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Ecology, Divinity, and Reason: Thinking the Divine Anew in the Midst of Ecological Crisis

Abstract:

Eco-feminist Val Plumwood has argued that as heirs of rationalism, the developed world has created an ecological crisis that is truly a crisis of reason. Of primary concern is the "rationalist hyper-separation of human identity from nature," which has caused a great epistemological schism between ethics and ecology. Assuming the ecological crisis is, as Plumwood argues, an epistemological crisis enflamed by the human/non-human, ethical/ecological divisions that take place in modern forms of rationalism, this essay argues that certain western interpretations of Christian divinity—particularly the notion of divinity purported by Thomas Aquinas—have historically supported hegemonic forms of rationalism and human supremacy. After showing that certain Thomist formulations of the divine have buttressed the anthropocentric elements of modern rationalism, I venture a reading of Christian divinity that is radically relational in character. This reading of the divine highlights the inseparability of the human and non-human, and begins doing so by emphasizing the intimate connection between human and non-human animality. Such a re-framing of divinity, I argue, could help bridge the human/non-human, ethical/ecological divides, complicate anthropocentric logic, and mitigate the vast eco-epistemological crisis of our day.

Keywords: Divinity, Epistemology, Ecological Crisis, St. Thomas Aquinas, Ecological Ethics, Val Plumwood, Catherine Keller

Introduction.

The reason for the current ecological crisis, says eco-feminist philosopher Val Plumwood, is the way we reason. In her work *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Plumwood argues that as the "heirs of rationalism," the developed world has created an ecological crisis that is, in truth, "a crisis or failing of reason and culture, a crisis of monological forms of both that are unable to adapt themselves to the earth and to the limits of other kinds of life" (2002: 15-16). An issue of primary concern in this eco-epistemological crisis is the "rationalist hyper-separation of human identity from nature," which has caused, in effect, a great epistemological schism between ethics and ecology (Plumwood 2002: 8). Thus, Plumwood continues, in order to reduce ecological and non-human animal abuse, we must resituate "humans [within] ecological terms and non-humans in ethical terms" (Plumwood 2002: 8-9). Or, in other words, if we hope to change our current ecological predicament, we must change the hegemonic and violent episteme of the human/non-human relationship. In Plumwood's view, rationalism's monological chains must be broken and its subsequent dualism of nature vs. man[1] abolished, because such a dualism

[1] Plumwood intentionally uses the masculine pronoun in order to refer to humanity so as to emphasize the violent, epistemological hegemony rationalism has made possible against not only the bio-sphere, but also against women and other oppressed people groups. Thus throughout this essay I will use "man" in some places in a similar manner.

fuels a logic that justifies the commodification of the non-human on the facile morale grounds of human supremacy.[2]

Building from Plumwood's position that the ecological crisis is in fact an epistemological crisis, enflamed by the human/non-human division that takes place in modern forms of rationalism, this essay will attempt to argue that certain interpretations of Christian divinity—particularly the notion of divinity purported by Thomas Aquinas—have historically supported hegemonic forms of rationalism and human supremacy. Thereafter, having shown the ways in which the Thomist formulation of the divine has been used in modern times to buttress anthropocentric[3] elements of rationalism, I will venture that perhaps a re-reading of divinity in relation to the non-human animal could conversely begin to complicate anthropocentric logic, and thus aid in mitigating the vast eco-epistemological crisis we now find our planet embroiled in. [4]

This thesis will necessitate three parts. In part one, I explain further what Plumwood and I are speaking about when we refer to "rationalism." Rationalist logic is perhaps the key antithesis in this essay; thus, we should make sure that the word, concept, and historical underpinnings are made clear, especially in relation to the non-human animal. Next, focusing on the human/non-human distinction in the realm of animality, I will engage Thomas Aquinas's theological interpretation of the human/non-human relationship in order to exhibit what is still today the Christian tradition's dominant view of human/non-human correlation.[5] I attempt in this section to expose traces of the Thomist divinity—specifically in the Great Chain of Being—that prepared the way for rationalist thinkers of modernity and the burgeoning Western sciences to implement a duplicitous, "pure" objectivity that, in many ways, has led to our current eco-epistemological predicament. These two parts together intend in no way to serve as a comprehensive historical account of human supremacy as it developed in relation to rationalism and notions of the divine. Rather, they only function as a limited survey that hopes to highlight some key social-scientific

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[2] On the heels of her thesis, Plumwood stresses that her work is not to be read as anti-rational. She insists that she is not implying that we ought to embrace irrationalism or pure empiricism. Rather, only that we must strategically fight rationalism as a hegemonic doctrine; i.e., we must combat the dominant western view of rationality that understands reason as monological, as "the apex of human life," and that employs "oppositional construction in relation to its 'others', especially the body and nature, which are simultaneously relied upon but disavowed or taken for granted" (Plumwood: 18). Such an anthropocentric, neo-Cartesian view of rationality, she believes, will only lead us further into ecological devastation—a claim I am inclined to agree with.

[3] Anthropocentrism is being used here as a philosophical viewpoint that holds human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world. "It regards the human as separate from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value while other entities (including animals, plants, mineral resources, and so on) are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of humankind" (Boslaugh, *Britannica Academic*, s. v. "Anthropocentrism": 2016).

[4] This approach has two desired results. Primarily, it hopes to mitigate the meat industry's mass systematic murder of animals simply for the sake of profit via an epistemological shift in the way we relate and think the animal—ideally this essay would at least make one consider a more sustainable and, in my view, more moral life style such as vegetarianism or veganism. Second, in recent years, scientists have shown that the mass slaughter of animals by the meat industry contributes the majority of the globe's greenhouse emissions (Walsh "The Triple Whopper Environmental Impact of Global Meat Production," *Time Magazine:* 2016). Hence, if thinking the human/non-human animal relationship differently can weaken anthropocentrism, it could possibly result in both a lessening of animal violence via fewer animals eaten and therefore slaughtered, and, concomitantly reduce the discharge of methane gas.

conditions of rationalism and medieval theological concepts that made modern day animal commodification morally tenable and possible. Last, I will enter into conversation with theologian Catherine Keller in an effort to reformulate a polydoxical understanding of the Christian God that diametrically opposes a monological anthropocentricism that justifies mass animal slaughter and ecological abuse. God, in this vision, is attentive towards the entire biosphere and is characterized by relationality, multiplicity, and open-endedness.

It is worth noting before I get too far into my argument that, in truth, the anthropocentricism that fuels the present ecological crisis is an infinitely complicated and perplexing epistemological problem that manifests at nearly every intersection of Western science, the humanities, and economics. Hence, unable to engage its full breadth, this essay engages one of its facets that seems, at least to this author, to be among the most pressing. Chiefly, in hope of assuaging the negative effects of our ecological crisis, I contest the moral and theological validity of framing the non-human animal as a commodity that exists to be used, bought, and sold by the human. Yet, were I forced to start from scratch, even with my scope narrowed to the human/non-human animal ethical relationship, this task would still prove unreasonably vast for a single essay. Therefore, to ground this task more specifically, I build upon a foundation established by Plumwood, for I find her diagnosis of our current ecological crisis apt.

1. Monological Rationalism and Our Eco-Epistemological Crisis

Plumwood emphasizes in her work that the rationalism she engages is the rationalism of the hegemonic order, i.e., the view of rationality that understands reason as monological, as "the apex of human life," and that employs "oppositional construction in relation to its 'others,' especially the body and nature, which are simultaneously relied upon but disavowed or taken for granted" (Plumwood 2002: 18). She is not primarily attacking the traditional philosophical position known as rationalism that claims, "there are significant ways in which our concepts and knowledge are gained independently of [our] sense experience" (Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Nevertheless, Plumwood's interpretation and pointed critique of today's dominant and anthropocentric rationalism tempts one to urgently search for rationalism's originator. Perhaps if we could blame a single thinker or "first cause" of modern-day rationalism, we could begin to narrow in on the source of modern anthropocentric logic, and thereby resist non-human animal violence more readily. But of course, it is not that simple.

Even if it were possible to determine a single beginning point of classical rationalism, rationalism and modernity as such may not be the main problem. Rather, at least in Plumwood's view, our eco-epistemological crisis persists not because rationalism existed, but because Western culture and society has failed to transition to more sustainable and inclusive forms of rationality. In large part, the cultural fealty to the scientific objectivity that took root some time during the Enlightenment prolongs our intransigent refusal to search for other, better ways of knowing and thinking, especially in relation to the non-human animal. Although scientific objectivity and method often prove to be the trailblazers of new knowledge, the idea of *discovering new ways of knowing* seems, at best, not to be an integral concern for modern day scientists, and at worst, is viewed as an anathema to scientific progress.

Plumwood agrees. Though science is the discipline most often lauded as the potential savior from ratiogenic and anthropocentric thought, she writes that it "has contributed to producing the environmental crisis at least as much as curing it, applying to highly complex situations and systems specialized and highly instrumentally-directed forms of knowledge whose aim is to maximize outputs, often with devastating results" (Plumwood 2002: 38). As evidence to this claim,

Plumwood adds that four out of five scientists in 2002 worked for companies with one purpose: maximize profit—an essentially anthropocentric task because it pays no heed to any collateral damage outside the rational bounds of monological free-market episteme (Ibid.). This disregard for other ways of knowing and being in the world can be especially seen, for instance, in the meat industry, where the mass killing of non-human animals is systematized to the height of efficiency in order to maximize profit. In one of his rare references to the Holocaust, Martin Heidegger, in the same vein as Plumwood's critique of science and its affair with free-market thinking, launches a similar charge against industrial meat companies and those who build them. He accuses the burgeoning, for-profit big agriculture industry of his day, built on a profit-driven epistemology, as equally systematic in its nefarious operations as the most death-dealing apparatuses of World War II. He writes, "Agriculture is now a motorized food industry, essentially the same as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as blockade and starvation of countries, the same as the manufacturer of hydrogen bombs" (Polt 1999: 172).[6] Heidegger's point is that the science employed at the death camps, and the relatively new technologies employed by big agriculture operated from the same level of thought: one that only understood inputs and outputs; profits and loss; how to use the minimal amount of resources to produce the greatest desired result.

The failure on the part of scientists to see other ways of thinking, and the anthropocentric violence that sometimes manifests from such failures, argues Plumwood, is prevalent in large part because this type of behavior is often supported and protected by the façade of pure, scientific objectivity: a disposition supposedly assumed by the scientific community that is unemotional, unbiased, non-political, and, worst of all, allegedly free from moral values (2002: 44). Plumwood writes that the "rationalist interpretation of objectivity as it stands" is in truth none of those things; rather, it is more often used as "a mystifying notion that is useful in enabling dominant groups to pass their interests off as universal" (2002: 44). This understanding of objectivity, highly influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, is "strongly anthropocentric" in its appropriation of natural resources, and tends to amplify the hyper-separation of "subject and object," "soul and body," "man and nature" in a way that makes the rational, masculine subject transcendent in relation to an inherently docile, enfleshed feminine-animality and nature (Plumwood 2002: 48-9). In short, this kind of mystical and transcendent scientific objectivism, rooted in rationalism, makes man, male, and rationality itself into a God who rules over nature, the body, the feminine, and non-human animal.

Sociologist Lamont C. Hempel supports such a view, though in less gendered language. Keeping the religious undertones of Plumwood's analysis, however, Hempel avers that the "decline of theocracy in Europe and the rise of the idea of human progress, led by science, infused Western civilization with a peculiarly self-confident belief in the human ability to dominate non-human nature" (Hempel "Population in Context: A Typology of Environmental Driving Forces." *Population and Environment* 18.5 1997: 439-61, 445).[7] In the nascent emergence of modernity, he continues, religious authoritarian rule began to fade, and "people began to imagine themselves, in René Descartes's words, as the 'lords and possessors of nature" (Ibid.). Likewise, theologian Laurel Schneider makes statements about Western science in relation to monological epistemologies. Yet, her comments and research tend to focus even more specifically on how religion and notions of divinity contributed to the blossoming science of modernity. Schneider writes that the "science that evolved in Europe late in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and

[6] "Das Ge-Stell" in *Bremer und Freiburger Vortrage*, GA 79, 27 (Quoted in Polt 1999).
[7]) Lamont C. Hempel quoting Ehrlich & Daily.

that gave birth to modern technological and scientific world grew out of Christian political and ecclesial struggles for dominance in the new world over which they fought and from which they sought to gain imperial advantage" (*Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* 2007: 75). Notions of divinity, scientific-rationalist objectivism, and imperial domination, therefore, all appear to be intimately entangled with one another in a relationship that can especially be observed in the shift from the Middle Ages into modernity.

Most pertinent to this essay, in Schneider's research and Hempel's insights, a hypothesis could be constructed regarding the relationship of rationalist science, epistemology, and the divine circa modernity. Mainly, it seems that while the Medieval-Christian notion of divinity was slowly being evicted from its seat of power by an emerging modernity, its singular space of epistemological ultimacy was exposed. This space may be thought in the same way Schneider thinks the logic of the One, because the singularity of the space itself insinuates that only one ultimate regulative idea or a single authoritative principle can inhabit it for society at a given time. In pre-modernity it was occupied by a medieval Christian God; in modernity, rationalist objectivity inhabited the space. When the pre-modern notion of divinity made leave of that space, the space concomitantly began to be filled by a rationalist, scientific objectivity that has, as Plumwood argues, landed us in our present-day precarious eco-epistemological pickle.

Fortunately, the exposure of this space allows us to examine it, and thereafter entertain the reassertion of another regulative principle. It seems that a notion of divinity both bio-centric and at home with multiplicity would be the best replacement for the current monological rationalism that is worn-out, tired, and moving us toward ecological disaster. I believe such a reimagined divinity would not only adequately fill the space, but also might ignite a rhizomatic fracturing of this space, so that there may be multiple spaces of ultimacy, instead of one exclusionary monolithic space. Such a divine disruption may finally allow room for a both/and, porous relationship between the human and non-human animal to take form, over against the current either/or, exclusionary relationship of dominance and passivity perpetuated by a dualistic objectivism. To take stock of this space and the monological divinity that filled it prior to modernity, I now turn to Thomas Aquinas.

2. The Thomist God: The Predecessor of Monological Rationalism

From the outset, I confess that this section of my short essay cannot and does not do justice to the rich theological and philosophical viewpoints of Aquinas, even just in relation to his understanding of God/human/non-human relationship. In many ways Aquinas has proven to be a fecund resource for those trying to move Christianity toward a more eco-centric theological ethic. Pope Francis for instance drew on Aquinas often throughout his 2015 eco-theological encyclical *Laudato Si,* and other thinkers like Willis Jenkins (2018) and Ryan McLaughlin (2014) have similarly called on Aquinas's theology to emphasize the dignity of the non-human. Thus, I simply remind my reader that my target is not Aquinas, but rather the harmful Christian practices and ecological beliefs which have flowed from some of his ideas. I have chosen to engage Aquinas as paradigmatic here per McLaughlin's suggestion that Aquinas establishes the longest-lived theological understanding of the human/non-human animal relationship within the Christian tradition (*Christian Theology and the Status of Animals: The Dominant Tradition and Its Alternatives*, 2014: 8). My choice is further influenced by McLaughlin's belief that Thomas *still*

provides us with the most coherent summary of the dominant view of the non-human animal within Christianity today (2014: 8). With these parameters set, I can now move forward.

A God of Hierarchy: The Hyper-separation of Human and Non-human in Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas is chiefly concerned with the unity of the world and God. Schneider notes that "as one of his principle points of his massive *Summa Theologica,"* Aquinas emphasized "that the goal and purpose of *all* of creation is its destiny and unification under God" (2007: 76). Moreover, as a premier theologian of the medieval church in theocratic Europe, Aquinas's position eventually became officially endorsed, and his understanding of the relation between God and creation quickly spread across medieval Christianity. The church, the most powerful institution of the day, held in accordance with Thomas that "true existence or the eternal reality of God" was "an abstract unity of all things in which there can be no division or disagreement" (Schneider 2007: 77). For Aquinas, the world itself "could serve as a revelatory text of the one, unchanging God of all creation," and the manyness that occurs within the world can be reconciled by the fact that all began, and will ultimately end, in God (Schneider 2007: 77). Additionally, the standards of monological unity and non-contradiction could be gleaned from reading another theological concept engineered by Aquinas: The Great Chain of Being.[8]

Principally, in the Great Chain of Being Aquinas modifies Aristotle's *scala naturae*—a scientific classification of animals—into a hierarchy that places the more perfect or more "noble" creatures closer to God, and the lesser creatures of the earth further from God (Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy,* 2005: 127). Aquinas held that although the entire world is orientated toward unification in God, and "participates in the divine goodness more perfectly… than any single creature,"[9] some creatures are nevertheless still closer to [unification] with God than others—the more perfect a creature is, the closer it is to becoming *one* with God (McLaughlin 2014: 13) Further, just as the modern hegemonic rationalism that Plumwood is attempting to combat, the measurement of perfection and nobility in the Great Chain predictably rewards rationality, the active, intentionality, and movement while it disparages the bodily and instinctual (Steiner 2005: 127).

Aquinas's unifying, hierarchical theology, and its official endorsement by the Catholic church, resulted in the proliferation of a political standard across medieval Europe that demanded unity and non-contradiction. This standard was especially utilized by the elites in managing the common people (Ibid.). For instance, the elites posited in defense of monarchy, that God had ordered the world purposefully as it is, and thereby its united, ordered structure must not be questioned. The king is king by divine right, and all other sociological and class hierarchical relationships are, therefore, also divinely ordained and therefore good.

A God of Monological Objectivism

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[8]) This hierarchy plays out as follows for Aquinas: God (a being of pure rationality), followed by angels (purely spiritual beings, but less perfect than God), then humans (beings of soul or rationality *and* body or instinct), ranked and organized by their class status and societal roles as mentioned above. And then, following the lowest human of the hierarchy came animals (beings of body and instinct), and after animals, entities that possessed less kinetic potential like plants, inanimate objects, and rocks lay at the very bottom ("Great Chain of Being," *New World Encyclopedia*).

[9]) Quoted by McLaughlin: 13.

Such a notion of divinity, one could conclude, shares remarkable similarities with modernity's rationalist objectivism. Modernity answers to the rationalist unifying force of objectivity, and pre-modernity ultimately answers to the unifying Thomist God, and that God's intentionally ordered reality. One might also thereby conclude that such similarities support my hypothesis that this pre-modern notion of the divine inhabited the space of epistemological ultimacy prior to rationalism's objectivism. There is, of course, scholars who find certain pre-modern theologians and philosophers to be more comfortable with divine ambiguity; e.g. Keller's read of Nicholas of Cusa is a germane example of this (Keller 2014: 249-250).Yet, despite more open interpretations of the divine that existed in temporal proximity with the Thomist God, most Catholic scholars agree that the Aquinas's notion of the divine was dominant during his own time, and further, that most concepts of God in modern theology are either a development or an opposition to the Thomist Divinity (*The Code of Canon Law: In English Translation* 1983: Can. 252, §3). Moreover, even if there were other competing notions of the divine present in medieval Europe, this does not change the fact that there is significant evidence that suggests Aquinas's conceptualization of divinity was historically utilized to defend elitism in the same way Plumwood has argued objectivity has been employed by the scientific community to act unethically, consciously or unconsciously, for self-gain. In further similarity, the Thomist notions of God and the Great Chain has also been used to justify anthropocentric violence against the non-human, just as modern-day rationalist objectivism has been utilized for the same.[10]

Aquinas's Theologically Closed System.

Perhaps most problematic, is that Aquinas's divinity and hierarchy more or less gives to the human permanent permission to dominate and use the non-human animal indiscriminately. This is because in his hierarchy, more perfect entities are to utilize the lower entities for their own purposes—the less noble entities "exist for the nobler, [just] as creatures exist for the sake of man" (Aquinas; ed. Pegis [1997], *Summa Theologica* 1, q. 65, art. 2, resp., in *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*). As McLaughlin summarizes it, according to Aquinas, "the nonhuman creation is *for God, through humanity*," and so, his "cosmological theocentrism actually reinforces an ethical anthropocentrism" (McLaughlin 2014: 14). Thus, while Thomas does award some dignity to the non-human animal as a part of God's creation, his thought cannot break with the fixed anthropocentric hierarchy built upon the foundations of the Christian dominion narrative (Genesis 1:28)—the same narrative which is still appealed to by Christians today to justify the use of the non-human for human ends.

One could even argue, prior to rationalist thought, Aquinas's theological essentialism precipitated the problematic hyper-separation of the human and non-human that fuels the eco-epistemological crisis of today, by positing "man" and "creature" analogically with value-laden language such as "nobler" and "less noble." He believes humans are made in the one divine image, and therefore should naturally rule over animals as the creatures that are, and always will be, closest to unification with God. Aquinas even goes so far as to completely absolve the human of any direct moral responsibility in relation to the non-human animal. He writes, "It matters not how man behaves to animals, because God has subjected all things to man's power" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* 1– 2, q.102 art.6, repl. obj. 8, *Basic Writings*, 2:905). Therefore, since it is "by divine

[10] I have demonstrated this already in the previous section concerning rationalist objectivism and will now focus on the anthropocentric episteme connected to Aquinas's notion of divinity.

providence [that animals] are intended for man's use… it is not wrong for man to make use of them, either by killing or in any other way whatsoever" (Aquinas., *Summa Contra Gentiles*; in *Basic Writings*, 2:222) Such comments lead eco-philosopher Gary Steiner[11] to conclude that in Aquinas's thinking of the animal, the human, and the divine, we witness the apex of pre-modern anthropocentrism. (Steiner 2005: 126).

There are, of course, more generous readings of Aquinas in relation to the non-human animal. In his book, McLaughlin explores several of these alternatives reads; however, I find myself drawn to his own scrupulous conclusion. He argues that Aquinas is both an anthropocentric thinker and a conservationist (2014: 10). What this amounts to is basically a kind unbalanced dialectical position; a position that McLaughlin believes coherently characterizes the traditional position the church still assumes in relation to the non-human animal today (2014: 8). He writes that on the one hand, Aquinas is without a doubt anthropocentric in his privileging of the divine-imaged human; yet on the other hand, McLaughlin argues that in Aquinas's deep teleological concern for all of creation, there is room for an indirect protection of the non-human animal that is less objectifying than most indirect ethical relationships of this same kind.[12] Yet, despite these small consolations, [13] Aquinas's theo-ethical treatment of the human/non-human animal relationship remains anthropocentric.

3. Re-Thinking the Divine as the Bridge Between Ecology and Ethics.

In my view, and in summary, the Thomist God reads and has been read as a monological god of rationalist objectivism—i.e., a god that insists on the logical uniformity of the One,[14]

11) Steiner does indicate that Aquinas eventually comes to adopt a similar view of the human/non-human animal ethical relationship as Immanuel Kant does. This position is sometime referred to as "an indirect ethical duty" toward the animal (2005: 131). In other words, Aquinas holds that there are some good reasons to not be violent toward animals; however, this is not because they are a living entities that deserve civil treatment, but rather, as Kant suggests in "Duties to Animals and Spirits," "cruelty towards a dog might encourage a person to develop a character which would be desensitized to cruelty towards humans. From this standpoint, [however,] cruelty towards non-human animals would be instrumentally, rather than intrinsically, wrong" (Andrew Brennan and Yeuk-Sze Lo, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Environmental Ethics" [Winter 2015 edition]: §1). Thus, even still, I stand by my claim that the non-human animal in Aquinas is simply a commodity to be used by the human, and is so precisely by divine will.

12) For a description of a more common reading of an indirect human/non-human animal ethical relationship see footnote #13 of this essay.

13) There are two points McLaughlin makes in particular that slightly assuage Aquinas's neglect of the animal. First as creatures orientated towards God, Aquinas, he argues, believes the non-human animal reveals the multiple forms in which God's goodness is manifested within temporal creation (McLaughlin 2014: 18). Thus, for example, when scientists and environmentalists are estimating that "a quarter of the Earth's species may be lost in the next three decades due to human destruction of habitat" (Hempel 1997: 445) this is tantamount to saying, "a quarter of God's goodness will be lost in the next three decades due to human destruction of a quarter of the earth's species" (McLaughlin 2014: 19). Second, and less convincing, McLaughlin draws attention to Aquinas's admonishments concerning the killing of animals that belong to other people. He argues that Aquinas would find such actions reprehensible because they ultimately hurt the human the animal belonged to (Ibid).

14) The logic of the One is used by Schneider throughout her work, *Beyond Monotheism,* to describe the western insistence that there can only be one, orthodox understanding of the Divine, who is one and

fundamentally opposed to multiplicity as otherness.[15] Aquinas's conception of the divine generates a hierarchy in which the human is able to use the non-human animal as an object without moral or ethical forethought. In this way, his conception of divinity, at the very least, supports rationalism's hyper-separation of the human and non-human, and at worst, makes it possible; such a distinct separation of human and non-human is opposed to any type of relational ontology and understanding of reality where the animal and human may be reframed in both ecological and ethical terms. Ultimately, therefore, the Thomist unification of God and reality along with the Great Chain of Being create a static, theologically closed system diametrically averse to epistemological open-endedness. Such a theological system enables Christians today to reason that the deliberation regarding the ethical status of the non-human animal is an antiquated consideration.

Therefore, in conversation with Catherine Keller, I put forth here a notion of divinity that attempts to complicate or amend each of the negative effects that the Thomist divinity can potentially produce in regards to the human/non-human animal relationship, in an effort to assuage the present eco-epistemological crisis. Against the hyper-separation of human and nature in Aquinas's speciesist hierarchy, I assert a God whose reality is ontologically relational and rhizomatic. Against an exclusionary God of Oneness and objectivism, I posit a Christian God of multiplicity. And last, against a theologically closed system, I suggest an apophatic becoming-relationship with the divine and the world that requires openness to the knowing and unknowing of both human and non-human entities in perpetuity.

A Relational God: A Relational Reality

In her work *Cloud of the Impossible*, Keller posits that our fundamental reality is tantamount to a cloud in which we are each a particle: not "a one, fluffy unit, but a collection of billions of water droplets, frozen crystals, each folded around a bit of dust, each utterly distinct. A cloud is a mobile manifold, as are each of us, as are each our contexts" (Keller 2014: 23). In this cloud, she argues, humans are apophatically entangled with, and in, one another, and our difference only *is* in our active relation to one another; i.e., without running up against one another we are not, and cannot *become* ourselves (2014: 7, 22). In this way, she suggests, we are both one and many. This complex nature of our reality means we must practice a constant unknowing that makes new knowledge possible. For if each of us is many—a cloud in our own right from our own experiences and contexts—then no entity can be fully known. The only absolutely knowable is our own uncertainty regarding absolutes. In such an apophatic entanglement, "epistemology…folds in and out of ontology," because who we are as individuals depends wholly on the world we inhabit and experience but will never fully know, or permanently understand (Keller 2014: 7).

Additionally, appealing to quantum theory, Keller notes that we are not only entangled with other humans, but with the entire world: animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. The ever-changing boundaries of our selves rub up against other bodies within our shared and jointly

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undivided. She uses the term "the One" sometimes to speak about monotheism in general (Cf., Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism* 2007: 1-2, 9).

[15] Although McLaughlin notes throughout that Aquinas might understand God's *multiplicity* as revealed in the various manifestations of creatures in creation, at the end of the day, the difference of that multiplicity is subsumed into Oneness (2014: 10-17). He writes, "Aquinas maintains that forms of higher perfection contain the lower forms. That is 'what belongs to the inferior nature pre-exists more perfectly in the superior'" (McLaughlin 2014: 11).

formed billowing world, causing a friction and agitation that creates each entity, at each moment. We—everything—only become with one another in a dance of knowing and unknowing; of yes and no; of one and many.[16] Reality in this view is not a fixed system, consisting of hierarchical "links"; rather, in opposition to the Great Chain, our world appears entangled—more like a tousled ball of yarn where we are each a thread weaving in and out of proximate relation to each other, creating the shape of our shared form.

This conceptualization of reality is already quite different and even opposed to that reality where rationalism's scientific objectivism transcendently rules, and it is certainly distinct from Thomas's subsuming unification of the universe in a God of Oneness. Thereby, it is also already more charitable to the non-human animal since it understands that all things and their difference are integral parts of our becoming world. Each entity here makes the world in its relations to other entities; this includes the human/non-human animal relationship. Keller, quoting Deleuze, writes, "A fiber stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or animal to molecules, from molecules to particles…every fiber is a Universe fiber" (2014: 193). In Jean-Luc Nancy's terms, we might say that each connecting fiber represents the relationality "for which I have no ready vocabulary," (Keller 2014: 225) but is that which allows for differentiation to occur without separation—perhaps, especially without hyper-separation. Relationality itself within this billowing-reality makes us all interdependent, even across species, while still honoring difference. However, a question still remains unanswered: Where is God in all of this?

A God of Multiplicity

In short, God is everywhere we make God. In Keller's final chapter, she canvasses a portrait of Christ in attempt to loosen the dangerous rationalist objectivism or certainty many Christians incorporate in their Christocentric, anthropocentric leanings. Jesus, in her view, is a sign of the *intercarnation*—an embodied, enfleshment of God that implicates us all in a call to *do* God (Keller 2014: 296). Christ, she believes is an invitation from God to participate in *theopoiesis*—God making; i.e., literally, Christ is a beckoning to enflesh God in the world. Thus, Jesus is not *the* revelation of God, she says; he is only *a* revelation. For Keller, Christ calls us to multiply the incarnation (Keller 2014: 304).

Although Keller does not develop this notion of intercarnation and its implications thoroughly, at least one conclusion can tentatively be reached. Mainly, multiplying the incarnation does not mean duplicating it, nor does it entail an enlargement of a single divine entity through the assimilation of other beings into a monolithic body. Rather, instead of abolishing difference, *theopoiesis* means we come to understand our irreducible self, and the irreducible other's existence as entangled with one another in the divine life. Making God requires recognizing that God's image is intensified through our peculiar distinctions. As Mara Rivera puts it in relation to Eucharist, flesh materializes in the ritual "not as a self-contained mass, but as an element transformed as it is given…like bread flesh is shared, becoming part of *many bodies that partake of it.* The exchange contains not only [Christ's] flesh, but also the carnality of those invited in its shared life" (Quoted

[16]) It should be noted that Keller emphasizes that "isms" and universals are not necessarily bad, so long as we are aware that they too must respond to the fluidity of reality—the key here is respond-ability; we are always as individual performers demanded to act as interdependent beings (Ibid., 229). Isms are an okay place to start to approximate ourselves and others, yet we must remember we are never outside of the becoming cloud.

by Keller 2014: 295)[17] In both Rivera's and Keller's analysis, there are echoes of the mystic Teresa of Avila's poem "Christ Has No Body":

> Christ has no body but yours,
> No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
> Yours are the eyes with which he looks[…]
> Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
> Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
> Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
> Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
> Christ has no body now but yours…

Perhaps too, we might add to this poem lines that describe Christ's body as not only composed of human body parts—perhaps God also has no body without hooves, without snouts, without tails or feathers. In Christ we are invited to re-imagine God as uniquely created *in* people, *in* the non-human, *in* the world, *as* the exchange between intertwined, yet unique entities. Multiplying the incarnation intercarnationally, therefore, amounts to being attentive to the way—to the *how*—we abide in God as we dwell with one in an effort to embody God through our particular entanglement with one another in each discrete exchange. "God"—the God we are invited to make in the world via Christ— "names our relation to everything" (Keller 2014: 296).

Thus, in my reading, Keller believes, as do I, we can ethically embrace our becoming with God and the world through participating "in the cloud-infinity that already calls us to care for its finitude" (Keller 2014: 307). Doing God requires we act "*not* as separable agents but in differential collectives mindfully enfleshing our planetary entanglement" (Keller 2014: 308). The divine invites us to act not only inseparable from other humans but also in relation to our discrete fleshy non-human animal co-intercarnators. In Plumwood's terms, perhaps this means we answer the call to care for creation's finitude by beginning to think humans ecologically and animals ethically. Since the world materializes in our active relational differences, and God is made in the world through our response-ability to the call of Christ, God becomes with the world, in the world. Therefore, this reimaging of the human/non-human/divine relationship may both bring about the the destruction of the hyper-separation of human and non-human, and possibly intercarnate God in creation more communally and fully than ever before. By thinking the animal and human ecologically and ethically entangled with God's becoming intercarnation, the potential manifests to observe God's multiplicity in uniquely new ways.

A Divinity of Apophatic Dynamism

An objection could be posited at this juncture: does this epistemic shift simply move from the instrumentation of the non-human animal to the instrumentation of God? That is, is "making God" not simply another anthropocentric endeavor; is making God not an idolatrous humanism? This is admittedly a possible outcome, and is even a danger that is inherent, I believe, in understanding God as a materializing, relational event. Yet, *this danger is part of the event*.

Intimacy with otherness is always dangerous, and we must not sanitize this dangerous element of God-making. This is why it is imperative to speak of *theopoiesis* from an apophatic disposition. Such a disposition recognizes the danger of intimacy by actively allowing it to exist through one's openness to change—it is open to being truly affected by the other, and by the

[17] Author's emphasis.

motion or change of that other. Change is often spoken of as a danger; words like, "inconsistent" and "fallible" are normally thereby posited in opposition to divine nature. In contrast I suggest we speak of change not as a danger, but as a freedom that proves the opportunity for both the divine and creature to be their own agent. This means we can neither name the divine absolutely, nor can we name the God being made in the event of our relationships. Such a task requires a humble, patient, apophatic approach. It begs us to think God as that relation that we all have to one another that both holds ideals, but can also change. The God of the biblical narrative, after all, changes God's mind on a number of occasions,[18] and in such acts, we see a God that adopts an apophatic disposition towards God's self and others that allow God to be affected by the human. We too, therefore, as intercarnators who find themselves confronted with the non-human animal and human alike are divinely invited to assume a similar apophatic disposition that is averse to facile certainty and fixedness.

In a way, this apophatic position in relation to the non-human animal is just good sense. There will always be things we cannot say for certain about our ethical and ecological relationship to the non-human; new knowledge may come about which demands a different understanding of our relationship to them, and, consequently, a different engagement with them. But, adopting this disposition is not *only* good sense—it is also an intercarnational act. Like the affected God of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, as God's body, we must humbly admit that we will not be able to declare the right action until confronted with each discrete situation, and that this is, in fact, part of the precarious pulchritude that accompanies intimate engagement with the divine through and with the other. This must be the starting point when we think about making God alongside the non-human, otherwise *theopoiesis* is no doubt doomed to be another humanism in religious guise. We must make God humbly; for humbly is the only way to receive such an invitation.

Conclusion

Thus, in summation, Keller's notion of divinity allows a mutual synergetic swirling of the divine, the human, and the non-human that, if embraced by the Christian community, could begin to rectify the epistemological hyper-separation of the human and the non-human animal, and thereby contribute to the amelioration of our eco-epistemological crisis. In contrast to the transcendent objectivism of rationalism, and the Thomist God of unity without difference, this divinity privileges the entanglement of our cosmic relationship over human interests and identity. In this rethinking of God, there is no ground for anthropocentric logic to build its hierarchy and hyper-separations because each non-human animal manifests uniquely in God's ontological, relational reality as irreplaceable. Here, the mass slaughter of animals for profit on grounds of human supremacy is unconscionable. Here, objectifying the non-human objectifies the human because both are ethically and ecologically entwined in the becoming intercarnation of God.

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18) E.g., Exodus 32, Amos 7, Jonah 3, just to name a few.

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