FUNDAMENTALIST DOMINION, POSTMODERN ECOLOGY

PAUL MALTBY

Christian fundamentalist dominionism is susceptible to a conventional ecological critique; that is to say, one framed in scientific-environmentalist terms of its unsustainability as a practice, given nature's finite resources and the fragility of ecosystems. Alternatively, a postmodern ecological critique has the conceptual tools to contest dominionism at the level of its *discursive* transactions, that is to say, the narrative frames and interpretive methods through which fundamentalists have constructed their understanding of the natural world. I shall suggest how postmodernism enables critical standpoints which, collectively, open a second front in an engagement with the dominionist model of humanity's relationship to nature.

Christian fundamentalist hostility to environmentalism typically finds its endorsement in the book of Genesis. A literal reading of the injunction that "man" should "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28)[1] has ratified the view of nature as a God-given resource for unlimited human use. This view was provocatively expressed by Ann Coulter, the right-wing Christian radio talk-show host, when she observed, "God gave us the earth. We have dominion over

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Direct all correspondence to: Journals Manager, Indiana University Press, 601 N. Morton St., Bloomington, IN 47404 USA iuporder@indiana.edu

the plants, the animals, the trees. God said, 'Earth is yours. Take it. Rape it. It's yours'" (Coulter 2001). Evidently, Dominionist philosophy does not recognize natural entities and species as autonomous life forms; rather, it perceives them as artifacts designed to satisfy human needs. Indeed, according to fundamentalist economist E. Calvin Beisner, to put the Earth before human needs is to be guilty of "idolatry of nature" (Beisner 1990, 165). (Without citing Saint Paul, Beisner surely has in mind the epistle to the Romans, in which Paul condemns the ungodly and wicked who "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25).)

Broadly speaking, dominionism means the responsibility of Christians to subject the spheres of everyday life and all institutions to the rule of God's laws, thus securing the conditions for Christ's return. However, in environmentalist debates, the use of the term is limited to designate the belief that the achievement of a sovereign and exploitative power over nature is mandated by the Bible. Still, the distinction is somewhat tenuous. After all, for the powerful Reconstructionist wing of Christian fundamentalism, the broad definition of dominionism is derived from the limited definition. As Sara Diamond explains in *Spiritual Warfare*, Reconstructionists such as the late R.J. Rushdoony and Gary North interpret dominionism as meaning "Christians are Biblically mandated to 'occupy' all secular institutions" until Christ returns (Diamond 1989, 138). Dominion theology is about "subduing the earth" in the name of Christ, a subjugation that extends from nature, via a stringent application of Biblical laws, to all forms of socio-cultural existence. In short, dominion is a divine right, lost by Adam with the Fall but reclaimable by born-again Christians (see also Goldberg 2007).

Fundamentalist anti-environmentalism finds further support in a literal reading of New Testament accounts of the Apocalypse and the Rapture as prophecy (Matt. 24:7, Luke 21:8, Rev. 8:8–11, 1 Thess. 4:16–17). Here, interpretation demotes nature to a mere prop in the supernatural drama of human salvation. Thus, not only is conservation seen as irrelevant, insofar as the planet is thought to have no future (in the words of the 19th-century premillennialist Dwight Moody, "You don't polish the brass of a sinking ship" (cited in Casselberry 2007, 12), but environmental catastrophe is positively welcomed by Pat Robertson and other fundamentalist leaders as presaging the Rapture and the Second Coming. This is the End-Times doctrine that permeates the best-selling books of Tim LaHaye

and Jerry Jenkins and Hal Lindsey, where ecological disaster is crucial to the plot of the *Left Behind* series (e.g. LaHaye and Jenkins 1995, 311–12) and to the good news in *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Lindsey 1992, 166). The same doctrine has motivated the congressional anti-environmentalism of leading Republicans: Tom DeLay, House Majority Leader from 2003–2006; James Inhofe, currently the Senator for Oklahoma and, given President George W. Bush's anti-environmentalism, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works from 2003–2007; and James Watt, who served as Ronald Reagan's Secretary of the Interior from 1981–1983. Todd Strandberg, webmaster of RaptureReady.com (Strandberg), the website which relays news of environmental catastrophes in the context of Biblical prophecies of the Apocalypse, has observed that "global warming could very well be a major factor in the plagues of the Tribulation" (cited in Scherer 2004). The guiding thought for all these figures is: Why care about ecological crisis when true believers will be rescued by the Rapture?

Christian reconstructionist politics also drives the zealous anti-environmentalism of the fundamentalist leadership. Here, criticism of environmentalism generally adopts two strategies: either it misrepresents the environmentalist movement as dominated by radical leftists and eco-pagans, or it scours the margins of the environmentalist debates from which to enlist "experts" who challenge the claims of the mainstream scientific community. Thus, Pat Robertson has identified those calling for the "empowerment of ecology" as advocates of a "one-world socialist government" (Robertson 1991, 153; see also 215). (The fundamentalists' political suspicion of environmentalists has prompted them to brand the latter as "watermelons," i.e. green on the outside, red within.) For Richard T. Wright, a professor of biology at Gordon College, Massachusetts, "Christian anti-environmentalism can be traced directly to political commitments." He considers the arguments that question the soundness of environmental science or that see a left-wing conspiracy behind environmentalism to be "red herrings." He concludes, "the political right has lost its traditional enemy—world communism—and appears to be replacing it with world environmentalism. The Christian political right is following right along the party line" (Wright 1995).

The most outspoken critics of environmentalism from the fundamentalist fold are E. Calvin Beisner and the late Larry Burkett. Burkett, a best-

selling author of books which promote Christian principles of financial management, concentrated much of his fire on environmental regulations. Like Robertson, he saw environmentalists as communists in disguise, whose aim is to enlarge central government by exaggerating environmental problems. Government authorized environmental programs operate "in the same role as the KGB" and threaten the vitality of American business: "The EPA [has] become a paramilitary enforcement group running amuck throughout the free enterprise system" (Burkett 1991, 178–79). Moreover, as he saw it, environmental regulations constitute a huge burden for the economy. He believed that "environmental extremists" have overrun the political system and are implementing policies at odds with the Christian reconstruction of society. However, Burkett did not rely on the Bible to endorse his position but on dubious research from non-refereed "scientific" sources, such as articles published in *The New American*, a journal sponsored by the John Birch Society.

E. Calvin Beisner, a professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Covenant College, Georgia, and adjunct scholar at the Acton Institute, is a key signatory to the (deceptively named) Cornwall Declaration of Environmental Stewardship. Like Burkett, he affirms his opposition to the scientific consensus on the causes of environmental crises with appeals to the work of maverick climatologists and other marginal researchers. However, he also enlists support for his anti-environmentalist stance by adducing passages from the Bible. Citing the dominion mandate in Genesis, he avers, "Man was not made for the earth, but the earth for man" (Beisner 1990, 24, 163). Invoking Psalms 115:16 and 8:6, he sees "man as [God's] viceregent" (156), a subordinate owner of the earth rather than its steward. He argues, "God intended there to be considerable liberty regarding the ways in which we rule the earth" (163), and maintains that the unregulated and private use of resources is consonant with God's provision of a bountiful earth to serve humanity's needs. Furthermore, he insists that "global warming [is] indeed an expression of God's will" (quoted in Moyers 2006); that is to say, the destructive effects of climate change are not primarily the result of irresponsible social practices but God's punishment for human sin, comparable to the flood in the story of Noah. (God cursed the Earth after Adam and Eve, so natural disasters like that of Hurricane Katrina are expressive of God's punitive will.) Another of Beisner's responses to environmental devastation is to quote Saint Paul in 1 Corinthi-

ans: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2), which he interprets as meaning that human experience on earth is insignificant compared to the eternity of our salvation in Christ. He dismisses concerns about the depletion of natural resources arguing that (1) God's bounty is infinite and (2) God-given human creativity will enable us to solve the problem of resource scarcity.

Fundamentalists vigorously contest ecological concerns about resource depletion. Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell, authors of the fundamentalist high-school textbook *America's Providential History* (1989), are in no doubt about the bounty and dependability of God's providence: "The secular or socialist has a limited resource mentality and views the world as a pie (there is only so much) that needs to be cut up so that everyone can get a piece. In contrast, the Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited and that there is no shortage of resources in God's Earth. The resources are waiting to be tapped" (197). Here, one must observe, such an argument, squarely based on the fundamentalist faith in "America's providential history," surely finds reinforcement from a residual colonial mentality: that lingering perception of the New World as a space of infinite resources available for plunder.

However, it is important to stress that evangelicals can be found in both the environmentalist and anti-environmentalist camps.[2] Organizations such as Evangelicals for Social Action and evangelical journals such as *World Vision* and *Moody Monthly* proceed from alternative passages in the Bible to actively promote an ethic of environmental stewardship. They most frequently cite Genesis 2:15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." According to the Reverend Richard Cizik, Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the 30-million-strong National Association of Evangelicals, 63% of evangelicals acknowledge the reality of climate change. And though a self-described "pro-Bush conservative," Cizik lobbies hard on behalf of environmentalist causes, integrating environmentalism into the NAE's political agenda. He invokes Genesis 2:15 and Revelation 11:18 ("God will destroy those who destroy the earth") in support of his pro-environmentalist stance (Cizik 2005).

Cizik's efforts are reinforced by the Reverend Jim Ball, Executive Director of the Evangelical Environmental Network. The EEN's flagship publication, *Creation Care*, provides "biblically informed and timely arti-

cles" on environmental issues, in particular, detailed essays and fact sheets on pollution and global warming. In 1994, the magazine published the highly influential "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" (Adeney et al. 1994). Bluntly acknowledging many forms of environmental damage, the manifesto declared the Christian obligation to care for the Creation and that Biblical faith is essential to the solution of ecological problems.

Cizik and Ball are among the most prominent voices speaking for grassroots evangelical communities that have challenged dominionism in the name of "Creation care" (a term which calls for responsible stewardship of the earth but which, unlike "environmentalism," is free of secular left-liberal overtones). Yet, for all their lobbying efforts, it is the fundamentalist top brass, most of whom belong to the extreme Christian Right—notably, Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed and, above all, Cizik's *bête noire*, James Dobson[3]—who hold more sway over the Bush government's environmental legislation. They have enjoyed privileged access to White House lawmakers, including and especially Gale Norton, Bush's Secretary of the Interior from 2001–2006 (Kaplan 2004, 81), who in the 1980s worked under James Watt and is a vocal advocate of free-market environmentalism.

In April 2000, provocatively timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary of Earth Day, a coalition of fundamentalist and theologically conservative religious groups launched ICES, that is, the Interfaith Council of Environmental Stewardship. Bill Berkowitz, editor of *Culture Watch*, has described ICES as "an organization to graft dominion theology onto right-wing environmentalism" (Berkowitz 2000). ICES' founding document, The Cornwall Declaration (ICES 2000), expounds ideas largely derived from Beisner's *Where Garden Meets Wilderness* (1997). This document significantly understates the global scale of environmental crises and seeks to characterize humans as divinely mandated "producers" instead of reckless "consumers and polluters." The author of the document elaborates thus: "Our call to fruitfulness...is not contrary to but mutually complementary with our call to steward God's gifts. This call implies a serious commitment to fostering the intellectual, moral, and religious habits and practices needed for free economies and genuine care for the environment" (ICES 2000). Clearly, in this context, the eco-friendly concepts of "stewarding" and "genuine care for the environment" and the

innocuous-sounding "call to fruitfulness" simply serve to make palatable the ideological commitment to unregulated exploitation of the planet's resources. Indeed, the Declaration concludes: "We aspire to a world in which widespread economic freedom—which is integral to private, market economies—makes sound ecological stewardship available to ever greater numbers" (ICES 2000). Here, the aspiration is purely rhetorical insofar as "sound ecological stewardship" cannot be privately enforced; time and again, corporate polluters and plunderers altogether avoid or simply renege on "voluntary" commitments to respect the environment. We should also note the use of "sound," employed here to imply that government-regulated stewardship is faulty or inefficient. In short, the ICES document engages in the tactics of greenwashing, that is, terminology that enables anti-environmentalist policies to masquerade as environmentally friendly. (Compare the Bush administration's "Healthy Forests Initiative" (USDA 2002) and "Clear Skies Initiative" (EPA 2002)—eco-friendly designations that mask policies of deregulation, allowing for, respectively, more deforestation and pollution.)

ICES is the inspiration and brainchild of the Michigan-based Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. The Institute was founded by Father Robert Sirico, in 1990, as an organization that advocates the use of the Bible in conjunction with free-market economics as a guide to policy-making. So it should come as no surprise to learn that, in May 2003, Sirico was present at Exxon-Mobil's annual shareholders' meeting, where he spoke out against environmental resolutions proposed by religious social activists (Berkowitz 2000). Moreover, for years the Acton Institute has received funding from Exxon-Mobil as part of the latter's covert campaign to support organizations that challenge evidence of global warming, in an effort to subvert the scientific consensus on climate change (Krugman 2006; Moyers 2006).

The pronouncements of James Inhofe, the fundamentalist Senator representing Oklahoma, supply another instance of the unholy alliance between corporate capital and dominionist anti-environmentalism. Inhofe has publicly stated that global warming is "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people" (Inhofe 2005) and he has claimed that "global warming is a UN conspiracy" (Wilson 2006). Now, Inhofe may be genuinely skeptical about global warming (at best, a perverse position given the overwhelming evidence to the contrary). However, the histrion-

ics and stridency of his talk about "hoax" and "conspiracy" cannot be divorced from the fact that he is the recipient of hundreds of thousands of dollars from the oil and gas industry. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, which publishes campaign finance contributions to Congressmen as released by the Federal Election Commission for public scrutiny, Inhofe, in the 1999–2004 Senate election cycle, received nearly $500,000 from the energy and natural resource sector, by far his largest source of funding (opensecrets.org, 2008). Furthermore, the magnitude of this contribution reflects his chief committee assignment in Washington—Chair of the Senate Committee on Environmental and Public Works (2003–2007).

In summary, as we review the statements of Burkett and Beisner, of Beliles and McDowell, of ICES and Inhofe, it is quite evident that dominionism is consonant with the Bush administration's efforts to deregulate environmental protection in the service of corporate capital.

Fundamentalist dominionism is certainly susceptible to a conventional ecological critique; that is to say, one framed in *scientific-environmentalist* terms of its unsustainability as a practice, given nature's finite resources and the fragility of ecosystems. The same critique would also respond to belief in the Rapture as an abdication from responsibility for the preservation of the earth and its species. Alternatively, a postmodern ecological critique has the conceptual tools to contest dominionism at the level of its *discursive* transactions, that is to say, the narrative frames and interpretive methods through which fundamentalists have constructed their understanding of the natural world. Here, I shall suggest how postmodernism enables critical standpoints which, collectively, open a second front in an engagement with the dominionist model of humanity's relationship to nature. These standpoints will be discussed under three rubrics: contingency, anti-transcendentalism, and zoontology.

CONTINGENCY

Postmodernism has distinguished itself as a particularly cogent form of anti-metaphysical thinking (see Maltby 2002, 2007). Most often the target of its critique are those secular philosophies, like humanism, which proclaim their post-metaphysical credentials while unwittingly reproducing metaphysical assumptions. By "metaphysical," I mean those discourses that explain human experience as the necessary outcome of any force (e.g. divine intervention, Telos) that operates beyond the domain of time,

change, and chance. A key strategy of postmodern critique is to combat the metaphysical pretensions of such discourses by showing *the discourse itself* to be wholly contingent upon historical and/or socio-cultural and/or linguistic conditions, rather than accepting it on its own terms as an *intrinsically* valid, self-certifying representation of some transhistorical and supernatural force.

Briefly stated, the contingency principle is persistently invoked in postmodern critique to argue that the truth and authority of any text (no matter how sacred or canonical) are always: (1) vulnerable to revision and reevaluation in the face of historically variable and emergent conditions (see Smith 1991); (2) dependent upon the legitimizing powers of institutional forces, which sanction methods of interpretation, regulate the terms of employment of discourse, and authorize some vocabularies while disqualifying others (see Foucault 1980); (3) conditional upon the dynamics of language, given the textuality through which all propositions are necessarily mediated (see Rorty 1989). To be sure, recognition of the contingency principle long pre-dates postmodern critique; nevertheless, this critique has programmatically developed new critical tools (e.g. deconstruction, genealogical inquiry, post-Marxist modes of ideology critique), which *inter alia* are used to contest the power of culturally privileged texts by exposing the context-dependence of their proposed truths. And it then follows that postmodern critique must signal an awareness that the truth-claims of *its own* propositions are constrained by the contingency principle. (Suffice, here, to note that the anti-metaphysical thrust of this critique squarely situates it in the historical process of secularization. Yet, the triumph of secularism was not inevitable but, rather, the outcome of a long political struggle (see Manzoor, 1995). Moreover, the prestige of postmodernism as a paradigm largely depends on the influence of the eminently secular institution of the humanities department.) In view of the contingency principle, neither postmodernism nor fundamentalism can lay claim to final and self-sufficient authority. Still, when one confronts the other, there are *specific contexts* where one side can enlist concepts that better serve the purposes of a particular ideal or objective. In the dispute with fundamentalism over the meaning of nature in Scripture, a postmodern eco-friendly interpretation is not inherently superior; however, in the current context of ecological crisis, it finds powerful validation and is more useful in the service of an environmentalist agenda.

Metaphysical assumptions may linger undetected in postmodern thought; all the same, it can more easily (and modestly) face up to its contingencies and conjunctural limits than fundamentalism, whose grand narrative and piousness preclude it from adopting a self-reflexive or self-situating stance. Indeed, fundamentalism positions itself at, as it were, a transcontextual viewpoint, beyond time and change, in claiming knowledge of the cosmic order or eternal redemption. Evidently, there is no place for the role of contingency in the fundamentalist commitment to the literal truth of the Scriptures as the Word of God; inevitably, this belief entails faith in the absolute and necessary authority of the Bible.

In the light of the contingency principle, the fundamentalist idea of nature as endowed with an essential or intrinsic meaning warrants scrutiny. As noted above, this idea is derived from a literal reading of passages from Genesis (1:26; 1:28; 9:2–3), in which humanity is granted "dominion" over the Earth and enjoined to "subdue" it. However, this reading is vulnerable to critique on two counts. First, postmodern ecology conceptualizes the meaning of nature as historically variable.[4] In the North American experience, for example, one can point to the Amerindian model of an animistic habitat, the Puritan model of a God-forsaken wilderness, the industrial-capitalist model of a repository for raw materials, and the postmodern model of a technologically mediated hybrid.[5] "Nature," in other words, may be grasped as a culturally coded construct, whence the contingency of its meaning is made visible; "nature" has no intrinsic or necessary signification *pace* the claim of the fundamentalist reading. Such an understanding clears the way for a viable environmental ethic, one that incorporates a culture's responsibility for an ecologically friendly conception of nature.[6]

Second, "dominion...over all the earth" (Gen. 1:26) does not necessarily mean the right to unregulated exploitation of the planet's resources. "Dominion" may signify "lordship" (the Latin "dominus" means "lord") but it may also signify the power to govern or administer, a definition that charges humanity more with the duties akin to those of a majordomo taking care of a vast estate—a definition that runs counter to that of a consumer privileged with the power of unrestrained expropriation. Indeed, when read in conjunction with the very next chapter in Genesis, where it is recounted that "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (2:15), the meaning of "domin-

ion" is instantly qualified, casting humanity in the role of steward rather than lord. (The biblical Hebrew "radah" may mean to "rule over" but always in the context of husbanding or nurturing, whence the focus is more on responsibility than power.) Of course, one need not wheel out the machinery of postmodern critique to argue the possibility of a rival interpretation. Indeed, that possibility is not quite the point (albeit that the rival interpretation in question better serves an ecological agenda). Rather, the point here is to highlight how meaning is contingent on the process of interpretation. This matters because the dominionist attitude to nature derives from faith in what is taken to be a purely literal reception of (selective) verses in Genesis; that is to say, faith that the words on the page speak for themselves or, *a fortiori*, issue directly from God. Thus, it is assumed, no interpretation is needed; meaning occurs independently of any convention of reading or historical circumstance.

Finally, the exploitative view of nature behind fundamentalism's literal reading of the term "dominion" clearly appears to be conditional upon an historically specific environmental experience. As Vladimir Tomek has observed, "In the inhospitable plains, barren deserts and desolate steppes of the Middle East, the early settlers had to channel all their efforts and energies into dominating, controlling, and taming the natural world" (Tomek 2006). Given such harsh conditions and the primitive level of technological development, ecological criteria could have had no place in the world view of the Old Testament desert patriarchies. However, the latter's attitude to nature, which fundamentalism would transform into an absolute and binding principle, was always susceptible to revision; after all, in our evolving and unstable terrestrial contexts, alternative encounters with nature were inevitable and, in turn, would produce alternative attitudes to it.

ANTI-TRANSCENDENTALISM

Dominionists cite verses in Genesis which declare, "God created man in his own image" (1:27; 1:26). Twice this assertion immediately precedes reference to humanity's "dominion" over nature and, if read literally, affirms humanity's quasi-divine status. In short, dominionism radically separates us from nature by elevating us into a transcendent, Godlike relation to it. Conversely, a postmodern ecological critique may well proceed from Nietzsche's (proto-postmodern) deconstruction of the humanity/na-

ture binary. The will-to-power thesis amounts to an anti-transcendentalist philosophy that establishes a continuity between nature and humanity. In particular, value-systems are perceived as ultimately an outgrowth of humanity's animal nature. In an early essay fragment, "Homer's Contest" (1872), Nietzsche writes:

> "When one speaks of *humanity*, the idea is fundamental that this is something that *separates* and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is no such separation: "natural" qualities and those properly called "human" are indivisibly grown together. Man, in his highest and most noble capacities, is wholly nature and embodies its uncanny dual character. Those of his abilities which are awesome and considered inhuman are perhaps the fertile soil out of which alone all humanity...can grow." (cited in Kaufmann 1974, 193)

Nietzsche's insight may be enlisted in support of ecology's founding premise that humans are always-already embodied and embedded in ecosystems.[7]

A literal reading of the proposition that "God created man in his own image" can work to legitimize human dominion over nature. That is to say, just as God has lordship over our species, we who are created in His image have (quasi-divine) lordship over all other species. This argument is founded on fundamentalism's premise that God is the ultimate expression and very model of absolute power and sovereignty. Yet, in theological debate, this premise is by no means secure.[8] In his postmodern theology, John Caputo has argued for "the weakness of God" so as to make a persuasive case for the efficacy of divine justice. The world, i.e. that which "really exists, in the order of being," and which is defined by the strong forces (military, economic) of systems of power, is opposed by "the weak force of the Kingdom," the gentle "call" and "promise" of a non-transcendent God ("without being or sovereignty") who keeps alive the alternative of a just and spiritual order (Caputo 2007, 291–93). Caputo speculates: "Suppose the sense of 'God' is to interrupt and disrupt the established order…the authority of man over man—and over women, animals, and the earth itself—human possessiveness and dominion, to pose, in short, the contradiction of the 'world'?" (289). Caputo's aim is to free "the name of God" (285) from its cooptation by Earthly powers, which routinely invoke "God" for worldly advantage—the justification of imperialist ambition or the protection of hierarchical privilege. Think of the evangelizing

rhetoric of the *Conquistadores* or the frequency with which George W. Bush and his fundamentalist entourage have called on the name of God to justify their military pursuit of material interests (Maltby 2007). Think of the Old Testament patriarchies who maintained their rule in the name of "God the Father." In short, to represent God in power-centered terms of lordship and supremacy looks like a projection of Earthly conceptions of power into the name of God. "God" as signifier seems all too often to have been motivated by the ideologies of institutional authority.

Fundamentalism's uncritical assumption of an *omnipotens deus* and the dominionist attitudes that derive from that assumption also owe more to the Old Testament reverence for God Almighty than the New Testament's lamb power, which stresses the *virtues* of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. Moreover, where the Old Testament speaks of man in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–27), we read in Philippians of Christ Jesus who "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6–7). The transformation described here is called "kenosis": the voluntary *relinquishment* of divine power (in order, ultimately, to exercise it on Earth).

In his seminal work on postmodern environmental ethics, Jim Cheyney introduces his concept of "bioregional narrative" to highlight the specificity of place in constructions of social identity (Cheyney 1995).[9] He sees identity as deeply inflected by, and narrated under, the pressure of our "situatedness" in a bioregional locality. We are not disembodied thinking subjects coming to self-consciousness above the world, but organisms rooted in specific niches of the biosphere. Of course, social identity, which includes our sense of home and community, is crucially mediated by our culture's governing myths and institutions. But these cultural forces are critically and ineluctably informed by our negotiations and encounters with the landscape—we are, after all, also members of a biotic community. And, building on Holmes Rolston III's concept of "storied residence" (Rolston 1988), Cheyney proceeds to argue that the health of a culture depends on how it conceptualizes or "narrates" its relation to its bioregion. As he observes, "The task then is to tell the best stories we can. The tales we tell of our, and our communities', 'storied residence' in place are tales not of universal truth, but of local truth, of bioregional truth" (Cheyney 1995, 37). Those stories, like the cosmologies of Native American cul-

tures, should embody an instructional component, an ethical guide to our obligations to the biotic community. Our current ecological crises point to the failure of our prevalent stories to instruct us in such obligations, a failure, in Cheyney's words, to "build health and well-being by means of a bioregional contextualization of self and community" (38). In short, to speak of a "bioregional contextualization of self" is just one more step in the anti-transcendentalist direction in which postmodern critique has taken us. The human subject, already decentered from sovereign Self and Godlike legislator of meaning to a subject constituted by technologies of control and regimes of knowledge, is further decentered here by an ecocentric discourse, which challenges the dominionist narrative that represents humanity in the image of God, that is to say, as above the natural order.

ZOONTOLOGY

In "The Bible Speaks On Animal Rights" (2002), Pastor Art Kohl of the fundamentalist Faith Bible Baptist Church, provides what appears to be a near-exhaustive inventory of, and annotations on, Biblical references to animals. His conclusion, in bold red font, is unequivocal: "There are many ways that animals benefit mankind. There is no indication in Scripture that they have certain rights, though" (Kohl 2002). Under the rubric, "Man was told to have dominion over the animals," Kohl cites Genesis 1:26 and comments: "So man has been given dominion over all animals. We are not equals" (Kohl 2002). And when, as fundamentalism dictates, we read the story of Noah's Ark literally, the dominionist attitude is further endorsed. Thus, God tells Noah and his sons:

> The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Gen. 9: 2–3)

Animal rights advocates, at any time, will deplore such a downgrading of animals and, among other arguments, they will cite research in cognitive ethology that makes the case for animal subjectivity and intelligence. (Marc Bekoff, an ethologist, argues from empirical studies of animal cognition that animals deserve recognition as "other persons" (Bekoff 2003; see also Allen and Bekoff 1999).) However, the recent postmodern turn

of animal rights theory supplies new posthumanist vantage-points from which to critically confront dominionist attitudes.

First, the term "animal" is largely an anthropocentric/humanist construction, which attempts to define a human essence or fixed species identity (*ratio*, *logos*) by invoking its putative opposite: the "mindless" animal. Moreover, the greater its mastery over the animal world, the more humanity can affirm the distinction of its non-animal identity. Yet, in these very endeavors at self-definition, the sheer heterogeneity of non-human life forms is erased. In the conveniently singular identity of "animal," the diverse and distinctive modes of animal being (i.e. "zoontologies" (Wolfe 2003b)) are elided.

Accordingly, in its spirit of ethical pluralism, and what amounts to an extension of radical democratic politics, the postmodern animal rights theorist seeks to subvert the representation "animal." The latter is central to what Cary Wolfe calls "the discourse of species," a discourse that has "made the *institution* of speciesism fundamental...to the formation of Western subjectivity and sociality as such" (2003a, 6). This discourse embodies a hierarchy by virtue of which one species (homo sapiens) assumes the power of life and death over all others. It is "the taking for granted of the *institution* of speciesism—that is, of the ethical acceptability of the systematic 'noncriminal putting to death' of animals based solely on their species" (Wolfe 2003a, 7). In short, "animal" turns out to be an inherently oppressive construction; a term enabling a binarism by which *all* species marked as non-human may be controlled and segregated as a resource for human use.

A second move for a postmodern critique of the dominionist doctrine of the animal would be to problematize confidence in the human ability to *know* non-human life-forms.[10] Thus, while the fundamentalist will maintain that his/her knowledge of animals is ratified by the Bible, the postmodern theorist will reframe that knowledge as "culture's means of constructing and classifying the animal in order to make it meaningful to the human" (Baker 2000, 9). In *The Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker argues that, in the postmodern period of "animal-sceptical" works of art, representations of animals have lost their traditional function of "allegorizing" human life; instead, we now encounter the limits of anthropomorphism. And this way of thinking finds an echo in Derrida's neologism "animots," which seeks to replace the anthropocentric notion of "the animal" with the suggestion of an ungraspable and indeterminate mode

of being—something between a cultural construction ("mot") and that non-cultural other that eludes conceptualization ("animaux") (see Baker 2000, 74).[11] Accordingly, "animal" as a concept serves as a strategy for assimilation, a way of incorporating into a culture's understanding that which is wholly extrinsic to it or radically different.

Famously, Genesis, if read literally, authorizes human dominion over animals insofar as God empowers Adam to name them:

> So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. (2:19–20)

Onomastics teaches that such is the power of naming that to name the other is to define the other on the name-giver's terms (Moraru 2005, 118). Now Adam may indeed be employing a pure nomenclature, whereby the signifiers of prelapsarian language bear a necessary relation to their referents. Nevertheless, the choice of names for the animals is manifestly human—God wanted "to see what he [Adam] would call them" (Gen. 2:19). Moreover, for the fundamentalist, Adam's God-given authority to name the animals may be invoked as divinely sanctioned human dominance—the animals are ours to classify and, hence, to define for our own ends. And, just one verse earlier, we learn that the animals are brought forth to Adam, each in the subordinate capacity of a (hoped-for) "helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). Thus, there is no recognition of their alterity; their raison d'être is subsumed within a human structure of meaning. However, the postmodern focus on the animal-as-other exposes the contingency and fragility of this structure. Recall Borges' bogus Chinese encyclopedia, by which he mocks the arbitrariness of systems for classifying animals (Borges 1973). For instance, divisions in the encyclopedia's taxonomy include: "those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush," "those that have just broken a flower vase," "those that resemble flies from a distance" (103). Borges concludes his "inquisition" by citing G. K. Chesterton's observation on the inadequacy of human language before the multifariousness, complexities, and nuances of nature, for nature cannot "'be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals'" (105).

CONCLUSION: ECOCENTRISM

Unilateral communication with nature is integral to fundamentalist dominionism. The faith subscribes to a literal reading of Genesis where, famously, nature must submit to a human nomenclature. Thus, fundamentalist exegesis perpetuates the discourse whereby "Man" speaks on behalf of nature, while denying natural entities a voice of their own. In response to this silencing of nature, Christopher Manes observes, "As the self-proclaimed soliloquist of the world, 'Man' is obliged to use *his* language as the point of intersection between the human subject and what is to be known about nature...." (Manes 1995, 49). To counteract the disastrous consequences of this monologue vis-à-vis nature, Manes speculates that "ecological science and postmodern thought...will draw on the ontological egalitarianism of Native American or other primal cultures" and learn to listen to "the passions, pains, and cryptic intents of other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence" (50).

However, in a sense, nature *has* made itself heard—has, as it were, talked back—communicating in the language of ecological crisis. Unfettered exploitation of what is seen as a God-given resource has had disastrous consequences, of which global warming, resource depletion, diminished biodiversity, and pollution[12] are the salient examples. Yet, fundamentalists who subscribe to dominionism are in no way disconcerted by this dire state of affairs. In fact, as noted earlier, natural disasters are positively welcomed as presaging Christ's return. Moreover, Rapture eschatology allows its adherents to believe they can escape death in the face of a planetary catastrophe; that is to say, catastrophe understood as divine punishment in the form of the seven-year Tribulation, prior to which, members of the "true" Church will ascend "[to] the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17).

It goes without saying that postmodern ecology rules out divine intervention as a force in the biosphere. Rather, it exhorts us to engage in the quite literally down-to-earth business of constructing a responsible bioethics. And central to this ethics are narratives that challenge the anthropocentric tendency to make sense of nature exclusively from the perspective of our interests. Such narratives confront the hubris of a species that conceives itself as nature's overlord and, instead, adopt an "ontological humility" (Manes 1995, 51), which locates humanity within an ecocentric paradigm, one that listens to other voices in the biotic community.

NOTES

1. All translations of Biblical books follow the Revised Standard Version.
2. To avoid confusion, all fundamentalists are evangelicals but not all evangelicals are fundamentalists. Fundamentalist evangelicals constitute roughly 50% of the (approximately) 100 million evangelicals (i.e. "born-again" Christians) said to live in the USA (Maltby 2007, 17). They can be distinguished from non-fundamentalist evangelicals by (1) their literalist approach to reading the Bible and (2) their right-wing politics, which includes actively campaigning for legislation that imposes Christian conservative values.
3. Cizik has a formidable enemy in the person of James Dobson, proprietor of the "Focus on the Family" media empire and, according to Dan Gilgoff in *The Jesus Machine*, currently the most powerful leader of the Christian Right (Gilgoff 2007). As the National Association of Evangelicals' chief Washington lobbyist, Cizik has advocated action on global warming, a cause which Dobson sees as a distraction from the evangelical moral agenda. Accordingly, Dobson sought, but failed, to have Cizik expelled from the NAE.
4. In *The Seeds of Time* (1994), Fredric Jameson discusses how our conceptions of "nature" reflect shifts in our hopes for or expectations of revolutionary change. While the modernist conception of nature as controllable—a "Promethean Utopianism" (48)—was symptomatic of faith in the transformative power of revolutionary politics, the postmodernist conception of nature as a fragile ecosystem that requires from us a "self-policing attitude," a "new style of restraint" vis-à-vis our "collective ambitions" (48), reflects our loss of faith in the chances for revolutionary change in the late-capitalist age. Jameson writes, "It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thorough-going deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (xii). The free market has been naturalized to the point where we, in the liberal "democracies," cannot conceive of its collapse; hence, we now tend to figure collapse in biological terms. (And here we should note that, in the *Left Behind* novels (see LaHaye and Jenkins 1995), accounts of the apocalypse focus on the destruction of the biosphere rather than the socio-economic sphere.) In short, for Jameson, ecological discourse, though it has a positive, utopian inflection, also serves an ideological function today, channeling our ideas of breakdown through biological rather than political images.
5. Laura Barrett and Daniel White have argued that, "the reconstruction of the Kissimmee River ecosystem is best described in terms of a postmodern-ecological idea of nature as a hybrid of human and non-human designs whose result is precisely an image without an original," that is to say, a "simulacrum." Whence, "The form of the restored river will be…not the

original river at all but rather a new hybrid form: a synthesis of the existing river course and the [computer] designs of ecological planners" (Barrett and White 2001, 233–34).

6. Kirsty Best (2004) has discussed an ecologically damaging conception of nature produced by screen technologies in the postmodern media culture. The visual interfaces of movie and TV screens, banner ads on pc monitors, ad-based TV wallpaper, etc. do not just represent nature; rather, they constitute viewers as consumers of nature, a subjectivity that prompts and facilitates material consumption. By way of example, she looks at the ecological impact of the Disney Corporation's *Finding Nemo* (director Andrew Stanton 2003). The film's popularity led to a surge in demand for clown fish and other tropical fish, a demand that significantly added to the depredation of coral reefs. And since, today, we cannot avoid the "always-already present mediation" (Best 2004, 71) of nature through visual interfaces, we must confront "ethical questions about the relationship between visual and material circuits of consumption" (80).
7. In order to contest the idealistic or nostalgic-mythic view of nature as some pure or primal presence—a sphere distinct from human activity—cultural studies projects a model of nature as an endlessly changing product of human and non-human interactions. At the very least, we must think of the force of natural processes as intimately entwined with the impact of human agency via agriculture, urban development, industrialization and, more recently, restoration projects (see Williams 1975).
8. David Hume (1974), in his critique of arguments from design for the existence of God, famously hypothesized: "This world…was only the first rude essay of some infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance; it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity, and is the object of derision to his superiors; it is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity, and ever since his death has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force which it received from him" (108).
9. Cheyney mobilizes his concept of "bioregional narrative" to resist the universalizing purview of modernist grand narratives, including those implicit in purely objective, science-based environmentalist panaceas. Here, the concept is invoked for its anti-transcendentalist character.
10. Recall Wittgenstein's (albeit pre-postmodern) proposition: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (223).
11. In their monograph *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have explored that zone of indeterminacy with a view to extolling not power *over* animals but power in "becoming animal." They propose that, "to become animal is to...cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a

world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of non-signifying signs" (13). Becoming-animal is a "creative line of escape" that "replaces subjectivity" (36). To be sure, this change constitutes but a respite from a territorialized/bureaucratized mindset, insofar as the latter, Deleuze and Guattari insist, is certain to reassert itself. All the same, they argue that embracing the "intensities" of animality amounts to an invigorating, life-enhancing experience.

12. As a matter of etymological interest, when Jesus speaks of hell, he uses the Greek word "Gehenna" (Matt. 23:33). The word, which can be traced back to Hebrew, means "the valley of the son(s) of Hinnom" (Josh. 15:8; see also 2 Kings 23:10). This valley, located just outside Jerusalem's city walls, was a refuse dump, where fires continuously burned so as to consume mounds of stinking trash. In short, Jesus figures hell as a garbage heap.

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