similar way to how Reid-Bowen uses pantheism to unlock theological understandings of divinity.¹⁴ Process theology can guide theology in understanding a fully immanent

¹² Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p103

¹³ *Ibid*, p104

¹⁴ See *She Who Changes: Reimagining the Divine in the World* (New York and Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) esp. pp197-226; "Does Feminism Need a Metaphysic?: Toward a Feminist Process Paradigm," *Feminist Theology*, 13, 2005, pp281-299; and "Ecofeminism and Process Philosophy," *Feminist Theology*, 14, 2006, pp289-310.

divinity intrinsically related to yet unable to control¹⁵ or intervene¹⁶ in the world in ways we would traditionally conceive. God is *in* everything in the world, therefore God is limited by the laws of nature and of history. God's action in the world is based upon persuasion rather than coercion:

God is "in" every being in the world. As the ground of being and life, God attempts to "persuade" or inspire all beings to respect being and life and to seek the greatest harmony of the whole. God as the ground of being is also "in" those who violate the web. But God does not inspire their actions or condone them. Those who violate the web of life do so by ignoring or denying the "persuasion" that God is offering them. When this happens, God's body is diminished. God suffers.¹⁷

Christ's discussion on process theology in *Rebirth of the Goddess* is significantly lacking in critical commentary and explanation of her adaptation of it for theological usage. When discussing how she finds process theology 'helpful for understanding the nature and power of the Goddess' she might well have added the suffix "-dess" to the statements she has made about the God of process theology. What is missing in her commentary is an explanation of how her usage differs from process theologians and feminist process theologians, and the critique of process thought is confined to a footnote.¹⁸ Reid-Bowen warns against adopting rather than adapting process

¹⁵ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p105

¹⁶ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p76

¹⁷ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p105

¹⁸ In fact, in the later paper "Ecofeminism and Process Philosophy" she goes on to claim that process philosophy is implicitly feminist and ecofeminist 'because it offers alternatives to dualistic habits of thought in which the subordination of women and nature have been taken for granted.' (p292) The project now is to make explicit those implicit claims. So are we to accept process philosophy blindly or utilise it as a critical friend? Additionally, I find it unsettling that in "Does feminism need a metaphysic?" she refers to the 'inclusively divine power as "Goddess/God" for the purposes of philosophical discussion.' (p284). She does submit that 'we must also learn to name divine power as 'Goddess', 'God-She', 'Shekhina', and 'Sophia' in prayer and ritual because of the metaphoric power of female imagery to shatter the hold of God as dominating male Other in our conscious and unconscious minds' (p284), although this is quite the departure from the days of "Why Women Need the Goddess". One does have to wonder if this is an inconsistency or a fair development of her work. However given Reid-Bowen's assessment of process metaphysics and theology, as above, I am more inclined to agree with him and adopt a more critical view.

metaphysics, warning the reader that '[a]lthough there are striking affinities' between the two points of view, 'there are also many tensions that need to be resolved.'¹⁹

Additionally, immanence has significant implications regarding accessibility of divinity. Ordinary objects can be regarded as sacred as divinity is immanent in the natural and the ordinary, therefore communion with the divine can be mediated through the everyday items and entities. Theology does not have need of specially sanctified objects and persons to intercede for lay people.²⁰ Since the divine is not "other", understanding that which embodies the divine is fundamental to comprehending the divine itself: 'the medium becomes integral to the meaning of the experience.'²¹ This imperative to comprehend the world in which the Goddess is immanent is what ensures theology remains connected with this world and not necessarily confined to ivory towers and consecrated halls.

Importantly, theology emphasises the embodiment of the Goddess within all things, despite much literature up to this point being largely concerned with the embodiment of divinity in women and nature. Reid-Bowen's perceived unease at the possibility he 'may be doing or writing feminist theology' and his recognition that his sex/gender is both a resource and problem for his doing theology need not cause too much anxiety as, in theory, the Goddess is immanent in him, his interconnected web and his work.²² I find Reid-Bowen's self conscious assessment much more satisfactory than Christ's discussion on the male body in *Rebirth of the Goddess* where she appears to import

¹⁹ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p77

²⁰ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p23

²¹ Ibid, p23

²² Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p9, 13

essentialist notions of women/mothers on to men/fathers.²³ The issue I take with Christ here is her pretence to universal accessibility, when in reality the commentary in *Rebirth of the Goddess* does not extend much beyond birth-giving goddesses and sacred nurturing fathers.²⁴ If thealogy is to empower women into “doing woman” with the Goddess on their shoulder in any creative way which suits them, then equally the Goddess is on the shoulder of men to also “do man” in theologically appropriate ways which should not limit them to nurturing father images. I may not be able to contribute much to a discussion about the effect of the immanent Goddess on men (all types), their influence on the web of life, and power-from-within, however I would be significantly interested in listening in on that dialogue.²⁵

In spite of the criticism of essentialism, Christ is skilled at the more emotive and inspirational writing. The most stirring and comprehensive outline of the immanentist view I have found in thealogy comes from her, summarising the general view and describing the relationship between the Goddess, the natural world and us:

As fully immanent, the Goddess is embodied in the finite, changing world. She is known in rock and flower and in the human heart, just as in theologies of

²³ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p94

²⁴ Additional evidence of this critique can be seen in a range of publications, although one could argue that a turn towards process philosophy has mellowed this tendency. “Does feminism need a metaphysic?” (2005) hosts a discussion on this specific topic, where Christ affirms that women are ‘free and creative individuals,’ (p286) also conceding that men and women are both ‘embodied, related and interconnected in the web of life.’ (p286) However I do struggle with this turn to process philosophy as with it emerges with a simultaneous drop in the use of the term “Goddess”, favouring instead the term “Goddess/God”, see “Ecofeminism and Process Philosophy” (2006). We can also see the relationship she paints between male attributes and power versus the potential difference that female attributes and power in *She Who Changes* (2003).

²⁵ Reid-Bowen has opened this area of discussion in *Goddess as Nature*, interpreting thealogy from a gender traitor point of view (p13), however it has been understandably slow in developing further. There is an insightful article from Daniel Cohen reflecting the influence of Asphodel Long and the Goddess on him and his understanding of the Goddess. It is not explicitly theological, but points towards several key themes on the men in feminism/men in thealogy debate. “Feminist Theology, Men and the Goddess: Reminiscences and Opinions,” *Feminist Theology*, 11, 2002, pp27-34

immanence. As the organism uniting the cells of the earth body, the Goddess is the firm foundation of changing life. As the mind, soul, or enlivening power of the whole body, the Goddess is intelligent, aware, alive, a kind of “person” with whom we can enter into relation. Thus the Goddess can “speak” to us through the natural world, through human relationships, through communities, through dreams and visions, expressing her desire to manifest life ever more fully in the world.²⁶

Using more confessional language, this description for me really captures the passion in theology regarding the Goddess as immanent in the natural world, and also the method through which the Goddess “communicates” with us as part of the natural world. The final comment, how the Goddess expresses her desire to manifest life ever more fully in the world, also introduces the ethical dimension to theology by conveying notion that certain states of affairs are more desirable than others.

Ethics and immanence

If the Goddess is immanent in all living things, then all life is sacred and requires care and protection from harm.²⁷

In theology there appears to be little which is fixed and absolute. Ethical thinking is not an exception to this. This section moves from the relatively established belief of immanent divinity to the flexible interpretation of immanence for ethical thought, as will be the structure of chapter three, interconnection. These four points will structure the discussion on ethics and immanence:

- Redefinition of the sacred and profane;
- How can an immanent Goddess be active in the world?;
- A theological problem of evil (the good, the bad and the Goddess);

²⁶ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p106

²⁷ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p115

- Practicalities of ethics of immanence.

Redefinition of the sacred and profane

In choosing to view the world as the body of the immanent Goddess, theology reframes the traditional sacred/profane binary. This is a key project in theology; investigating the liberation of the female sacred is a fundamental theme for Raphael in *Thealogy and Embodiment*. Here, Raphael argues that it is not simply a reversal of the binary or a denial of the term which is occurring in Goddess spirituality, it is a more complex process which sees the profane being sketched as that which denies the full flourishing of the embodied sacred.

Sacrality can be context dependent. Raphael gives the example of blood shed in menstruation versus blood shed in war,²⁸ the same object can be considered both sacred and profane, depending on the context it is presented in. Factors that re-shape our concept of the sacred are context that are 'erotic, biophilic experiences associated with (but not automatic to) being a woman', as opposed to 'revealed then highly elaborated codes of law.'²⁹ The attribute of sacrality is fluid. What makes the sacred profane are actions which diminish the body of the Goddess:

When the sacred is not only a social construction of meaning and value but also a true revelation of the divine, it suffuses human values and practices with healing 'biophilia'. In other words, the sacred mediates the healing/holiness of divine presence. That presence entails ethical obligations – namely that the sacred should not be treated as if it were profane. *Indeed, divine immanence in*

²⁸ Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment*, p36

²⁹ Ibid, p36

*nature means that nothing should be used as if it existed to serve the patriarchal will to power.*³⁰

It is a common misconception that theology is devoid of ethics and justice, however in light of statements like the previous one, claims like this simply do not stand up.³¹

Sacred actions are therefore those actions that facilitate the full manifestation of the immanent Goddess, nourishing not neglecting the body of the Goddess as nature. Indeed, if we choose to make the sacred profane, we are diminishing ourselves *and* the Goddess because firstly the Goddess is immanent in nature, including humanity, and also because Goddess spirituality finds the Goddess manifested in interconnections in the web of life.³²

Christ reflects on the work of Sallie McFague and echoes McFague's question: 'What if we dared to think of our planet and indeed the entire universe as the body of God?'³³ McFague tells us that we would 'love and honor the body, our own bodies, and the bodies of all other life-forms on the planet.'³⁴ Despite critiquing McFague for not going far enough in her analysis and neglecting the specific state of female bodies in relation to the body of God by framing her interpretation within Christian incarnation, Christ echoes McFague's sentiment:

³⁰ Ibid, p49. My emphasis.

³¹ Mary Grey critiques theology as being devoid of ethics and justice in *Introducing Feminist Images of God* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). Christ responds to Grey by critiquing her with a lack of attention to detail, describing Grey's work confused, patronising, and criticises her for not reading *Rebirth of the Goddess* carefully enough. See: Christ, "Musings on the Goddess and Her Cultured Despisers: Provoked by Naomi Goldenberg," *Feminist Theology*, 13, 2005, pp143-149, p3. Rosemary Radford Ruether forms similar criticisms in *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth and Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

³² Starhawk, "Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion," p417. Ethics and interconnection in theology will be discussed in the next chapter, however at this point it should be noted that immanence and interconnection are intrinsically linked in a theological worldview.

³³ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) p19

³⁴ Ibid, p16

Such an image would challenge the traditional view that God is in heaven and we are going there when we die, and thus do not have to worry too much about destroying the earth body... Our understanding of divine power is transformed as it is clearly recognized as present within the finite and changing world. The image of the earth as the body of the Goddess can inspire us to repair the damage that has been done to the earth, to women, and to other beings in dominator cultures.³⁵

Resacralising the physical as the body of the Goddess has wide reaching implications for ethical decision making. Decisions regarding raw materials, waste, use of space, energy, animal and human welfare, and even decisions as broad as relating to war and as individual as a healthy lifestyle would all be implicated in an ethical shift towards ethical immanence. Events occurring whilst writing this thesis led me to think about applying these ideas in my life, for example who the Goddess would vote for in a general election, which policies lead towards repairing the body of the Goddess and preventing that which damages it. The ethics of immanence demand us to actively consider issues of this nature; the ethical Goddess does not withdraw from the fight for the body of the Goddess, she votes, she is politically aware, she opens controversial conversations, she fills her recycling bags and looks for the “red tractor” when in the supermarket.³⁶ In short, she is not inert, she is active.

Manifesting ethics based in immanence is not as arduous as the above implies. If divinity is intrinsic in the natural world, then the natural world deserves to be treated as divine, experiencing ‘deeper pleasures [and] richer joys’.³⁷ As the body of the Goddess surrounds us, the ethical Goddess allows herself to enjoy that which she finds pleasurable: trying to see something she has never seen before each day, walking in the

³⁵ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p90, 91

³⁶ ‘The Red Tractor is an independent mark of quality that guarantees the food we are buying comes from farms and food companies that meet high standards of food safety and hygiene, animal welfare and environmental protection.’ <http://www.redtractor.org.uk>; accessed 17th May 2010.

³⁷ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p12

elements, enjoying drinks with friends, successfully helping a client at work. Immanent divinity requires us to respect and take responsibility for the natural world as sacred, enjoying and representing it as necessary.

How can an immanent Goddess be active in the world?

If the Goddess is immanent in the world and natural cycles, then how can the Goddess influence action or intend certain choices and states? If the Goddess was not in some way active in the world or influential in it, then there would not be such an imperative placed upon us to act in an ethical manner as there would be in a transcendent worldview. This relates to the debate referenced in the introduction regarding whether a pantheistic Goddess was purely an image of nature or whether it could be a personal presence with which one could enter into communion. The notion of integrity is central to understanding how the Goddess shapes and influences behaviour; in an immanent worldview, justice is based upon integrity as opposed to authority.³⁸

The ethics of immanence call for integrity of self, in our choices, our relationships with each other and with the world. It requires consistent application of the principles of immanence, including positive and negative consequences inherent in our choices, and relies upon these effects to regulate behaviour. According to a transcendent worldview, consequences for action tend to be preordained by 'some abstract otherworld',³⁹ leaving justice in the hands of an entity outside of our system. Certainly we can act with

³⁸ Ibid, p34

³⁹ Ibid, p10

integrity within a transcendent worldview, however what Starhawk labels as the ethics of integrity in an immanent worldview runs much deeper:

They are not based on absolutes imposed upon chaotic nature, but upon the ordering principles inherent in nature. Nor are they based on rules that can be taken out of context. They recognize that there are no *things* separate from context.⁴⁰

This notion of rules in context is essential to the understanding of theological ethics, with great importance being placed upon appreciating context and situation before absolutes and supreme fixed law. This is not to say that there is no framework for theological ethics; if this were true then this project would be futile. However the ethical framework I am proposing for theology is based upon three broad principles, immanence, interconnection and power, that are open to interpretation and a healthy dose of context.

The ethics of immanence are not negative ethics, with a list of commandments to be obeyed or be subject to punishment either in this life or an afterlife. The consequences of actions are integral to the choice made, just as the Goddess is immanent in processes and interconnections in the world. They are not based upon guilt, but rather based on pride and empowerment: 'I pick up beer cans not because I feel rotten when I don't, but because I feel empowered when I do.'⁴¹ Furthermore, the interplay between immanence and integrity has praxis woven into it: 'Life, being sacred, demands our full participation. The ethical person engages in life and does not withdraw from it.'⁴² The Goddess cannot directly and specifically intervene in worldly affairs, however by virtue of being immanent in the world imbues it with value, making behaviours which enhance

⁴⁰ Ibid, p35

⁴¹ Ibid, p37

⁴² Ibid, p42

natural life ultimately good and desirable. Choosing to act with integrity within an immanent worldview is how the Goddess influences our actions.

It is also important to note that immanence and integrity also drive the nature of issues that concern theological ethics. The distinct overlap between theology and discourses on ecofeminism is unsurprising, and in particular religious and spiritual responses to ecological dilemmas.⁴³ Challenges surrounding embodiment, in particular women's bodies, are frequent topics of discussion for theologians and Goddess feminists; Raphael contextualises her discussion on theology and ethics in debates over ecofeminism and reproductive choice.⁴⁴ Taken to its logical conclusion, a fully immanentist worldview might lead to the privileging of non-human interests not as a special issue but as a matter of principle. This is not something that Goddess feminists operating with integrity should not draw away from. However operating within a theological framework of immanentist ethics is not a straightforward task:

[t]he Goddess can be enriched or diminished by human activity... Ethically, religiously and practically, though, these points can be highly demanding. If ethical, metaphysical and religious convictions of Goddess feminists are drawn towards ultimate coherence, a sweeping vision of human purpose can be delineated.⁴⁵

The sweeping vision of human purpose of which Reid-Bowen speaks relates to the notion that the Goddess (as nature) has immanent divinity, which can and ought to be

⁴³Raphael uses ecofeminism as an example of theological ethics in action in *Introducing Theology*, pp103-107. Gudmarsdottir implicitly refers to immanentist belief in her discussion on ecofeminism, maternal images and ecorape; Sigridur Gudmarsdottir, "Rapes of Earth and Grapes of Wrath: Steinbeck, Ecofeminism and the Metaphor of Rape," *Feminist Theology*, 18, 2010, pp206-222. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein's edited volume *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990) contains many relevant contributions to religious and spiritual responses to ecological dilemmas, as does Carol Adams (ed.) *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*: London and New York: Continuum, 1994)

⁴⁴ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, pp103-110

⁴⁵ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p168

nurtured, and attention should be directed to 'wholes greater than oneself'.⁴⁶ However it is evident that actions considered immoral in this worldview still occur, despite the claim of immanent divinity. How does an immanent worldview digest the apparent evil in this world?

A theological problem of evil? (The good, the bad, and the Goddess)

Traditionally, the problem of evil is set up as a dilemma between the God of theism who is omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient, and the given presence of evil: how can the existence of all these elements be reconciled? Despite the attributes of the Goddess in theology being significantly different to that of the God of theism, we can still articulate an albeit different problem of evil: if the Goddess is immanent in all that exists, then does that mean the Goddess is also immanent in evil? Does this mean that a theological worldview condones natural and moral evils as part of an immanent worldview?

Firstly, by assuming an immanent worldview, we have to accept that the Goddess is immanent in all things, as we have previously established, including what we consider to be good and evil. However this also involves accepting that as 'the nonpersonal organic whole of nature' the Goddess does not intend particular circumstances and events, however is immanently present in all circumstances and events. Thus Reid-Bowen:

[t]he Goddess encompasses all the states of nature; the sum total of human suffering may be explicated in terms of the natural processes and cycles of the

⁴⁶ Ibid, p169

Goddess; the Goddess is both 'creative and destructive', 'light and death'; and, to all theological intents and purposes, the Goddess is amoral.⁴⁷

So if the Goddess is amoral, how can we claim certain actions as "good" and "evil", and how can we claim to be applying a framework of theological ethics?

It is necessary for theologians to redefine the notion of evil outside of traditional theological and moral reasoning, within a theological framework and reflecting upon the nature of immanent divinity. Reid-Bowen defines the concept of evil in theology as 'anything that severely inhibits the flourishing of the Goddess as nature.'⁴⁸ This entails an appreciation of another key concept in theology and the focus of our second chapter, the interconnected web of life. The ethics of interconnection are also valuable to us when we consider natural evil, i.e. evil as a result of natural processes and not with a clear perpetrator, as we can identify destructive actions in the world as necessary in the cyclic nature of the ecosphere.⁴⁹

Significantly, Reid-Bowen comments that it is easier to determine an appropriate ethical judgement in terms of theological ethics when considering mass extinction of species and pollution of the ecosphere.⁵⁰ What he considers 'theologically difficult' is 'relat[ing] the well-being of the metaphysical/ecological wholes to the micro-political realities of patriarchal society.'⁵¹ This is precisely the research gap this dissertation intends to

⁴⁷ Ibid, p165

⁴⁸ Ibid, p166

⁴⁹ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p122

⁵⁰ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p166

⁵¹ Ibid, p166

explore in terms of employment. What links can be made between the Goddess as immanent in nature and deciding which career to pursue or how aggressively to act in a boardroom? Do theological ethics help guide us as to where we should make compromises in terms of a salary or corporate social responsibility policies, or whether you should compromise at all? How do the ethics of interconnection or power-from-within affect the choices we make regarding employment? Additionally these questions could be asked of other micro-political realities of patriarchal society, including and certainly not limited to issues of welfare, healthcare, running a household, choosing what car do drive or whether to drive at all. Where does the ethical Goddess draw the line or choose to make compromises?

This is only a nod to a discussion on evil and theology and indeed a whole thesis itself could be devoted to this topic. For the purposes of our discussion, I will conclude that it is easier for theologians to define that which is good and benefits the Goddess than it is to define that which is evil due to the importance of context for theological ethics. What may be beneficial in one situation may have severe ramifications in others. '[P]romoting the health of the living organic whole' appears to be a guiding notion,⁵² therefore that which violates the health of the whole, stands in the way of the flourishing of the body of the Goddess or infringes upon the immanent divinity of others who participate in the body of the Goddess can be labelled as evil. This begs the question, how does this translate into a practical ethics of immanence? Where do we begin the project of living by ethics based on an immanent worldview?

The practical application of the ethics of immanence

⁵² Ibid, p166

Life, being sacred demands our full participation... Life demands honesty... It demands integrity... Life demands courage and vulnerability... and it requires responsibility and discipline... life demands love, because it is through love, of self and others... delighted love for the myriad forms of life evolving and changing, for the redwood and the mayfly, for the blue whale and the snail darter, for wind and sun and waxing moon, caring love for the Cambodian child and the restless ghetto teenager, love for the eternally self-creating world... and raging love against all that would diminish the unspeakable beauty of the world, that we connect with the Goddess within and without.⁵³

Due to their nature, the ethics of immanence manifest in a contextual and individual manner. In the absence of rigid ethical prescriptions, immanence as a framework for ethical decision making means it becomes manifest initially on a micro level. Starhawk gives examples of how to incorporate immanence as a principle into our daily lives, beginning with the nature of personal relationships and group dynamics:

The structures of immanence are circular: clans, tribes, covens, collectives, support groups, affinity groups, consciousness-raising groups. In a circle, each person's face can be seen, each person's voice can be heard.⁵⁴

Giving clear and practical guidance on how best to facilitate immanence in group situations, she makes a clear correlation between immanence and power-from-within, a greater discussion of which will follow in chapter four.

The practical application of the ethics of immanence focuses on skills and principles. Immanence will not present us with a neat set of commandments as to what is and is not allowed. As with theological ethics as a whole, conduct and choices of a specific nature are favoured as opposed to specific deeds and actions. The focus here is on processes that affirm the Goddess as immanent in nature, and making choices which

⁵³ Starhawk, "Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion," p421

⁵⁴ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p115

contribute to the flourishing of the body of the Goddess and avoid inhibiting that flourishing.

It is fair to say that cultures based on principles of immanence would have evolved slowly and potentially not reached the level of technical prowess we have come accustomed to in the present day.⁵⁵ However with humankind's power to destroy, make extinct entire species and even annihilate themselves is reached and exceeded, then perhaps we need to begin asking ourselves if technical prowess should still take precedence over the natural world. Practically, the ethics of immanence directs us to stand up for the natural world as the body of the Goddess and facilitate its flourishing.

The ethics of immanence are not about to conquer the ethics of estrangement either: '[a]ny one who is uneasily contemplating the prospect of the wheels of production and/or progress grinding to a halt can, of course, relax. We are not, as a culture, about to switch to the ethics of immanence suddenly.'⁵⁶ What we should be aspiring to do is consider immanence and how best to facilitate the full manifestation of the Goddess in choices we make daily, from what groceries we buy, to methods of transport, to which how we utilise technologies and home comforts. Some decisions are clearer and more common sense than others, however larger scale decisions like who to vote for, who to bank with and who to work for are not so straightforward. What is clear is that we should be active. Chapter five will consider this in relation to the issues in the context of employment.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p36

⁵⁶ Ibid, p36

To conclude this chapter, and moving the discussion on to the next topic of interconnection and the web of life, I would like to draw attention again to Starhawk. She writes of her friend Mary, who when out hiking with her son, would fill rubbish bags with beer cans and other litter to take away and dispose of appropriately. When asked why she bothers to do this, as their efforts do not appear to make much difference at all, Mary replies, "I know we can't clean it all up... but I believe in picking up the garbage that you find in your path."⁵⁷ This action exemplifies concern for the flourishing of the immanent Goddess, embodied in the earth and that which inhabits the earth, and more specifically for the ecological balance of the biosphere: the interconnected web of life.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p33

Chapter Three
*Interconnection and
the Web of Life*



To know ourselves of this earth is to know our deep connection to all people and all beings. All beings are interdependent in the web of life. This is the distinctive conception of nature and our place in it found in Goddess religion.¹

If immanence is the central concept in theological ethics, then interconnection can be regarded as the central concept regarding the *manifestation* of theological ethics. Some may consider the distinction drawn here between immanence and interconnection as artificial, as the Goddess is considered immanent in both the natural world *and* the connections which exist in the natural world. However I have chosen to approach these two elements of theology as separate entities because one can infer specific and different ethical intentions from these concepts, as will be explained and explored below. Embodied, immanent divinity leads us to a state where individuals are called to ‘honour their own divinity and that of their natural environment, of which they are wholly a part.’² However as arguably amoral,³ the Goddess does not condone certain events and chastise for others, leaving the question of what is and is not acceptable up to human reasoning.

If the Goddess is not “out there” but is “in here” and present in the natural world, then there can be no metaphysical good outside the flourishing of life: ‘[t]he wellbeing of a strong, unbroken planetary web offers the spiritual/emotional and material wellbeing for

¹ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p111

² Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p98

³ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p165. Prior to Reid-Bowen making this observation, Christ and Raphael both discussed the idea of the relative morality or immorality of actions as intrinsic to the web but not intended by the web: ‘Theology does not impute moral evil to the Goddess and nor does it justify human evil, but its ecological model reminds us that the Goddess has not created as easy or joyous paradise as we might have liked.’ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p258; ‘the source of morality is the deep feeling of connection to all people and to all beings in the web of life. We act morally when we live in conscious and responsible awareness of the intrinsic value of each being with whom we share life on earth.’ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p156. A pertinent question would be, does morality lie in intention? If the Goddess *as nature* does not/cannot *intend* actions then the Goddess could be considered amoral. However if moral judgment and consequences for actions originate from nature/the web, then the Goddess *as nature* is not amoral. I appreciate Reid-Bowen’s reasoning for this statement, however it is based on the assumption that amorality is intrinsically linked to an inability to intend specific states of affairs and accountability or a lack thereof (p165). The Goddess *as nature*, *as interconnection* and therefore *as consequence* in the web may have a *different* moral status as opposed to an amoral status. However he does concede that ‘[f]or most Goddess feminists... the personal amorality of the Goddess is a theological irrelevance’ (p166).

the greatest number of living things, human or otherwise.’⁴ To ascertain purpose, goodness or indeed evil, we have to look around ourselves and not to the proverbial heavens. A secondary inference can be drawn from this quote: it could be argued that theological ethics are essentially utilitarian. I would agree with this assessment to a degree, in the sense that theological ethics advocate the greatest good for the greatest number, however for theology this includes all beings in the interconnected web of life and not just humans which will at times lead to the privileging of non-human interests.⁵ This chapter will consider how theology interprets interconnection and the concept of the web with relation to Gaia and ecological theory, then moving on to explore the impression this makes on theological ethics, namely how and why we should facilitate and maintain a “healthy” web. Interconnection has various other manifestations in theology, including but not limited to: the Goddess hypothesis of archaeology, (pre-)history and anthropology,⁶ dialogues on permaculture,⁷ and experience of interconnection during pilgrimage and ritual.⁸ Gaia theory and ecology have been presented here as the most appropriate demonstration of interconnection for the ethical discussion that follows and also as it is an emergent discourse in theology.

⁴ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p100

⁵ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p169

⁶ For an introduction to the Goddess hypothesis, see Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, esp. pp50-69; Christ, “Reclaiming Goddess History,” in *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987) pp161-180; and Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991)

⁷ In her more recent work, Starhawk has been focused on permaculture and sustainability as a manifestation of interconnection and nurturing the web. Her website has excellent introductory materials on the subject: <http://www.starhawk.org/permaculture/permaculture.html>; accessed 10th August 2010

⁸ Christ tells stories from Goddess pilgrimages in Crete in *Odyssey with the Goddess: A Spiritual Quest in Crete* (New York: Continuum, 1995), and reflects on her own experiences of interconnection in Crete in *Laughter of Aphrodite*, esp. pp183-205. Additionally, see Bob Hodge, “The Goddess Tour: Spiritual Tourism/Post-modern Pilgrimage in Search of Atlantis,” in Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips (eds.) *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) pp27-40

Theology, Gaia and ecology

Gaia theory, hypothesised by James Lovelock and theorised by Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, can be summarised thus: the entire biosphere of the earth, including rock, water, and atmosphere ‘behave[s] like a self-regulating system in which life and its material environment are massively interconnected.’⁹ Lovelock described Gaia theory as ‘a new and unified view of the earth and life sciences’, but rightly noted ‘[i]t is bound to attract the attention of humanists, environmentalists, and those of religious beliefs and faiths.’¹⁰ He identifies an undercurrent of scientists and philosophers warm to Gaia theory as early as the 18th century, for example James Hutton in 1785 suggested that ‘the earth was like an animal and that its proper study should be via physiology’, an early echo of Gaian hypotheses.¹¹ However these ideas became buried under 19th century reductionism and language as many ideas were developed by Russian theorists, to reappear in English and in a more credible framework with Lovelock in the 1960s. Theologians have understandably taken interest in Gaia theory as a model of the interconnected nature of life on earth and, combined with ecological models such as the web, are beginning to open these models up to philosophical analysis and evaluation in terms of practicality and coherence.

There are several occasions in *Rebirth of the Goddess* where Christ refers to the “Gaia body” to name and exemplify the power of the immanent Goddess as manifest in the interconnection between all beings in the web of life. It is not always clear whether she is

⁹ James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A biography of our living Earth, 2nd edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, this edition previously published 1995) pxiii. More recent publications evidence Lovelock’s continued application of the Gaia hypothesis to our current situation. *The Revenge of Gaia* (2007) is a critique of our continued ignorance to the Gaia hypothesis, advocating a turn to more radical and controversial methods to preserve humankind as we know it. Interestingly and controversially, this is where Lovelock advocates and defends a turn to nuclear power as a method of slowing global warming and reducing damage to Gaia. *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* (2009) is his most recent publication and takes a more prophetic stance, detailing that too much damage has already been done to the interconnected Gaia and humankind can now only prepare for the radical changes the planet is set to undergo in his hypothesis. His thesis is that Gaia will survive as humankind is damaged beyond repair.

¹⁰ Lovelock, *Ages of Gaia*, p11, 13

¹¹ *Ibid*, p9, citing James Hutton, Scottish scientist, 1785.

referring strictly to Gaia theory and the reader is left to conclude this for themselves. I suspect she is using an amalgamation of Gaia theory and Gaia as the Greek Goddess named “Earth”, slipping between the two whether consciously or unconsciously to exemplify how at home theological interconnection is with this scientific theory.¹² Similarly, Monica Sjöö takes Gaia theory and breathes theological rhetoric into it, displaying both the concept and implications of interconnection in theology:

Gaia, the Earth Mother, is a gigantic, living, cosmic being with a self-regulatory system and the air and moisture surrounding us in the atmosphere is Her in-and-out breath. The tropical forests, now being cut down for short term economic profits, are the lungs of the Earth and wells are the menstrual flow of Her underground blood-water arteries.¹³

The above exposition from Sjöö is not only representative of a basic theological stance on Gaia theory and the Goddess, it also effectively exemplifies the metaphorical language often adopted by theologians and the personification of the Earth/nature as Goddess. Personification, as a basic literary tool is used to increase personal affiliation with that which is being described; if the Gaian earth body is Goddess, with elements of our body represented in Her, then that which Goddess/nature becomes much more immediate.

Gaia theory sees the earth as an organism, whereas ecology studies life on earth, and despite them being significantly separate in the realm of science, theologians identify connections between them and are concerned with both.¹⁴ Ecological theories base their understanding of environment on communities of living organisms and networks of these communities which provides theologians with a potential ‘conceptual framework’ to aid exploration into what ‘interconnection and the web of life may mean, both metaphysically

¹² However Christ can be critiqued for not making her distinctions clear, and this is one of the points where her work might be criticised as that of a “sloppy thinker.” (“Why Women Need the Goddess” p278) Is she being a sloppy thinker or a good theologian for creatively trying to amalgamate similar words from separate language games? Her work is credible, however to a reader outside of theology it would be easy to misinterpret what she writes.

¹³ Monica Sjöö, *New Age and Armageddon: The Goddess or the Gurus? Towards a Feminist Vision of the Future* (London: The Women’s Press, 1992) p134

¹⁴ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p108

and theologically.¹⁵ Christ and Reid-Bowen have utilised both Gaia and ecological theories to enhance their theological work, yet this is an emergent dialogue for theology. Further elucidation and understanding of the scientific background is required to fairly interpret these theories for theological purpose. Reid-Bowen has begun to do this regarding the ecological model of the web.

He notes that Goddess feminists have not yet systematically analysed the web model in terms of philosophical coherence and consistency, despite it being an almost universal image. He concludes that their attempts to do this so far are largely aided by appropriation of Gaia theory and ecological theories, justifying the use of the specific ecological models selected as being so close to a theological worldview that they are 'almost analogous'.¹⁶ The concepts of community and networks are central to ecology, and a community is the basic organisational unit in ecological theories. He identifies the parallels between Gaia theory, ecology and the Goddess: 'the Goddess as nature is an ecological community, Gaia is an ecological community, and humans themselves may be understood as ecological communities'.¹⁷ We can see here Gaia and ecological theory utilised to explain and expand upon the theological notion of self and community.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid, p108

¹⁶ Ibid, p110. Reid-Bowen describes the increasing borrowing of 'models and terms' from ecology as 'can acceptable means of expressing theological principles and reality-claims.' (p110) He also describes theologians as working with the claims of ecological theory, eagerly drawing upon postmodern science (p111) and directly weaving Gaia theory into theological accounts of interconnection (p106). He does not appear to comment on the nature of this appropriation other than to say they are 'almost analogous' (p113), implying that it is broadly positive. I find this interesting after his comments on process metaphysics where the reader was warned to carefully adapt rather than adopt the theory 'it if is to cohere with the experiences, metaphysical commitments, reality-claims and values of many, or even most Goddess feminists.' (p77) Surely Gaia theory should come with a similar caveat?

¹⁷ Ibid, p113

¹⁸ See Starhawk's chapter six: "Building Communities: Processes for Groups" and chapter seven: "Circles and Webs: Group Structures" for critique of hierarchical structures as compared to groups and communities, in *Dreaming the Dark*, pp93-134, especially pp127-132

Reid-Bowen continues: 'The point that is theologically significant, however, is that these communities are in some sense organic: interactive, open-ended and subject to transformation.'¹⁹ This point highlights the potential theology has to make the link between web of life imagery and ethics; where ecology reflects and studies the community of interconnected life on earth, theology can utilise this framework and is currently beginning to explore the metaphysical implications of this. If communities are open-ended and can be transformed, then the theological imperative is that they should be transformed, firstly in line with the principles of immanent divinity and secondly taking into account the interconnected web of life. This notion of a "theological imperative" is elucidated below.

Sallie McFague asks us to consider what may happen if we dared to think of the planet as the body of God.²⁰ Considering the planet as the body of God[dess] also requires us to consider God[dess] as manifested in the interconnection between all things on the planet/body of God[dess]. This adds an extra dimension to the ethical outlook based on immanent divinity; our actions and choices not only affect the body of God[dess], but also influence and change the dynamic of the web of life, which itself is divine. In identifying the link between McFague and her own work in theology, Christ makes several significant contributions, however I found myself waiting for more commentary following Christ's discussion of McFague's work, feeling that more could be made of this. Christ analyses McFague in terms of the implications her work has on the resacralising of the female body and the earth, and that this image 'can inspire is to repair the damage that has been done to the earth, to women, and to other beings in dominator cultures.'²¹ I felt that McFague's work has far greater implications than inspiring Christians to repair the damage; it could reach outside of her native Christian community and motivate change in many more varied arenas: 'prenatal and nutritional care of the young, experimental genetics, rape and sexual abuse, endangered species, AIDS, the homeless, clear-cut logging practices, affirmative action laws, taxation policies, pollution control and water rights, abortion and contraceptive

¹⁹ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p113

²⁰ McFague, *Body of God*, p19

²¹ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p91

availability, immigration laws, health insurance and care, education costs and opportunities, and on and on.²² It does not necessarily tell us what to do regarding specific issues, but it presents us with a new paradigm with which we can think. Theological ethics, I argue, are not too distant from the place McFague writes from, however Christ's analysis does not give McFague's work the praise it requires. I would speculate this may be related to the position of McFague within a Christian framework and Christ's awareness that she operates within a different worldview.

The kind of theological ethics I am exploring pertain more accurately to the broader and more inclusive list of issues McFague identifies and not the narrower list that comes from Christ and her 9 ethical touchstones.²³ This, I believe, is a limitation in Christ's generation of theologians, a hangover from their intense personal and professional struggle to create metaphorical and physical space for thealogy and the Goddess. It would be wrong to assume that this space had been won, and my generation is faced with many challenges similar to those which faced Christ's generation.²⁴ However we are one step further on, with the work of many great women (and men) to utilise if we are given the opportunity to explore it. We should head towards a more collaborative and cooperative process with people like McFague and others like Lucy Reid²⁵ who are not necessarily within the Goddess camp but speak the same language over similar issues and are often looking towards a similar if not the same outcome. Is the result more important than whether it is Goddess or God scented? Or developed in collaboration with, for example, women of colour, theo/alogians from the Far East, the *mujerista* and women of Islam? Collaboration and

²² McFague, *Body of God*, p203

²³ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p167

²⁴ To give some examples I have experienced: the struggle for metaphorical and literal space in the academy, the issues of funding and the time afforded to thealogy by institutions. This week I learned that the thealogy module I have been involved with for the last four years has been pulled from the program to be incorporated elsewhere on the course if at all. Having listened to the struggle the module coordinator has had whilst making the space for thealogy at undergraduate level, I find this latest development unsurprising and quite saddening, and exemplifies the issues still being faced in Higher Education. See Deryn Guest, "Because They're Worth It!: Making Room for Female Students and Thealogy in Higher Education Contexts," *Feminist Theology*, 17, 2008, pp43-71

²⁵ Lucy Reid, *She Changes Everything: Seeking the Divine on a Feminist Path* (London: T&T Clark, 2005)

finding commonalities with like-minded groups will strengthen it as a field, retaining its distinctive approach whilst not becoming assimilated as a result of that collaboration.²⁶

Interconnection and Ethics

The web is also an ethical symbol and model for natural holistic justice in that each connected element of the web is as important as another.²⁷

The understanding that the Goddess is immanent in nature therefore means the Goddess is immanent in the interconnections between different elements in nature. When the web of life is the Goddess' mode of being then it becomes an ethical imperative to 'actively promote ecological flourishing' as promoting and maintaining the body of the Goddess is 'important/valuable'.²⁸ Echoing this is Christ's first ethical touchstone, 'nurture life,' where she gives practical examples of nurturing life as part of the Goddess, as embodied in nature:

There are many ways to nurture life: caring for children; tending a garden; healing the sick; creating a hospice for the dying; helping women gain self esteem; speaking the truth about violence; replanting forests; working to end war... What if we asked ourselves every night: How does what I did today nurture life?²⁹

These examples of life nurturing appear to be focused on middle class, educated privilege. How does this ethical touchstone work if you are the one forced into childcare; have no green space; are the sick and dying; are the woman with no self esteem or living with

²⁶ Similar suggestions are made by Mantin in "Blurring Boundaries and Moving Posts", and Clack in "Theology and Theology: Mutually Exclusive or Creatively Interdependent?" *Feminist Theology*, 7, 1999, pp21-38

²⁷ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p150

²⁸ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p168

²⁹ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p167

violence; live in the destroyed forest; or live everyday with the realities of war? These concrete examples given by Christ are not necessarily the most transferrable outside of her particular context, however I would still think it fair to say that “nurture life” as an ethical touchstone is significantly broad and has potential. Could this imperative be potentially broad enough to take into account the myriad of different situations we might find ourselves in? The question she asks at the end of the quote: “How does what I did today nurture life?” is more useful as a reflective decision making tool and has a greater impact than the imperative to nurture life. It has definitely made a significant impression on the life of this Goddess feminist.

Nonetheless, in order to “nurture life” and “repair the web”, Christ’s ninth ethical touchstone, we need to lay out the characteristics of an ideal or healthy web in order to know what we should be facilitating and maintaining. A strong web is one which is diverse and where each point of intersection is valued and necessary, where no one point is more important than another.³⁰ The impact of an interconnected web metaphor on an ethics will be explored in this next section, focusing on these two points: diversity and the potential benefits of being part of a web model.

Diversity as a standard of judgement?

Interconnection, particularly as interpreted utilising Gaia theory, leads to an appreciation of diversity and difference in nature. It is more advantageous to be part of a web or many intersecting webs than to be part of a hierarchical chain; a diverse ecosystem flourishes more than a monolithic one. Should a connection be jeopardised or disappear, then there are other connections which can be relied upon. When it comes to choosing between diversity and uniformity, ecology and the web metaphor will always advocate diversity. Starhawk muses that diversity could potentially be a standard of judgement in decision

³⁰ Then again, one could reasonably argue that individual points may temporarily have greater importance at certain times and in specific contexts, depending on what is required to maintain or repair a web.

making: 'leading us, perhaps, to favour a salt marsh over a subdivision, or a multitude of small business over the interests of a few large corporations.'³¹

Diversity as an ethical standard/decision making tool however is ambiguous enough to be interpreted in a variety of ways, not all of them positive in a theological worldview. For example, diversity could mean favouring diverse methods of energy, including fossil fuels, nuclear power and renewable forms of energy, although I find it hard to believe theological ethics advocating increased nuclear activity. It is fair to say that theology incorporates both light and dark into its worldview, clearly exemplified by the following quotation and critique from Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, and Reid-Bowen respectively:

[the Goddess does not] 'live' solely in elite separatist retreats, dancing naked in the piney woods under a white and well-fed moon. The Goddess at this moment is starving to death in refugee camps, with a skeletal child clutched to her dry nipples. The Goddess at this moment is undergoing a routine strip-and-squat search inside an American prison. The Goddess is on welfare, raising her children in a ghetto next to a freeway interchange that fills their blood cells and neurons with lead. The Goddess is an eight-year-old girl being used for the special sexual thrills of visiting business men in a Brazilian brothel.³²

Reid-Bowen adds his own comment to this:

One may reasonably ask, in response to these claims, is the Goddess not also the prison guard performing the strip search, the visiting businessman gaining the sexual thrills, and indeed the heavily polluted freeway interchange?³³

Sadly Reid-Bowen does not provide us with a clear answer to this quandary, rather directs the reader to his subsequent chapters to help understand how theologians are to respond to these dilemmas.

³¹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p38

³² Sjöö and Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) p417-418

³³ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p72

I would guide the reader to respond to these dilemmas thus. Firstly, consider the defining qualities of a theological outlook.³⁴ Theology is about relation, context and situatedness. It values that which is fluid, personal and based on embodied experience. Just as the theological method is a constructive endeavour, theological decision making is also constructive, taking into account the variables such as context, embodied experience and relation. Secondly, consider the discussion on immanence from the first chapter; the Goddess is immanent in the natural world and a theologically “evil” action is that which despoils the body of the Goddess and impedes the full flourishing of the Goddess as nature. Thirdly, consider the metaphor of the web and the presence of the Goddess in the interconnections and relationships of our natural world. Actions which violate the web and sever connections are considered immoral. With these three points in mind, we can almost use them as a set of criteria to pass potential actions through, alongside manifesting the greatest diversity in the web, as a standard of judgement. The decision arrived at may not necessarily be the most comfortable for all parties involved, however a theological ethical outlook does not begin with humans, nor does it necessarily work from a position of human privilege. Continuing with the example above on generating energy, under these criteria continued enthusiasm for fossil fuels and nuclear power would not pass through.

The web model and the effect of not being at the centre

In a web, each point is as valuable as the next, and the health of the whole web becomes the focus of ethics. No one point becomes more important than another:

By directing ethical/metaphysical attention towards wholes greater than oneself, and ultimately that whole of which no greater can be conceived (the Goddess as nature), the Goddess feminist worldview evaluates other forms of life in a manner that does not actively privilege human interests.³⁵

³⁴ I am not suggesting that theology can be rigidly defined, however I do think that there are some qualities which would draw broad consensus between Goddess feminists that could be drawn together under the broad heading “theological outlook”. Indeed there would be little point to this project if this was not possible.

³⁵ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p168

This reorientation at the centre of theological ethics that places the web of life at the core, as opposed to a hierarchical system where humans occupy the central position, may be difficult to swallow. Structures which manifest estrangement are hierarchies: 'In schools, in corporations, in government bureaucracies, in social agencies and professions, we are expected to climb from rung to rung.'³⁶ Our culture may reward us for being at the centre of our Copernican world, however from that position you become 'uniquely important and responsible for everything.'³⁷ Starhawk suggests that living at the centre can create unbearable pressure on an individual. It is a precarious and lonely position to be in, despite societal reinforcements telling us it is the ideal scenario.

Her sustained critique of hierarchical structures identifies their weaknesses:

Of course anyone who has recently dealt with a government agency, or tried to get a large corporation to redress a computer error might well question whether hierarchical structures are, indeed, as efficient as we like to believe. In fact, anyone who has ever worked in the lower levels of a hierarchy knows the amount of waste, theft, and minor sabotage that occurs daily. Hierarchies appear to be efficient only because they have enormous resources, money and the armed forces of the state to back them up.³⁸

Sensationalist as Starhawk may sound, having worked at some of the lowest levels of a hierarchy this is definitely representative of my experience. Circles, clusters and networks are often ridiculed by society, and it may be fair to say that progress is slower in these structures as they rely upon efficient distribution of information and cooperation of the members concerned. Yet my experience of a more collaborative, circular working process is significantly more positive in the outcomes achieved. Also, there was definitely less waste, theft and minor sabotage.

³⁶ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p114

³⁷ Ibid, p127

³⁸ Ibid, p132

Alleviating of the pressures of working in a hierarchical structure could prove positive. This does not mean simply stepping down from the lofty positions of power, rather it advocates a revolution in structures towards a web based model: 'Our work is not just sawing the legs off the ladders, but building the structures that can replace them.'³⁹ Consider also the discussion in the previous chapter on the Goddess as immanent in light and dark. Could a theological worldview facilitate better psychological health, without the pressure to always be at the centre and to always be in the light? The traditional assumption of human deficiency and potential punishment is not present in theology in the same way it is present in other more traditional Western transcendental worldviews. The fate of the cosmos is not bound up with the fate of human life; humans are a part of nature, not apart from it, and participate in the web of life as much as other elements of the web in the community of life.⁴⁰ Could these thoughts be as psychologically comforting and empowering as a belief that a transcendent, omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent being influences everything we do? Could they be more comforting and more empowering? My experience supports this notion.⁴¹

A practical duty of care

The model of the web imposes a practical duty of care. Actions which break the interconnections in any web system and jeopardise those who maintain and repair the web are considered 'absolutely morally wrong.'⁴² We can deduce from even this brief description of absolute moral wrong what moral right looks like and ascertain what practical acts are to be avoided and rewarded, of course with the application of a little theological reasoning. Acceptance of a web model places us under an imperative to maintain and

³⁹ Ibid, p134

⁴⁰ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p100

⁴¹ I am fully aware that verification from one individual does not make a foolproof testimony, however in the spirit of embodied thinking and the value of the personal voice in theological methodology, it is important to mention my personal positive experience where relevant, this being one of the places.

⁴² Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p113. This comment also contributes to the discussion in chapter two on a theological problem of evil, pp45-48

repair the web and it is right to promote and facilitate its flourishing and those who contribute to its thriving.

A web model imposes a practical duty of care upon all those present in it, as all members of the web are connected and affected by supposedly unrelated actions:

In theology, not only war, but pornography, rape, battering, genital and cosmetic mutilation and gynaecological abuse are some of the 'fallout' from the primary patriarchal violations of the body of the Goddess... *In the crimes done to one are done to all and, finally, felt by all, then the responsibility to protest and heal is a collective one.*⁴³

As a worldview, interconnection cannot fail to have practical implications, and in a theological worldview which begins with immanent divinity this practicality requires us to protest against that which ruptures and wounds the body of the Goddess as immanent in the interconnected web of life. The point I am belabouring is that in a theological world view it is not just unacceptable to claim ignorance or irrelevance to injustice, it is impossible to do so.

Praxis is integral to theological ethics, as Starhawk identifies eloquently:

To be a member of that community [the biological community] means both to be shaped by it and to have responsibility for shaping it – for preserving both its balances and the interplay of diversity and richness of life in its fullest expression. No one can live out the fullness of self when she or he is hungry or condemned to a life of poverty and discrimination.⁴⁴

We are each responsible for ourselves and our micro- and macro-communities. Starhawk extends the web motif to include the practicalities of organisation. She sees webs as an ideal model for non-hierarchical post-patriarchal organisations and practices, considering the benefits of group and web-like network structures in great depths in *Dreaming the*

⁴³ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p106. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p40

Dark.⁴⁵ Identifying the types of critique that non-hierarchical systems can attract and answering these critiques, Starhawk is refreshingly connected with the practicalities of living a theological worldview as opposed to its analysis on paper. The underlying theme of *Dreaming the Dark* is the calling forth of power and how Goddess feminists can facilitate healthy power for practical use. The web model appears to be invaluable to her analysis. This theme of applied theology continues as we move to the next chapter on power and its ethical use for Goddess feminists.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp114-134

Chapter Four

Power



This chapter differs from the previous two in that it does not delineate a central theological concept then extrapolate ethical principles from it. “Power” as a concept is different to “immanence” and “interconnection”; where it would be semantically correct to say one “believes in” interconnection or immanence, it is not the case of a “belief in” power. Proper application of appropriate power helps translate theoretical discussion from something we read into something we do. The concentration on female empowerment is evident from the earliest stages of the movement, for simple evidence of this see the Christ and Goldenberg’s justification of the term “thealogy.”¹ As theologians have explored and expanded the field, greater introspection has led to greater consideration of what it means to act in a theologically consistent way and to empower.

It features here as the final element of a theological ethical outlook because of the way it guides practical engagement with the world. The two conceptions of power that feature here are quite different in terms of their contribution to theological ethics and their frequency in theological dialogue. Starhawk’s assessment of power-from-within is more commonly cited than power and chaos, yet both add value to this discussion on translating the theoretical into practical. I will begin by delineating power-from-within and exploring how this affects theological ethics, then I will survey the less well travelled path of power, chaos, and the links that can be made with theological ethics.

Power-from-within

Starhawk dedicates an entire book to *Dreaming the Dark: Sex, Magic and Power*, and presents a substantial analysis of power. Perhaps due to her background in non-violent political action, she approaches the subject in a more practical manner, naming different forms of power as power-over and power-from-within and identifying power-from-within as

¹ Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” whole article; Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, esp chapter seven, “The Goddess is Alive!”

the most positive form for Goddess feminists. There are four key terms in Starhawk's analysis of power which we need to become familiar with: power-over, estrangement, power-from-within and immanence, which has already been encountered in the first chapter.

Power-over: 'the power of the gun and the bomb, the power of annihilation that backs up all the institutions of domination.'² She cites patriarchy as an example of power-over, a force working on a principle of hierarchy based essentially on a system of control. Its danger lies in the ability to divide the content and value of objects, as well as in its ability to divide and compartmentalise nature including separating people in terms of race, class and similar factors.³ Therefore, estrangement is the "weapon" of power-over which she claims pervades our modern (patriarchal) culture in terms of science, technology, economics and productivity, education, psychology, religion, sexuality and countless other elements.⁴ Starhawk essentially places the blame for the ills of this world upon the shoulders of power-over and estrangement.

Immanence: 'the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting, and infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance.'⁵ It is the opposite and remedy of estrangement. Power-from-within is the power form of immanence, the method through which immanence becomes manifest; 'it is not something we *have* but something we can do',⁶ to echo the statements made at the beginning of this chapter. It may sound commonsense, however it is necessary to state that power-from-within is the power that comes from within us, 'power that arises from our

² Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p3

³ Ibid, pp5-6

⁴ Ibid, pp7-8

⁵ Ibid, p9

⁶ Ibid, p12

blood, and our lives, and our passionate desire for each other's living flesh.'⁷ This carries echoes of Audre Lorde's work on the power of the erotic as non-rational knowledge that arises from deep within our bodies, where empowerment lies in the liberation of erotic knowledge and removal of the taboo placed upon it by patriarchal society.⁸

"Goddess" is Starhawk's preferred term to describe immanence, citing the strength of this word's ability to describe the many attributes of immanence. For instance, Goddess is embodied in bodies and nature, Goddess is many different images, 'a constellation of forms and associations', Goddess is 'the power of the low, the dark, the earth.'⁹ To make plain the link between the three concepts covered in these first few chapters on theological ethics, power-from-within *is* immanence and interconnection, and these two things *are* the power-from-within. The three concepts are not mutually exclusive.

Starhawk's work surpasses the others in the way she grounds her words in experience. Once she has laid the foundations of power-from-within in thought, magic and will, she then goes on to explain how she has explored power-over and power-from-within in her own experience. She utilises her experience in jail to explain the tools of power-over:

[I]n jail we experienced controls of our culture directly. We see their naked operation, unclothed by the usual niceties. Power-over is a vice, a clamp that holds us with our own hopes and fears. For there are always privileges to be won if we behave, and there is always some place worse they can put us, if we refuse to be controlled.¹⁰

She then explains that immanence reinstates the inherent worth which is stripped from us through power-over. She does make a shrewd argument regarding the importance of

⁷ Ibid, p4

⁸ For further detail, see Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in Plaskow and Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions*, pp208-213

⁹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p9, 4

¹⁰ Ibid, p95

praxis, that if that inherent worth remains locked on a page as “theological doctrine” then it is not felt in any actuality:

We feel it when we connect with another person, when we can comfort someone in distress, ease someone’s pain, do work that means something to us. We feel our own worth when we can help shape the choices that affect us.¹¹

If it is these times which make us feel powerful, i.e. when facilitating power-from-within, then it is these kinds of actions which are to be encouraged. Notice that these examples are strongly rooted in an interconnected worldview, and that the power and happiness of the other is integral to the power and happiness of ourselves. This is the essence of theological ethics, that in an interconnected web of life permeated with the presence of the Goddess, we are not isolated entities making decisions which only affect us individually. Even in cases where decisions may seem clear, ethical reasoning based upon a theological worldview will always be a complex and emotive as it will always need to take into account the potential others who may be directly or indirectly affected by decisions made. There are two key points to be noted in this section: manifesting power-from-within is necessarily found in the connections, or lack of connections, with others in the web of life; and power-from-within ensures theology remains engaged in praxis.

In chapters six and seven, citing community as the ideal form in which power-from-within may flourish, she provides guidance on how to facilitate power-from-within in group processes. This point is returned to in chapter five regarding the practical manifestation of this for the workplace, however for the purposes of this commentary the guidance provided appears to be significantly bound by culture and class, and not necessarily transferrable outside of the context Starhawk finds herself in.¹² In spite of this, my personal inclination is

¹¹ Ibid, p96

¹² I realise I have also levied this criticism at Christ at an earlier point in this thesis. Intuitively, I find Starhawk to be less toe curling than Christ at moments like this when their comments seem particularly context bound. I do not entirely understand why this is the case, although I suspect it is related to the pretense to universality I

to broadly praise her work and analysis, for the virtue that discussion of this nature based so firmly on functional and useful advice is simply not present to this detail in any of the other works surveyed here.

Power-from-within requires us to make choices that facilitate the increase of power-from-within in others. It is not only about choice, power-from-within is also the power to say no, to limit and to stop. In a closed ecological system inhabited by numerous individuals and communities, some new things contribute to the web of life whereas others do not. Power-from-within gives us the tools and the imperative to set limits, to say no, to refuse cooperation, and to change our relationship with other beings in the web of life to effect positive change.¹³

The “from-within” element lies in the practical decisions we make. There are ways of achieving the same ends utilising both forms of power that Starhawk identifies; choosing to identify power-from-within as more valuable than power-over means we choose a path with an often more difficult route. If we accept what Starhawk holds to be true, then the path of power-over is our mother tongue, with words, phrases and actions that feel innate. Choosing to act with power-from-within means careful consideration of one’s actions and the consequences of those actions in a way of thinking which may feel unnatural and uncomfortable. Making choices on the basis of inherent worth, feeling, nurturing and a passionate desire for others is supposedly going against the grain of the training the culture of estrangement provides us with, but to act in a theologically consistent way means manifesting power-from-within.

sense to be much stronger in Christ’s work than Starhawk’s. Starhawk feels a lot more grounded in and engaged with reality, and more committed to sharing her own context bound experiences, whereas I find Christ operates on a more delicate boundary between the ethereal, the lecturer and the preacher. This response is more instinctive than factual, however I feel it necessary to try to explain why I seem warmer to one theologian than another despite similar critiques.

¹³ Ibid, p27

Power, chaos and strategy

Grandmother Goose's cosmic egg is cracking, and Chaos is (re)-emerging. The Goddess – that is, turbulent and transmutational Powers in which both females and males participate – is returning.¹⁴

This section on power, chaos and strategy has not only been a difficult section to research and write, initially it was also difficult to justify its presence in this chapter. It may not appear a natural fit, and originally it was included out of curiosity and personal intrigue. Raphael introduces “Theology from the Edge of Chaos” which weaves together discourses of postmodern science, philosophy and spirituality with theology to identify themes of chaos and regeneration which ‘undermine... patriarchy’s cosmological claim to be the eternal, God-given social system that was set out on the first three chapters of Genesis.’¹⁵ I struggle not to get too excited when reading her words:

[t]he postmodern theological/theological shift from a God of law presiding over a cosmic machine to a divinity holding creation in a nexus of complex relations has – like one of its forerunners, process theology – brought the divine into the very heart of change: the Goddess does not sit and watch the cosmos but is dancing at its very centre.¹⁶

Below I will delineate a theological appropriation of chaos and explain its importance to our ethical discussion.

The chaos alluded to in the opening quotation is tricky to identify and elucidate. It is intrinsically linked by Raphael to ideologies of boundaries and their gradual disappearance in recent history. She presents a convincing case for the disappearance and changing nature of boundaries politically, technologically, ecologically, globally and theoretically in recent

¹⁴ Jane Caputi, *Gossips, Gorgons and Crones: The Fates of the Earth* (New Mexico, Santa Fe: Bear and Company Publishing, 1993) p281

¹⁵ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p251

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p229

history,¹⁷ a state which is echoed within theological discussion. This echo is especially visible in the problematising of the boundary between the sacred and the profane made prominent by Mary Douglas and discussed at great length by Raphael in *Theology and Embodiment*.¹⁸ This turbulence of the ideals of modernity ‘can hardly be underestimated’ and is intrinsic to the ethical worldview of Goddess feminists: ‘spiritual feminism shares in the globalist attempt to erase or transcend all forms of barbed wire frontiers and boundaries in the interests of dialogue and common environmental and humanitarian concern.’¹⁹ I understand this worldview based upon flux, turbulence, regeneration and the presence of the Goddess in light, dark and grey areas, as characterising the “chaos” to which Raphael and Caputi refer.

Caputi connects chaos with the Goddesses Tiamat and Kali:

These goddess were metaphor who expressed their culture’s awareness of the universal Powers of Chaos. They represented the original churning womb or Crone-stirred cauldron of birth, death and transmutation – the gaping Hole or spiraling Eye associated with the primordial female Powers in which all of us originate and to which all of us will return.²⁰

Her depiction of chaos is in a place where chance reigns supreme. Not a place of meaninglessness, emptiness and havoc, but rather where there is no such thing as emptiness and where everything has meaning due to the sensitive dependence of the chaotic system.²¹ This is the point at which Caputi becomes involved with chaos theory:

¹⁷ Ibid, pp220-221

¹⁸ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, esp. pp38-50

¹⁹ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p221

²⁰ Caputi, *Gossips, Gorgons and Crones*, p281

²¹ Using the language of chaos theory, sensitive dependence is more commonly understood as “the Butterfly effect”; imagine two identical worlds with two identical butterflies, where one butterfly flaps its wings and the other does not. This difference generates a tornado in one of the worlds. The smallest of differences can have the most colossal effects; this is sensitive dependence.

‘Even in the most random data, as chaos theory reveals, there are beautiful patterns – structures that are fine and intricate even if they are hidden and unpredictable.’²²

At this point it is important to make a few notes on our use of language and theory from diverse fields. Caputi moves her discussion of chaos between the philosophical, scientific and spiritual spheres, identifying and surveying elements of each as it suits her discussion however without, in my opinion, significant scrutiny. To be fair her focus does not appear to lay solely in the furthering of academic discourse and, as her research is largely sourced in popular culture and written in a manner to reflect this, Caputi does succeed in appealing to a popular and potentially more confessional audience.²³ However I have found her presentation of chaos theory in particular to be fairly clumsy and driven by popular discourses on chaos. Whilst I myself do not profess to be a master in chaos theory, her affirmation that ‘it is absolutely impossible to predict the weather beyond a couple of days for there is no way to account for all the possible significant factors’ appears rudimentary to the point of being erroneous in my understanding.²⁴ Raphael develops Caputi’s suggestions including chaos as a model for political activism, and makes additions of complexity theory and edge of chaos discussion, and I find her analysis of chaos significantly more valuable academically.

In this dialogue, the edge of chaos is a place of turbulence, instability and a site of great power:

²² Ibid, p284. My understanding of chaos theory as presented here is nourished by James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (London: Vintage, 1998; originally published 1987); Nina Hall (ed.) *The New Scientist Guide to Chaos* (London: Penguin Books, 1991); and the entertainingly illustrated *Introducing Chaos* by Ziauddin Sardar and Iwona Abrams, (Royston: Icon Books, 2004). Particular recognition should go to Leonard Smith’s exceptional *Chaos: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), which I am indebted to for initially unlocking the enigma that chaos theory appeared to be to a Theology graduate.

²³ See Caputi, *Gossips, Gorgons and Crones*, back plate

²⁴ Ibid, p282. Whilst chaos theory does not claim to be able to predict chaotic systems, it provides us with models which attempt to reduce noise, observational uncertainty in chaotic systems, so that we may better forecast events in chaotic systems.

[t]he edge of chaos is where new ideas and innovative genotypes are forever nibbling away at the edge of the status quo, and where even the most entrenched old guard will eventually be overthrown... The edge of chaos is the constantly shifting battle zone between stagnation and anarchy, the one place where a complex system can be spontaneous, adaptive and alive.²⁵

Theology, in 'refus[ing] to submit its ideas to modernity's rationalistic systems and with a playful elusiveness propos[ing], for example, paradoxical or even contradictory descriptions of the Goddess', can be located at the edge of chaos as described above.²⁶ If we accept the premises above as true: firstly, that we live in a chaotic system and exist in the principles of sensitive dependence; secondly, that system is imbued with the immanent Goddess; thirdly, that theology lies on the turbulent regenerative boundary (edge of chaos) of that system; fourthly, that system is already experiencing turbulence, then we can see this as providing a model for ethical and political strategy. On a macro level we can see patriarchy as occupying a space in our complex dynamic system which is experiencing turbulence from various groups. Feminism and more specifically Goddess feminism is part of that turbulence, which could contribute to chaotic and cataclysmic effects:

A chaos theory of altered political consciousness could equally show that non-violent, quantitatively slight, 'butterfly' changes of consciousness could transfigure the whole without first fighting for a privileged position at the top or the centre of a hierarchical stack.²⁷

This coheres with theological attitudes to power-from-within in terms of methods of planning and of action: 'Without resorting to coercion, the superficial, apparent equilibrium of the patriarchal status quo could be stirred by introducing small pockets of turbulence into the machinery of domination.'²⁸ This can be seen as a theologically friendly model for political action, which takes into account our existence in an interconnected web and therefore is respectful and mindful of others in that web.

²⁵ M. Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994) p12

²⁶ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p246

²⁷ Ibid, p249

²⁸ Ibid, p249

Whilst not necessarily so useful on a micro scale when dealing with the ethical dilemmas we are faced with in our daily lives, chaos discourse and in particular the notion of sensitive dependence is constructive. Just as the butterfly changes of consciousness may transfigure the whole for the better, butterfly actions may have catastrophic effects for the worse. This is where it is important to note the potential to forecast chaotic systems; despite chaotic systems being non-linear and thus impossible to predict accurately, forecasting can occur by gathering enough information and processing it in such a manner to reduce uncertainty as much as possible. Certainly the effects of our decisions cannot be predicted with certainty, and actions with the best of intentions may still have catastrophic effects, however chaotic systems are useful to help us understand, appreciate and respect this instability. We are called to make decisions which facilitate the flourishing of the immanent Goddess and the interconnected web of life yet must always be mindful of the chaotic effects of our decisions. However chaos discourses also empower us to make even the most “butterfly” of effects, which could indeed contribute to transfiguring the whole. Immanence and interconnection show us what we are aiming for, and appropriate use of this power promotes its manifestation.

Frameworks/touchstones/systems/codes: Can we systematise theological ethics?

Having identified key elements of a theological ethical framework, I will conclude this chapter with a brief consideration of the potential to systematise theological ethics. What might practical ethical scaffolding look like upon which Goddess feminists could build their lives? Christ has attempted this with her nine ethical touchstones which reflect the notion that we cannot produce a perfect and complete list of guidelines as the web is dynamic and contextual, ‘providing a framework for decision making not a blueprint for action.’²⁹ Her full list of touchstones reads as follows:

- Nurture life.
- Walk in love and beauty.

²⁹ Ibid, p169

- Trust the knowledge that comes through the body.
- Speak the truth about conflict, pain, and suffering.
- Take only what you need.
- Think about the consequences of your actions for seven generations.
- Approach the taking of life with great restraint.
- Practice great generosity.
- Repair the web.³⁰

In making these nine statements, Christ is identifying several points continuous with the theological worldview I have outlined in the last three chapters. Indeed, I personally utilise the question she poses to us, “How does what I did today nurture life?”, when reflecting upon decisions I have made or when considering the effect my decisions will have on the web. However the instinctive response I have to her touchstones is to find them too sentimental, still too confessional to account for the moments that are less Goddess orientated.³¹

Starhawk also offers us her ‘ethical guide for a modern age’ as emanating from a story about her friend and her son who used to walk in the countryside near Los Angeles:

A rough, beer-drinking crowd frequented the area and left the stream littered with cans and trash. Mary always brought some large bags with her, and when they were leaving she and her little boy would fill them with beer cans. It was a discouraging task, as the supply was so vast that their efforts barely seemed to make a difference. I asked her once why she bothered to try. “I know I can’t clean it all up,” she said, “but I believe in picking up the garbage that you find in your path.”

Each of us must determine for ourselves what path is ours and where it takes us; the garbage is not hard to recognise.³²

³⁰ Ibid, p167

³¹ To speak plainly, these words no longer seem to have the clout that they were intended to have. I appreciate their intention, however the implicit connotations attached to them by others leaves them full of empty rhetoric. Their maudlin effect does not cohere with the image of the formidable teacher in front of an unruly class, the researcher in the NHS, the civil servant at the Ministry of Defence, the police officer or Human Resources manager. When you walk out of your classroom mid-lesson, a much stronger tonic than “nurture life” or “repair the web” is needed to galvanise you into standing in front of that class again. In this case, the words that continually help me find the strength and desire to go back and face that class are far more potent and direct. Christ’s touchstones simply no longer resonate with me.

³² Starhawk, “Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion,” p422

Again, as with Christ, this does not appear to paint the full picture of theological ethics as I understand them to be. Picking up garbage in our own paths does not display the urgency or imperative to repair the web as the body of the Goddess, nor does it convey the potential chaotic impact feminist turbulence may have on the modern age which I identified in chapter three. A system of absolute morality laid down by an external referee would not work within theology simply due to the divine not being envisioned as external or absolute, however an insipid ethical framework lacking the passion and fervour that lies at the core of theology would be equally as inadequate and irrelevant.

Key words can be identified in Raphael's "Thealogy and Ethics" chapter which illustrate the ingredients of theological ethics: erotic, biophillic, contextual, subtle, complex, urgent, and angry.³³ These words are useful for describing the tone of ethical discussion, and contextual, erotic and biophillic begin to describe what shape those ethics take. However the conundrum is regarding how they are presented. Do you offer touchstones, like Christ? A neat one line resolution? An ethical framework? A flow chart or set of points to be worked through and ticked off? To continue with the cookery metaphor from chapter one, should theological ethics present a list of basic ingredients and utensils which rely upon each Goddess feminist knowing how to cook in order to achieve something coherent?

Taking into account the methodological assumptions made in the introduction regarding the personal voice and embodied thought, it is appropriate here to explore what I am leaving this thesis with. I began the project of discerning a theological ethic or ethics with disparate sea of theological ideas, quite sure that I felt thealogy provided me with ethical imperatives but not entirely aware of what they entailed. There are several things I am now sure of regarding theological ethics:

- They have to be informed, not only by context but also the knowledge that comes through the body, embodied thought;

³³ Raphael, "Thealogy and Ethics," pp97-115

- No ethical decision can be named theological without an intense awareness of the Goddess as immanent in the interconnected web of life, and the implications living in an interconnected immanently divine web bestows upon us;
- Decisions taken ought to facilitate power-from-within in myself and others, and must be made with a butterfly consciousness, aware of chaotic implications;
- Choices should ideally be based on diversity in the flourishing of the web, as opposed to uniformity;
- Theological ethics must avoid rupturing the web, ecological degradation, violating the body of the Goddess and power-over.

Whilst not being necessarily the most concise and catchy ethical framework, I think it adequately reflects the ethical, theological worldview. My personal inclination is to phrase these statements as probing questions, designed to be chewed over in the mind when choices are to be made, for example: how do my actions contribute to the flourishing of the body of the Goddess? Am I approaching this dilemma with a butterfly consciousness, mindful of observational uncertainty? Today, did I make choices which violated or nurtured life? Questioning makes ethical decision making a dynamic process, not one where the outcome is bequeathed to you in varying degrees of rightness and wrongness.

I know that this framework will not necessarily fit neatly into my lifestyle at present, and that I will often be left in difficult situations to choose my way out of. I may not, as a human, automatically receive privilege in ethical reasoning which will at times, in the least extreme scenario, lead to my comfort and pleasure becoming compromised. However in choosing to align oneself with theology, the lived realities of belief in immanent divinity and interconnection are to be accepted in both dark and light forms. I do wonder, as Reid-Bowen does, what the limits of this ethical outlook are, and to what degree will Goddess feminists really effect change.³⁴ In choosing to dedicate time, finances and personal energy to this research project, I know that my answer is the affirmative, even during those times when I feel there is only hope in Pandora's box. However the lived realities of a theological

³⁴ Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p170

ethical worldview bring numerous other tests, and I echo Reid-Bowen's comment that it is difficult to apply ethical reasoning to the micro-political realities of patriarchal society.³⁵ The final chapter and concluding remarks is my attempt to explain and apply theological ethics to one particular micro-political reality in patriarchal society: employment.

³⁵ Ibid, p166

Chapter Five

Wearing the red “Witch Shoes” to work: Theological ethics and the workplace



Scriptural passages were read by two women (Cohorts)... Emily Culpepper, wearing her bright red "Witch Shoes," read from the "new" testament, specifically from Pauline epistles. I Re-Call the look of absolute satisfaction and glee on Emily's face as she intoned from 1 timothy 2:11: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection," and so on, and on.¹

Emily Culpepper wore her bright red "Witch Shoes" on the day of the Harvard Memorial Church Exodus as she, Mary Daly and the rest of the Tigers, together with '[h]undreds of women and some men began stampeding out of the church'.² Despite so little being known of Culpepper's red witch shoes, their image has remained with me since reading this passage several years ago. They were worn on 'an historic Moment of Breakthrough and Re-Calling,'³ where Daly and the Tigers had planned to turn a sermon into Fiercely Focused Action.⁴ Were these shoes a talisman? Were they a secret indication to the outside world that something was afoot, an outward symbol of inter rebellion? Did Culpepper wear the red "Witch Shoes" as a kind of armour for potency and power when engaging in "risky" behaviour and when she was not learning in silence with all subjection?

The image of these shoes has resonated deeply with me. I found myself unconsciously translating it into my own world as I did not have a literal pair or red shoes and discovering a range of talismans for those days I was engaging in particularly "risky" behaviour, like lectures where it was often too intimidating to speak, when managing difficult colleagues, or job interviews. Whether it meant choosing between the red or the black glasses, flat or heeled shoes, lipstick or no lipstick, this bag or another, I was instinctively suiting myself to maximise power and strength.

¹ Daly, *Outercourse*, p138

² *Ibid*, p138

³ *Ibid*, p137

⁴ *Ibid*, p137

Could the shoes be considered as a type of veil or war paint? As a veil they may be tool to protect the sacrality of the wearer, a veil for metamorphosis and shape-shifting: 'just as a veil or cloth placed over a bowl of dough allows the yeast to ferment and rise, so do the veil activates the transformative powers of the female psyche.'⁵ A veiled woman can be described as 'awesome, terrifying, infinitely attractive, but also powerfully repellent of any irreverent touch.'⁶ Following from this concept of veiling as power, the shoes could also be understood as war paint. The debate over feminine beauty and make-up which was particularly prevalent with feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s is moved forward by some Goddess feminists who look to adornment of the body as a form of raising power through a concentration or a re-presentation of that power. Eller refers to a group of Goddess feminists who use lipstick as an element of ritual, 'reclaiming these oppressive, very sexualised feminine things and making them into war paint.'⁷ Raphael comments:

Make-up and self-adornment need not mask what Estes calls 'the wild woman'; they can be a graphic display of transformatory power that enables a woman to *make up* new and alternative stories about herself, and ritually/theatrically enact (rather than conceal) the changes in her own body.'⁸

Make-up or self-adornment need not be represented as red "Witch Shoes", lipstick or a power suit. It may be a talisman that you wear, or a piece of music that you play which symbolises and creates empowerment in individual. For me, the red shoes are a metaphor, signifying the act of taking the Goddess with me wherever I go, and empower me to manifest theological ethics in practical situations. The question "can I wear the red "Witch Shoes" to work?" means trying to decipher whether theology and theological ethics fit with the image of graduate employment. What impact do they have on the Goddess feminist seeking Goddess friendly employment? What impression have they made on my career?

Following this, I will discuss two key points. Firstly, the impact theological ethics have had on job selection, based on a visit to the ever popular Graduate Recruitment Exhibition, and

⁵ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p156. Raphael defines "shape-shifting" as the potential to change the boundaries of the female form, and the veil enables this by 'allowing women to be elusively there and not there at the same time.' (p156)

⁶ Ibid, p157

⁷ Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, p103

⁸ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p162

then the discussion will move on to delineating the characteristics of a theologically friendly career.

Taking the red shoes to the Graduate Recruitment Exhibition

[b]egin where you are, not where you think you should be. Even the states and the places we feel as negative, as painful, embody energy. Anger, rage, depression, cynicism, fear/resistance, are all sources of power when we use them as pointers rather than blocks.⁹

During my time at University I attended two national Graduate Recruitment Exhibitions. The first one, attended as an undergraduate with rose-tinted research future ahead, was characterised by collecting as many free chocolates and pens as possible. The second fair was taken much more seriously, as the graduate concerned had the funding carpet pulled out from under her feet and was staring at a distinctly vacant future. This thesis was being cultivated, the unnamed ethics were in development and the red witch shoes were definitely present. What was this graduate to do, to which recruiter should she pledge her allegiance?

In the interests of efficiency, specific recruiters were automatically crossed off of the list of stands to visit: scientific companies, financial consultants and engineering opportunities were the first ones to go, largely because a theology degree left me less than qualified. Certain government agencies were only interested theologians if they were Arabic speakers or had qualifications relevant to the contemporary religious/political climate, not the skills of analysis, innovation and tenacity required to research new ground at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The list was also narrowed down by considering the implications of the red witch shoes on my choices. For example, a company that develops weapons for "defence" does not cohere with an immanent or interconnected world view, nor would working for a gas and oil company. More subtly, I was troubled by industry in the City,

⁹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p29

where the market reigns supreme and competition exists often for competitions sake. Additionally, a city banker in an air conditioned office in the square mile does not have the greatest opportunity to ground their experience or consider the implications of investing in this program or losing £Xmillion on the rest of the web.

The next area to negotiate was corporate social responsibility (CSR). Much more in vogue now than it was in 2008, my questions about CSR at the exhibition often led to deep frowns on the faces of recruiters who had been trained to capture the best graduates for opportunities in finance, human resources, marketing, and operations management. A recent article on *GradJobs* explains CSR thus:

It concerns the measures a firm or organisation takes to make the world a better place. This can be at a local level, perhaps funding nearby youth schemes, or on a national or even global scale such as donating money to selected charities or funding specific aid projects in the developing world.¹⁰

CSR is becoming an increasingly influential factor in the graduate employment market, with 71% of graduates seeking out employers with CSR values that reflect their own and 55% considering a company's stance on climate change as important.¹¹

However what concerned me was CSR tokenism. As a colleague of mine pointed out, why would a company need as CSR department if they were already socially responsible? Does it matter how much money a company fundraises for local community projects if that company is the corporate group putting local enterprise out of business? What difference will "carbon neutral" status make if the business you work for is centred on developing technologies which will lead to a negative environmental impact? Whilst considering my career pathway it became clear that there is a difference between corporate social responsibility and a company engaged in ethical pursuits. Rather than repair the web with one hand and strain interconnections with another, a more theologically friendly approach would consider how to conduct the business without putting stress on the web.

¹⁰ <http://www.gradjobs.co.uk/news/Pull-Together/160>; accessed 1/08/10

¹¹ Ibid

Not only did I struggle to find a career that theology/theology had qualified me for, I also struggled to find something which "felt right"; the Goddess cut down my options and also my list of possibilities. It was the *via negativa* of the careers world: I knew what I did not and could not do, and from this I needed to discover what a good Goddess could do! Can a good Goddess do anything?

This little Goddess went to market, this little Goddess stayed at home...

Life, being sacred, demands our full participation. The ethical person engages in life and does not withdraw from it... To be human is, by definition, to be imperfect.¹²

The ethical framework delineated in this thesis needs to be grounded in worldly discussion and experience for the theological method to be truly realised. The sources for this section come from years of discussions with individuals negotiating the Goddess-in-the-workplace pathway including my own experience, and reflection on the practical parameters of the theoretical ethical discussion above. I will restate the issue: given the general nature of theological ethical thinking, can a good Goddess do anything with the right reasoning? There are several key points to consider in answer to this question: the place of intent and integrity, the potential of withdrawal, the issue of compromise, and the relative significance of this question outside this graduate's context.

The loose descriptors which characterise theological ethics may be one of its strengths, but it is also one of its limitations. Could any action be given a theological spin? Take, for example, the licensed retail industry which can include the neighbourhood local pub. A pivotal business in many communities, "the local" is often a site of companionship, celebration, grief, support and will often bind a community together. Some pubs fundraise and support local and national charities close to the heart of the community, or may sponsor local sports teams and other groups. How does a good Goddess reconcile this with an industry build upon the sale of alcohol and the effects it has outside the pub doors? Even

¹² Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p42

with theological intent, considering the implications of actions outside their context is essential. Chapter two discusses integrity in theological ethics acting as a potential regulator of behaviour as one considers the positive and negative implications of actions. Right intent is intrinsically linked to integrity, which means that the decision lies with us and the urge to live with completeness and wholeness, unimpaired by incomplete decisions and actions. As points of interconnection in the web of life, it is our responsibility to drive this completeness, experience the tension and elasticity in the web around you and decide the most appropriate way it can be repaired and maintained. We are spiders in our own environments.¹³

However considering a perceived lack of continuity between a theological worldview and the western hegemonic view currently in place, would a good Goddess be wrong to withdraw from active participation in the world that already exists? Disengaging with networks already in place, companies already in business and political games already in play is considered by some not only as an appropriate course of action, but also as a matter of self preservation. However consider again the quotation that heads up this section: 'Life, being sacred, demands our full participation. The ethical person engages in life and does not withdraw from it.'¹⁴ If theological ethics are situated ethics then it does not make sense to fully withdraw from the current context. Additionally if that context is a place of divine indwelling, as of course divinity is immanent, then disengagement is not necessarily the most desirable option. For this graduate, planning a career on my terms, with my agenda and a view to affect the webs around me was the only course of action. However it's not simply a case of affecting the webs comfortably in your grasp, it stretching to grasp ones which may seem farther away.¹⁵

¹³ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p74

¹⁴ Ibid, p42

¹⁵ Some more recent work from Raphael has presented an analysis on seeing God/dess in places of pain and cruelty as a face of solidarity and kindness. *Hersed*, translated as gracious love, was exhibited by women (and men) of the Holocaust through staying with and experiencing the suffering of others in community. This, she submits, was a religio-ethical response to the horrors of the Holocaust and *Hersed* 'was a way of seeing a recreating a woman's full humanity.' (p100). This links to the idea presented here of engaging in life regardless of the nature of the web. Just as the face of God/dess is visible in negative places such as Holocaust camps

If you choose not to withdraw from our current context and hold it at arm's length whilst manifesting a theologically appropriate agenda, then there are compromises. My own theology-friendly career means I have had to buy a (fourth-hand) car, replace my old computer and augment my bookshelf with at least double the number of new books and other materials. Furthermore, my partner will be out earning me within the next two years and it will be his credit check which will allow us to buy a home in the future, not mine.¹⁶ There will not be time or space to grow my own vegetables, do most of my own cooking and indeed get out and tend to the world around me. I weigh this against the fact I will be a small spoke in larger wheel of a much larger vehicle, trying to mend one element of a very damaged web. I will also be lift sharing in the car and have moved my kitchen garden on to the windowsills of my flat. I am considering starting an allotment in my school to teach young people about the web in which they live. At 23, these are the places where I draw my lines of compromise, but as I grow older these lines may move. I know Goddess feminists of my age have chosen to draw their lines elsewhere, and what is important is the reasoning which has taken place in deciding those compromises. I do not believe a good Goddess can reason any decision possible largely because of theology's meticulous attendance to repair and maintenance of the web. It goes without saying that Goddess feminists will not make the same decisions and live the same lives. In the interconnected web of life, the webs are many, the task is vast, our skills are diverse and abundant, and the immanent Goddess works in us and through us to bring about our influence and change.

It would be ignorant to ignore the luxury of the situation facing young graduates. They often have many more choices available to them right from the point of early schooling, and this providence will continue with them for much of their lives. They have opportunities

and stories, the immanent divine can be seen in more negative situations and webs; simply because one disagrees with or criticises specific event, does not necessarily mean that it is devoid of divinity. See *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2003) for further details.

¹⁶ In fact, it is this question which this thesis is borne out of, which was swiftly followed by the second question, "how feminist is that?"

available to them which many others do not have, and I am aware that in focusing on graduates my research is only relevant to a very small group of people. The application of theological ethics outside of this context may look significantly different; a single parent with little to no qualifications and living in relative poverty on the estate 5 minutes walk from my home may not be able to choose any career, let alone one which is theologically consistent. However this does not invalidate what has been written here as I am contributing to a body of discussion, not decrying absolutes.

So, laying the boundaries of the discussion to consider young, socially mobile graduates, what might a good Goddess' career look like? Following from the chapters above, it might firstly be concerned with the ethical concepts of immanence, interconnection and power-from-within. Secondly, it may relate to integrity and intention of actions. Thirdly, it would be acutely aware of intuition and feeling in the workplace.

Concerned with the immanent

A theologically friendly career takes into account the embodied divinity in all things. Separation, division and estrangement from the world would not be encouraged in this worldview as divinity is manifest in this world. To fully commune with, manifest and nourish the divine is to be concerned with physical and actual affairs. A career built on theological ethics is intensely concerned with other people, places and things.

Practically, this may mean eschewing career opportunities that are not directly concerned with the nurture of the world around us or may even negatively impact on that world. If you had a plan to work in a damaging organisation whilst endeavouring to transform it from the inside, I would not necessarily assume that to be against theological ethics. Conspiring to prevent damage to the immanent is quite different from colluding with those who promote that damage. As Starhawk says, it's the power to limit, the power to say no.

This is not to assume that a good Goddess will act with perfect consideration of the immanent the whole time. On a micro level, she may still say a few choice words to a frustrating colleague or kick the photocopier from time to time. However, upon reflection, she may choose to resolve or withdraw from conflict in a more gracious, understanding and empowering manner, or she may install a recycling system next to said photocopier to repair what damage may have been done.

■ *Concerned with the web*

If the crimes done to one are done to all and, finally, felt by all, then the responsibility to protest and heal is a collective one.¹⁷

Regarding points of compromise and the potential to work with not work for potentially negative organisations for positive change, interconnection becomes an important element to consider. The derived consequences of many organisations which operate within current webs are wide reaching and an awareness of operating within a web is an important understanding. The chaotic effects of actions are equally significant and relevant to theology. Applying this practically, a career in banking and finance may be a suitable point of compromise, so long as the standards of integrity and right intention are met. It is a difficult career to justify, particularly considering recent events regarding the stock market; however a good Goddess with a strong grounding in practical concerns may consider implications from which others may be blinded.

Chapter three discusses diversity as a potential standard of judgement. How might a good Goddess feel about Tesco, Walmart, or even Google? I do not understand this diversity to become a theological/political justification for capitalism, as these kind of overarching companies have some significantly beneficial effects. I understand diversity as a standard of

¹⁷ Raphael, *Introducing Theology*, p106.

judgement to mean making choices that create more points of interconnection in the web, not sever them.

Interconnection also relates to the nature of businesses and organisations people may wish to work for. Described above is the potential positive effects of not being at the centre of a structure, which can be applied to a career model which may manifest in these ways:

- Non-hierarchical organisations to be favoured over a vertical hierarchy;
- Values driven organisations as opposed to profit driven;
- The shareholders/stakeholders being those affected by the actions of the organisation, not only a faceless Board;
- Focus on the importance of open forums and the importance of accountability and feedback which values the contributions of each member of a collaborative working process and those affected by that process.

At the start of my new career I have found Starhawk's insights into the practical running of non-hierarchical processes particularly useful. Whilst I will not be assigning the role of 'vibeswatcher' or 'priest/priestess' to in my groups, the principles of these and the other roles of 'facilitator', 'peacekeeper', 'mediator' and 'coordinator' make absolute sense.¹⁸ Explicit theology is not appropriate for my workplace, however nothing has been mentioned about "stealth theology" or theology-by-proxy. Bias towards non-hierarchical organisation as well as other ideas highlighted here may be the way to manifest the way of the red "Witch Shoes" without laying bare the "G" word.

Manifest power-from-within

Power-from-within follows on from the above discussion on non-hierarchical structures. These concepts are as intimately connected as hierarchies and power-over, where '[t]he structure itself reinforces the idea that some people are inherently more worthy than

¹⁸ Starhawk, *Dreaming*, p116-118

others.¹⁹ Hierarchies may never result in the empowering of those involved with and affected by an organisation, and will as such require a level of control and maintenance.

Integrity is intrinsically linked to power-from-within. Ethics of integrity are focused on manifesting wholeness of the self and of the web. A system with integrity is complete, without breaks and is satisfied. Wholeness for the person is the acceptance of the presence of both "good" and "evil":

People of integrity are those whose selves integrate both the positive and the negative, the dark and the light, the painful emotions as well as the pleasurable ones. They are people who are willing to look at their own shadows instead of flinching from them.²⁰

In confronting shadows, the ethics of integrity become concerned with the potential to change that shadow or at the very least approaching the shadow with the intent to change. Theological ethics based in integrity and intention focus on intending the best course of action and potentially taking risks to achieve positive ends. Yet these risks are always calculated alongside theological principles of the web and immanent divinity because ultimately the body of the Goddess should be nourished, not diminished. If this is what is required for integrity and wholeness, then the good Goddess should be manifesting this in their own life.

I have applied this principle in my own career of choice and been affected by integrity when it comes to choice that need to be made. The ethics of integrity are self regulating. I do not need a check list of what I can and cannot do and when I should or should not do so. Integrity is more personal and far stronger as an impetus to act because if I do not act, take risks, clean up and dust myself off after confronting a shadow and try again, then it is my wholeness which is affected and in turn the wholeness of the web. By acting with integrity in the web I become empowered:

¹⁹ Ibid, p19

²⁰ Starhawk, *Dreaming*, p35

If I leave the beer cans lying, and go away feeling powerless and depressed, my powerlessness is not a judgement imposed by an irate Goddess – it is an inherent aspect of the decision I made.²¹

The proverbial beer can may represent any actions in the workplace that violate the body of the Goddess. To have integrity means avoiding places built around these actions, and defying them when the opportunity is presented to you.

Awareness of intuition and feeling

A theologically friendly career is not divorced from feelings and intuition. It gives you the space to respect and work with gut reactions and toe-curling moments, and provides time to step back and feel what is going on. It shuns dispassionate, clinical and ungrounded workplaces. Yet once again the good Goddess is presented with potential compromise. I have experienced quite a cross-section of workplaces, and if I wanted everything mentioned above then I would not have taken over half of the jobs I had. My new place of work resembles the inside of the Starship Enterprise and several of my colleagues are in other colleges which are specifically designed to emulate a boardroom environment, no displays, no ownership of space and no personality.

What is being questioned here is the assumption that "professional" is necessarily connected to "dispassionate". A theologically friendly career allows time and space for embodied thought, considered emotional responses and to discuss and develop workplace intuition. Whether this means selecting an employer who already has this built into their systems or introducing it into a different company is a compromise the individual must decide. However the onus is on the individual Goddess to remain grounded, respect feeling and intuition and to think through the body with reference to work decisions as well as personal.

²¹ Ibid p35

Ultimately, career choice will be a reflexive process and for the conscientious Goddess there is interplay between the above factors, context, practicality and necessity. The terrain mapped in chapters two, three and four is offered as a framework or set of guiding factors to help inform ethical decision making or being the "good" Goddess. The graduate career market was selected here to provide context and ground the discussion, considering the practical application of theological ethics to 'the micro-political realities of patriarchal society.'²² Additionally, the notion of a theological methodology was proposed in chapter one and modeled throughout this thesis to extend and expand upon research material. Despite considering my methodological venture as a success in that I believe it has enhanced my work and deepened my awareness of method, the relative success of it remains to be seen. What I have achieved is a general framework which, despite needing further research to acquire the details so difficult to arrive at, provides tools to move forward in applying this research to wider contexts.

²² Reid-Bowen, *Goddess as Nature*, p166

Concluding Remarks



The city is nature. The people are holy. The land is sacred. In so loving the world, the Goddess in the metropolis dances amid the concrete and the garbage embracing us all.¹

Theology, as contextual and situated, is a constant process of adaptation for those who choose to engage with it. This is true for my journey. Thus far I have been situated against a landscape characterised by a bustling city and the challenges facing those who tick the “18-25” box. The theology I have read does not address my context as, I suspect, is the experience of many Goddess feminists. At the same time as negotiating the Goddess into my life I have been adapting what resources I find to suit my generational context, as well as my city surroundings. A great majority of theological discourse appears to implicitly or explicitly favour more rural scenery, a backdrop which coheres more neatly with the concepts of immanent divinity and environmental interconnections. The opportunities to manifest these important theological notions appear greater when one is able to ground ones perspectives in a physically natural environment. However to ground ones perspective in nature is not necessarily linked to the imperative to live in that environment. I agree that it would be more straightforward and less demanding to live my theology in the Cazadero Hills or on an idyllic Greek island,² but this simply has not been possible or desirable firstly as a UK university student and secondly as a graduate seeking employment. Additionally, if we encourage the Goddess to dwell in rural environments then we are limiting the influence of the Goddess to a relative few. My theology comes from an urban context out of both necessity and the imperative to extend the reach of the Goddess’ arm.

Starhawk identifies a series of questions which open the issue of applying theology in urban environments:

In the cities, we are equally interdependent, but we often behave as if we are not. How can we bring a sense of the sacred value in each of us not just to the groups we

¹ Irene Javors, “Goddess in the Metropolis: Reflections on the Sacred in an Urban Setting,” in Diamond and Orenstein (eds.) *Reweaving the World*, pp211-214, p214

² Referring to Starhawk and Christ respectively.

create and the relationships we choose but to the groups we don't create – our neighbors, the homeless who beg on street corners, the youth gangs, our coworkers at the office? How do we generate trust and compassion in situations in which we are afraid to trust? These are not questions I have ready answers for, but I believe they are the crucial challenges we face if we wish to re-shape the world.³

Already there are small nuggets of insight into spirituality and city life. Carol Lee Sanchez paints this image: 'Imagine an entire city of people waking and rising together at 5:00 or 6:00am and the first thing they do is sing themselves – body, mind, and spirit – into the day,' sending out 'loving goodwill while visualising all the creatures, all the plants, all the elements, and especially all the microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, molecules, and atoms) that plants, creatures, and humans depend on to keep the balancing machinery working.'⁴ Interconnection and interdependence can also be experienced against a city backdrop:

I was sitting alone on the downtown IRT on my way to pick up the children at their after-school music classes... Then suddenly the dull light in the car began to shine with exceptional lucidity until everything around me was glowing with an indescribable aura, and I saw in the row of motley passengers opposite the miraculous connection of all living beings. Not felt, saw. What began as a desultory thought grew into a vision, large and unifying, in which all the people in the car hurtling downtown together, including myself, like all people on the planet hurtling together around our sun – our entire living cohort – formed one united family, indissolubly connected by the rare and mysterious accident of life.⁵

Starhawk's novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*,⁶ envisions a diverse and multicultural city in the future: 'Choosing life over guns, they have created a simple but rich ecotopia, where no one wants, nothing is wasted, culture and cooperation are uppermost, and the Four Sacred Things [air, fire, water and earth] are valued unconditionally.'⁷ The book expounds elements of ecofeminism and spirituality within a city and I find it an inspirational piece of

³ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, pxix

⁴ Carol Lee Sanchez, "New World Tribal Communities: An Alternative Approach for Recreating Egalitarian Societies," in Plaskow and Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions*, pp344-356, p355

⁵ Alix Kates Shulman, *Drinking the Rain: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995) p55-56

⁶ Starhawk, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (New York and London: Bantam Books, 1993)

⁷ <http://www.starhawk.org/writings/fifth-sacred-thing.html>; accessed 1st August, 2010

fiction, where '[d]iversity of lifestyle, learning style, religion, and culture are also honored and are key to the richness and variety of city life.'⁸

This thesis is an academic representation and reflection of my first steps towards exploring theology in the city and a contribution to the emergent discussions referenced above. In deducing an ethical framework from theology I have had to consider where theology might draw its lines of compromise and of importance. I have proposed that without a notion of immanent divinity, an interconnected worldview or the importance of power-from-within then an outlook would not be theologically consistent. By thinking through this framework of ideas, I argue that Goddess feminists in both urban and rural environments can begin to live their theology.

During my research I have been tested, interviewed, rejected and selected for a number of graduate employment opportunities and I in turn have rejected and selected my career through this theological framework. My chosen career is intimately concerned with repairing a series of broken webs in an urban context which have left large swathes of the population in serious hardship. I am influenced by the ethics of integrity to pick up the beer cans in my path, mend the broken web in my path to fully nurture the immanent divinity I find in others. Regarding the potential and recommendation for further research, I do wonder whether what I have written here will still apply one year, two years or five years into my career. Will my next piece of research be concerned with theology friendly management or on shifting careers because through experience and reflection what I have written here simply does not work?

The red "Witch Shoes" as a metaphor for theological ethics have already guided me in choosing my future career. There is no question as to whether I will be wearing them on my first day, 3rd September. Without them, the demanding challenge they have shaped for me would be would seem too big and too difficult. However armed with the potential of

⁸ http://www.starhawk.org/writings/fifth_sacred_SFvision.html; accessed 1st August 2010

chaotic power, aspirations of power-from-within, the strength of interconnection and the imperative to manifest the full flourishing of the body of the Goddess I have the potential to effect change of some nature.

Bibliography



Books and Articles

Adams, C. (ed.) *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (London and New York: Continuum, 1994)

Alba, D. *The Cauldron of Change: Myths, Mysteries and Magick of the Goddess* (Oak Park, IL: Delphi Press, 1993)

Althaus-Reid, M. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000)

_____ *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004)

Atkinson, C., C. Buchanan and M. Miles (eds.) *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture* (Ann Arbor and London: University of Michigan Press, 1987)

Bradotti, R. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)

Caputi, J. *Gossips, Gorgons and Crones: The Fates of the Earth* (New Mexico, Santa Fe: Bear and Company Publishing, 1993)

Christ, C. "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in Christ and Plaskow (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising*, pp273-287

_____ *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987)

_____ *Odyssey with the Goddess: A Spiritual Quest in Crete* (New York: Continuum, 1995)

_____ *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 1997)

_____ *She Who Changes: Reimagining the Divine in the World* (New York and Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

_____ "Musings on the Goddess and Her Cultured Despisers: Provoked by Naomi Goldenberg," *Feminist Theology*, 13, 2005, pp143-149

_____ "Does Feminism Need a Metaphysic?: Toward a Feminist Process Paradigm," *Feminist Theology*, 13, 2005, pp281-299

_____ "Ecofeminism and Process Philosophy," *Feminist Theology*, 14, 2006, pp289-310

Christ, C. and J. Plaskow (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1979 and 1992)

Clack, B. "The Denial of Dualism: Theological Reflections on the Sexual and the Spiritual," *Feminist Theology*, 10, 1995, pp102-115

_____ "Theology and Theology: Mutually Exclusive or Creatively Interdependent?" *Feminist Theology*, 7, 1999, pp21-38

_____ "'The Many-Named Queen of All': Theology and the Concept of Goddess," in Sawyer and Collier (eds.) *Is There A Future for Feminist Theology?*, pp150-159

Clough, P. and C. Nutbrown, *A Student's Guide to Methodology* (London: Sage, 2002)

Cohen, D. "Feminist Theology, Men and the Goddess: Reminiscences and Opinions," *Feminist Theology*, 11, 2002, pp27-34

Culpepper, E. "Contemporary Goddess Theology: A Sympathetic Critique," in Atkinson, Buchanan and Miles (eds.) *Shaping New Vision*, pp51-71

Daly, M. *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1973; this edition, 1986)

_____ *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language, Conjured in Cahoots with Jane Caputi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987)

_____ *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (London: The Women's Press, 1993)

Diamond, I. and G. Orenstein (eds.) *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990)

Douglas, M. *Purity and Danger* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970)

Eller, C. *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press 1993, reprinted 1995)

Ellis, C. and A. Bochner (eds.) *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (California: Alta Mira Press, 1996)

Foltz, T. and W. Griffin, "'She Changes Everything She Touches': Ethnographic Journeys of Self-Discovery," in Ellis and Bochner (eds.) *Composing Ethnography*, pp301-329

Fonow, M. and J. Cook, "Back to the Future: A Look at the Second Wave of Feminist Epistemology and Methodology," in M. Fonow and J. Cook (eds.) *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp1-15

Feyerabend, P. *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: Verso, 1978)

Gimbutas, M. *The Civilization of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991)

Gleick, J. *Chaos: Making a New Science* (London: Vintage, 1998; originally published 1987)

Goldenberg, N. *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979)

Gudmarsdottir, S. "Rapes of Earth and Grapes of Wrath: Steinbeck, Ecofeminism and the Metaphor of Rape," *Feminist Theology*, 18, 2010, pp206-222

Graham, E. H. Walton and F. Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005)

Grey, M. *Introducing Feminist Images of God* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001)

Gross, R. *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996)

Guest, D. "Because They're Worth It!: Making Room for Female Students and Theology in Higher Education Contexts," *Feminist Theology*, 17, 2008, pp43-71

Hall, N. (ed.) *The New Scientist Guide to Chaos* (London: Penguin Books, 1991)

Hodge, B. "The Goddess Tour: Spiritual Tourism/Post-modern Pilgrimage in Search of Atlantis," in Hume and McPhillips (eds.) *Popular Spiritualities*, pp27-40

Hume, L. and K. McPhillips (eds.) *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)

Isherwood, L. (ed.) *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains* (Oakville and London: Equinox, 2007)

_____ "Book Review: Goddess as Nature," *Feminist Theology*, 17, 2009, p262

Javors, I. "Goddess in the Metropolis: Reflections on the Sacred in an Urban Setting," in Diamond and Orenstein (eds.) *Reweaving the World*, pp211-214

Lorde, A. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in Plaskow and Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions*, pp208-213

Lovelock, J. *The Ages of Gaia: A biography of our living Earth, 2nd edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, this edition previously published 1995)

_____ *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2006)

- _____ *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* (London: Allen Lane, 2009)
- Martin, R. "Blurring Boundaries and Moving Posts: Where Does a Feminist Stand for Justice?," *Feminist Theology*, 11, 2003, pp293-306
- _____ "Theological Reflections on Embodiment," *Feminist Theology*, 12, 2004, pp212-227
- _____ "'Dealing with a Jealous God: Letting go of Monotheism and 'Doing' Sacrality," in Isherwood (ed.) *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*, pp37-49
- McFague, S. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)
- Morton, N. "The Goddess as Metaphoric Image," in Plaskow and Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions*, pp111-118
- Plaskow, J. and C. Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989)
- Raphael, M. *Theology and Embodiment The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996)
- _____ *Introducing Theology: Discourse on the Goddess* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999)
- _____ *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2003)
- _____ "Monotheism in Contemporary Feminist Goddess Religion: A Betrayal of Early Theological Non-Realism?" in Sawyer and Collier (eds.) *Is There A Future for Feminist Theology?* pp139-149
- Reid, L. *She Changes Everything: Seeking the Divine on a Feminist Path* (London: T&T Clark, 2005)
- Reid-Bowen, P. *Goddess as Nature: Towards a Philosophical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)
- Rorty, R. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980)
- Ruether, R. R. *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth and Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992)
- Salomonsen, J. *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002)

- Sanchez, C. L. "New World Tribal Communities: An Alternative Approach for Recreating Egalitarian Societies," in Plaskow and Christ (eds.) *Weaving the Visions*, pp344-356
- Sardar, Z. and I. Abrams, *Introducing Chaos* (Royston: Icon Books, 2004)
- Sawyer, D. and D. Collier (eds.) *Is There A Future for Feminist Theology?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999)
- Shulman, A. K. *Drinking the Rain: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995)
- Sjöö, M. *New Age and Armageddon: The Goddess or the Gurus? Towards a Feminist Vision of the Future* (London: The Women's Press, 1992)
- Sjöö, M. and B. Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991)
- Smith, L. *Chaos: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Spretnak, C. (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement* (London: Anchor Books, 1982)
- Starhawk, "Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion," in Spretnak (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*, pp415-422
- _____ *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (New York and London: Bantam Books, 1993)
- _____ *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics: Fifteenth Anniversary Edition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997; previously published 1982, 1988)
- _____ *The Earth Path: Grounding your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2004)
- Thompson, J., S. Pattison and R. Thompson, *SCM Studyguide to Theological Reflection* (London: SCM Press, 2008)
- Vest, N. 'Is Reverie to be Trusted? The Imaginal and the Work of Marija Gimbutas,' *Feminist Theology*, 13, 2005, pp239-248
- Waldrop, M. M. *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994)

Online resources

<http://www.starhawk.org/writings/fifth-sacred-thing.html>; accessed 1st August, 2010

http://www.starhawk.org/writings/fifth_sacred_SFvision.html; accessed 1st August 2010

<http://www.starhawk.org/permaculture/permaculture.html>; accessed 10th August 2010

<http://www.starhawk.org/writings/dreaming-dark.html>; accessed 18th March 2009

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/science_and_environment/10093904.stm; accessed 13th May 2010

<http://www.redtractor.org.uk>; accessed 17th May 2010

<http://www.gradjobs.co.uk/news/Pull-Together/160>; accessed 1st August 2010

Red shoe collection

Introduction: Red or Dead, Alexa Brogues in Red; <http://www.schuh.co.uk/womens-red-red-or-dead-alexa/1373043020>

Chapter One: Christian Louboutin, Pigalle patent-leather flats in Red; <http://www.net-a-porter.com/product/78768>

Chapter Two: Schuh, Tilly Clog in Polka Dot; <http://www.schuh.co.uk/womens-red-schuh-tilly-clog-polka-dot/1737013020>

Chapter Three: Hunter, Classic Boot in Red; <http://www.digginfood.com/2008/11/gotta-have-my-wellies/>

Chapter Four: Christian Louboutin, New Decoltissimo 85 patent pumps in Black; <http://www.net-a-porter.com/product/48415>

Chapter Five: Irregular Choice, Flick

Flack; <http://shop.irregularchoice.com/womens/product/2860/flick-flack.html?offset=7>

Concluding Remarks: Topshop, Wisteria Chiffon Tie Wedges in Red; http://www.topshop.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?beginIndex=0&viewAllFlag=true&catalogId=33057&storeId=12556&categoryId=209958&parent_category_rn=208542&productId=1748154&langId=-1

Bibliography: Doctor Marten, 8 Tie Boot in Red Patent; <http://www.schuh.co.uk/womens-red-dr-martens-8-tie-boot/1407193040>

All accessed 1st August 2010