



**Postgraduate/Distance Learning
Assignment coversheet & feedback form**

**THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE
SUBMITTING (DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)**

For completion by the student:		
Student Name: Simon <u>Nevill</u>		
Module code: HPCA 7023 Module title: ECOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY	Student ID number: 2013891	Educational support needs: Yes/No NO
Module tutor: Dr Jack Hunter		
Assignment due date: November 18 th		
If your module has multiple submissions, please indicate which piece of work this is. 1 st ☐ 2 nd ☐ 3 rd ☐ 4 th ☐ 5 th ☐ 6 th ☐		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed <u>S. Nevill</u> Simon <u>Nevill</u>		
Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☐ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		
Assignment Mark		
Final Mark	WILL BE GIVEN ON TURNITIN	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.		
PLEASE NOTE: ALL COMMENTS WILL BE POSTED ON TURNITIN		
For completion by Marker 1:		
Comments:		

Marker's signature:	Date:
For completion by Marker 2/Moderator: Comments:	
Marker's Signature:	Date:
AGREED INTERNAL MARK (where necessary): Comment on process of arriving at agreed mark:	
External Examiner's comments (if relevant)	
External Examiner's Signature:	Date:

Simon Nevin ---HPCA7023---ESSAY 1

‘A Critical Comparison of Two JSTOR Papers’

This essay critically compares and contrasts two papers.

The two papers chosen are Lynn White, Jr, ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.’ *Science* New Series, Vol. 155, No. 3767 (Mar. 10, 1967), pp. 1203-1207.

and Val Plumwood, “Gender, Eco-Feminism and the Environment”: *Controversies in Environmental Sociology*, ed. Rob White (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp 43-60.

White’s article in context

The first article addressed in this essay, ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis’, published in March 1967, was the transcript of a speech given by Lynn White at the annual conference of the AAAS, the largest professional organisation in the American scientific community, December 26th, 1966.

In a review of the meeting, Leitenberg explains that the theme of the conference was: ‘How man has changed the Planet’. The speech appeared later as an article in the journal *Science* March, 1967. At the conference, White’s address was one of many. Leitenberg noted that the other speakers, like White, were ‘scientists of international renown and AAAS dignitaries’; Nobel Laureate, Dr. Blackett, addressed the audience on ‘ecological imbalance’.¹ White’s paper, therefore, was written as a response to the given theme of the conference. He answered this question initially by explaining that investigations into the role of man in changing the planet were still ‘rudimentary’ but went on to argue that the impact of ‘our race’ (rather than species) has been a destructive one and the principal cause lay within Christian values. As White was a practicing Christian, describing himself as a ‘churchman’, there was, as Taylor pointed out, an instant and enduring response from the Christian community to a churchman delivering a polemic against the failings of his own religion.²

White’s paper, written as a speech, was designed to have an impact with an audience who were all members of the science and technology establishment, one which was predominantly male: all seven keynote speakers were male. As professionals with careers in the sciences, White sought to make both the Christian and the scientific community aware of their ethical responsibility toward the environment and used various rhetorical devices, employing emotive language and images designed to provoke a response. For example, he discussed the potential catastrophic devastation of use of H-bomb and how continued pollution may alter the Earth’s chemistry.

¹ Milton Leitenberg, ‘How man has changed the planet: Report on the 1966 AAAS meeting’, *Science Education*, Volume 51, Issue 5, (December 1967), pp 458.

² Bron Taylor, ‘The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One)’, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, (2016), pp. 269

As Leitenberg noted, White's speech was a 'masterly presentation of scholarship, wit and intelligence'.³ Therefore, although this paper was not written as an academic piece, as Whitney pointed out, as the originator of the study of Medieval technology, was a respected academic.⁴ However, there were no footnotes, no citations and no glossary contained in his article. The sources were often anecdotal or the result of his own wide scholarship.

Further, White was speaking in an era marked by an emerging counter culture and a growing environmental movement. For example, White referenced the Beat movement and as Turgeon pointed out, Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' had been published three years earlier.⁵ The printed version of the speech enjoyed a wide readership. Science had the highest circulation of a science magazine in the US.⁶ By 1958, it had a yearly readership of over 61,000.⁷

PLUMWOOD's article in context

As Taylor explains, Plumwood was one the world's leading environmental philosophers, a radical feminist, academic and activist.⁸ This article was one of a collection of essays written for students and included not only footnotes, citations, and a glossary but also questions for students to consider after having read the article. As the editor, Rob White explains in his introduction, the book which contained Plumwood's essay was aimed at providing a platform for heterodox thinkers to discuss controversial environmental issues.⁹ All the articles in this book followed the same format as Plumwood's with the following sections: Background, Key Debates, Future Directions. Plumwood cited many contributors to this recent debate which are clearly referenced in over 34 papers, including others by the author herself.

A brief note on the content of White's article

White's article considered the damaging effect of technology, science and Christianity in combination had on the environment. He did so by examining in great depth the history of technology since Medieval times, the development of science in the West, and by considering the assumptions inherent in Western scientific thinking—a way of thinking that was underpinned by a Christian worldview. The founding assumption, derived from early Christian thinkers like Friar Roger Bacon, was that in both science and Christian theology nature existing only as a benefit to man with no value of its own and was a profoundly anthropocentric view. White showed how pre-Christian animism, by contrast, valued the natural world.

³ Milton Leitenberg, 'How man has changed the planet: Report on the 1966 AAAS meeting', Science Education, Volume 51, Issue 5, (December 1967), pp 459.

⁴ Elspeth Whitney, 2005, Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature (London /New York: Continuum 2005) pp. 1735

⁵ Michael Turgeon, Christianity and Environmentalism, 2018, <https://www.scu.edu/environmental-ethics/environmental-activists-heroes-and-martyrs/lynn-white.html> [accessed 08/10/2020]

⁶ Elspeth Whitney, 2005, Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature (London /New York: Continuum) pp. 1735

⁷ '150 Years of Advancing Science: A History of AAAS and the Maturing of American Science: 1941-1970', <http://archives.aaas.org/exhibit/maturing3.php> [accessed October, 2020]

⁸ Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion* (University of California Press, 2010) London. pp. 129

⁹ Rob White (ed), *Controversies in Environmental Sociology*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004) Introduction. pp. 5

By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. (pp. 1208)

For White, Christian thinking underpinned scientific enquiry and contemporary Western world view and should be held entirely responsible for the current ecological crisis. He argued that given how entrenched a Judeo-Christian worldview was even in secular society that only a reform of Christian theology would reverse environmental decline. He saw in the example of St Francis as a way forward. St Francis advocated that man as a species should see himself as an equal to other animals in an exercise of humility.

A note on the content of Val Plumwood's article

Plumwood's article provided an analysis of the recent development of feminism and its response to the ecological crisis drawing on her work as a philosopher. Beginning with formation of the movement from its aim to counter sexism in the environmental movement, she traced the history of eco-feminism outlining varieties of eco-feminism, their differences, commonalities, emphases and the philosophical ideas underpinning them. Plumwood promoted Critical Eco-Feminism which is a development and improvement on these varieties. Eco-feminism, crucially, examined the philosophical assumptions which are ingrained in Western patriarchal society, one based on a dualistic approach that separated philosophical categories into two, with one dominant, the other always subordinate. The foundational dualisms, Plumwood showed were those of culture/nature and male/female. Plumwood proposed a complete break with dualistic thinking if we are to recognise prevent continued ecological catastrophe.

COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

1. DUALISMS

Whilst both authors agreed that there was an ecological crisis that needed addressing, they approached their subject from a different perspective, White as an historian and Plumwood as a philosopher. However, there were comparisons, one of which is in their use of the term dualism.

A philosophical dualism for Plumwood positioned the former as superior and the latter as inferior. As Curry, explained, these were 'value laden hierarchies, whereby such dualism is not neutral...the role of the 'lower' is to serve the needs of what is 'higher.' ¹⁰ Plumwood identified a number of dualistic divisions (or hyper-separations) but the foundational dualisms were that of culture/ nature and male/ female. The female has throughout history been the foundational 'lower' order so for Plumwood, all dualisms derived from this construct. Discussing Plumwood's contribution to eco-feminism, Curry emphasised Plumwood's point: 'the domination and exploitation of nature and women proceeds from the

¹⁰ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011), pp. 129.

same logic'.¹¹ Further examples were provided by Coupe: reason/emotion, human/non-human, mind/body, master/slave, self/other.¹² In these examples, the female can be identified with the subordinate side of the binary construct. As Plumwood wrote, women are seen as emotional and associated with the body through reproduction and household labour, whereas man is associated with matters of the mind and the spirit.

However, White also mentioned a dualistic construct:

Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.... not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his own ends. (pp. 1205)

White only addressed this single dualism of man and nature explicitly. Like Plumwood, he saw this construct as a negative one, with man dominant and nature subordinate, giving man license to exploit nature. However, there are some implicit dualisms recognised by White when he equated man with reason, science with mastery, as seen here: 'In the scientific fantasy of mastery, the new human task has become that of remoulding nature to conform to the dictates of reason to achieve salvation.'

Whilst White identified only a single dualism: the split between man and nature as inherent in Christianity, Plumwood sees this dualism as one of many. White's Christian world view did not refer to the gendered nature of this dualism. Plumwood said a philosophical shift is required: a radical break with dualistic thinking needed to be replaced with an Eco-Critical Feminism that includes an analysis class, race and gender, whereas White proposed that a 'greening' of Christianity was sufficient.¹³ White did not discuss colonialism or race although he did question the role of democracy in creating the conditions for lower class pursuit of technology to combine with higher class pursuit of science to the detriment of the environment. Plumwood doesn't refer to democracy's role in ecological decline directly but discussed the culpability of global markets, capitalism, and colonialism

Whilst, Plumwood called for dualisms to be re-examined, she he criticised thinking that sought to only reverse the male/female dualism, as Gynocentric feminism thinking does, with the female dominating. "This cannot simply involve privileging 'female' nature instead of subordinating it for that is simply to invert the language of patriarchy.'¹⁴ Instead a complete break was required, one that for Coupe, 'affirms difference, but denies superiority.'¹⁵ Plumwood argued, therefore, that women shouldn't be seen as 'closer to nature' than males, as both are part of nature. In this way, she subverted the male/female dualism.

¹¹ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011), pp. 130.

¹² Laurence Coupe (ed.), *The Green Studies Reader*, (Oxon, Routledge, 2000) pp. 119

¹³ Bron Taylor, 'The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One)', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* (2016), pp.269

¹⁴ Laurence Coupe (ed.), *The Green Studies Reader*, (Oxon, Routledge, 2000), pp. 120

¹⁵ Laurence Coupe (ed.), *The Green Studies Reader*, (Oxon, Routledge, 2000), pp. 120

GENDER

One obvious difference between the two papers is one was written by a man and one by a woman. When considering the development of Eco-feminism, Plumwood wrote from a woman's experience of patriarchy. Writing as a man and a Christian, White did not criticise male superiority. God is still the supreme authority. Indeed, White mentions that his model Christian, St Francis 'unique pan-psychism of all things animate and inanimate' was designed for the glory of God.

(N.B. In his review of White's speech, Lietenberg changed the theme of the conference above by mistake as follows: 'How Man has changed **His** planet.')¹⁶

To this extent White's argument remained Androcentric, which Plumwood identified as key philosophical failing. As Curry stated, 'patriarchy identifies women with nature and dominates both, they are internally linked, so a struggle to resist or overturn either must address both.'¹⁷ Plumwood also made the comment that philosophy itself is androcentric, historically dominated by 'traditional male philosophers' something White did not consider.

TELEOLOGY

Both authors critiqued teleological thinking as underlying Western society's continuing destructive behaviour toward the environment. As Curry defined it, teleology referred to 'having or being defined by pre-determined goals.'¹⁸

Plumwood located the origin of the man/nature dualism in Ancient Greek teleological thinking and the privileging of man over women, man over nature and the idea of progress as inevitable. She noted that this thinking informed Christian values and underpinned Western thinking. Furthermore, contemporary society had transferred its religious faith into a faith in science. White's historical observations, located this dualism only in Western Christianity. In contrast to Plumwood, he explained that Greek thinking didn't include a teleological perspective or a destructive beginning myth, a Creation story. Time, he pointed out was cyclical in Ancient Greece. There was no God, who created all things for man to exploit.

PAGANISM

Pagan animism, White explained, had a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. He described how pagan animist societies considered the natural world as sacred. White lamented, not the passing of paganism, but the form of Christianity which had replaced it, one that had not incorporated the values of animism into its belief system. On the other hand, Plumwood did not discuss paganism or Eastern religions. However, in common with White, she critiqued Christianity. Her critique is that Christian belief in transcending the earthly life by ascent into a 'next world' perpetuates the body/mind hyper-separation, with the former subordinate to the latter. White commented on Eastern religion, noting that they had a more positive view of man and nature as inter-connected. However, despite the growing interest in Eastern religions, he was doubtful that they provided a model as they were culturally alien

¹⁶ Milton Leitenberg, 'How man has changed the planet: Report on the 1966 AAAS meeting', Science Education, Volume 51, Issue 5, (December 1967), pp 459. *my emphasis*

¹⁷ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011), pp. 130.

¹⁸ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011), pp. 46.

belief systems to a Western mind. Another non-Christian ideology, White referred to was Marxism. He criticised it for being equally teleological as Christianity. He did not include any criticism of capitalism or use the term. However, Plumwood located destructive dualistic thinking as intrinsic to global capitalism, colonialism, and class inequalities and cited feminist authors, Salleh and Mies for example, (whose analyses, Curry argued, were more political in emphasis than Plumwood's own cultural approach.)¹⁹

PREDATION

Plumwood critiqued another variety of eco-feminism, Ontological Vegans for their dualistic world view. In suggesting that predation is unnatural, they undermine species who are carnivorous and indigenous communities for which predation is cultural and a necessity. In doing so humans are seen as apart from nature. Plumwood said 'their anti-predation stance from human to animals is to argue that human predation is situated in culture while animal predation is situated in nature'. This view reinforced the hyper-separation of man/animal. White explained that St Francis saw animals as equal rather than existing for man to exploit. However, in the example he gave to illustrate this the Saint, persuaded a wolf to stop predating; the wolf died and received a Christian burial. The wolf was rewarded for pleasing God, rather than being recognised as an animal in nature affirming the superiority of a human, Christian life over that of an animal.

DARWIN

White commented that society had not taken in Darwin's observations. White wrote: 'Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process.' By comparison, Plumwood noted also Darwin's revolutionary observation that humans evolved from the non-human, has not been fully accepted in society even by the scientific community. Plumwood wrote, following on from Darwin, that birds were equally as evolved as humans, and White discussed how life modified its environment, however neither discussed biological processes in detail.

CONCLUSION

Both authors agreed that there was an ecological crisis, and that human behaviour and modes of thinking throughout history, had caused the current eco-crisis. White and Plumwood both proposed that urgent change was required. For Plumwood, the source of our detrimental view of nature was the Western philosophical tradition from Plato onwards. Christian theology continued this anthropocentric way of thinking. For White, his historical analysis revealed the origins were to be found solely within Christian values applied to science and technology. White proposed that Christian thought required radical reform if we were act positively to halt the ecological crisis. However, Plumwood proposed a process of change within philosophy that sought to subvert existing gendered dualistic assumptions. So for White, the solution to the ecological crisis is a narrower, religious one embodied within the teachings of St. Francis through, as Taylor suggested, a 'greening' of Christianity.²⁰ On the other hand,

¹⁹ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011), pp. 46. pp. 128.

²⁰ Bron Taylor, 'The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One)', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* (2016), pp

Plumwood asked for nothing less than a paradigm shift that would overthrow dualistic thinking, something offered by an ethical eco-feminist project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

White, Lynn Jr. 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.' *Science*. New Series, Vol. 155, No. 3767 (Mar. 10, 1967), pp. 1203-1207

Plumwood, Val. 'Gender, Eco-Feminism and the Environment' Chapter 3, '*Controversies in Environmental Sociology*', ed Rob White, Cambridge University Press, 2004. pp.43-60.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Leitenberg, Milton, 'How man has changed the planet: Report on the 1966 AAAS meeting', *Science Education*, Volume 51, Issue 5, (December 1967), pp 454-460

Taylor, Bron, 'The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One)', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, (2016), pp. 269

Bron Taylor, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (London /New York: Continuum 2005)

Michael Turgeon, '*Christianity and Environmentalism*', 2018,
<https://www.scu.edu/environmental-ethics/environmental-activists-heroes-and-martyrs/lynn-white.html> [accessed 08/10/2020]

'150 Years of Advancing Science: A History of AAAS and the Maturing of American Science: 1941-1970', <http://archives.aaas.org/exhibit/maturing3.php> [accessed October, 2020]

Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion* (University of California Press, 2010)

Laurence Coupe (ed.), *The Green Studies Reader*, (Oxon, Routledge, 2000)

Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011), pp. 130.