

Chapter 13 *I Love a Sunburnt Environment*

THE environment is like the Empire used to be. It adds moral tone to what could otherwise look like a pretty ordinary pile of rocks. It is continuous with daily life — you're standing in it — but the best parts of it are somewhere else. Constant vigilance is needed against its many enemies. All-embracing yet uncontroversial, it is the perfect devotional object for schools.

Surveys tend to show that the 'environment' is the only public issue considered important by adolescents.¹ It is not hard to get 70 per cent of schoolchildren to disagree with the statement, 'Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs', though it is harder to motivate them to learn any of the scientific facts involved,² and other surveys seem to suggest that real concern is more characteristic of Whitlamite baby-boomers than the jaded youth.³

The more extreme environmentalist educators have made the most of the opportunity, and their enthusiasm rivals the Protestant recruiting sermonisers of the First World War.⁴ They have not been shy of

¹ *Australian* 28/11/1995, p. 1.

² B. Clarke, 'Environmental attitudes and knowledge of year 11 students in a Queensland high school', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 12 (1996): pp. 19–26; similar in S. Connell *et al.*, 'Young people and the environment in Australia', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 14 (1998): pp. 39–48.

³ N.W.H. Blaikie, 'The nature and origins of ecological world views: An Australian study', *Social Science Quarterly* 73 (1992): pp. 144–65.

⁴ M. May, 'Towards a new cosmology of the earth', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 4 (1988): pp. 9–21; K. Dyer & P. Gunnell, 'Humans and nature: A spectrum not a dichotomy', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 9 (1993): pp. 53–70; K. Dyer, 'Environmentalism as social purpose

advocating major changes in philosophy. 'A shift towards an ecological paradigm for education does not simply mean more environmental education, peace studies, development education and women's studies on school timetables. A paradigm shift involves changes in our *total* world view.'⁵ Education must 'encourage the kind of storytelling which "transcends the proclamation of difference" between ourselves and the earth.'⁶ 'A poststructuralist position in science and environmental education would encourage an understanding of "reality" that I once saw encapsulated in the words of a poster in an English (language) classroom: "the universe is not made of atoms — it is made of stories."⁷

Even a sympathetic observer says, 'As rightful heirs to the 1960s counterculture, contemporary greens affect a certain studied looniness.'⁸ Though these views are not shared by the mainstream of educators concerned about the environment, there is certainly some basis at least for the charges of critics like the former Finance Minister Peter Walsh, who accused the Government of appeasing a 'gaggle of kindergarten Marxists, secular religion zealots and new-class free-loaders who comprise Australia's green extremists.'⁹ Another writer sees the extremists as reviving Wordsworth: mining is not seen as working with nature, but as desecration; nature should be an untouched spectacle.¹⁰ It may be going too far to accuse the fringe of the green movement of reviving a pagan religion whose worship of nature may require human sacrifice in the form of a culling of the over-

in higher education', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 13 (1997): pp. 37–47.

⁵ N. Gough, 'Greening education', in *Green Politics in Australia*, ed. D. Hutton (Sydney, 1987), pp. 173–202, at p. 181.

⁶ N. Gough, 'Healing the earth within us: Environmental education as cultural criticism', *Journal of Experiential Education* 13 (1990): pp. 12–17, at p. 14; also N. Gough, 'From epistemology to ecopolitics', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 21 (1989): pp. 225–41; Gough's Eureka Prize for Environmental Education in *SMH* 27/11/1997, p. 8.

⁷ N. Gough, 'Environmental education, narrative complexity and postmodern science/fiction', *International Journal of Science Education* 15 (1993): pp. 607–25, at p. 615; also N. Gough, 'Playing at catastrophe: Ecopolitical education after poststructuralism', *Educational Theory* 44 (1994): pp. 189–210, at p. 210.

⁸ R. Goodin, 'A green theory of value', in D.J. Mulvaney, ed, *The Humanities and the Australian Environment* (Canberra, 1991): pp. 61–86, at p. 61.

⁹ *Sun-Herald* 24/2/1991, p. 3.

¹⁰ R. Sworder, 'Where man is not, nature is barren', *IPA Review* 45 (3) (1992): pp. 36–9.

prolific human species,¹¹ but even in this case there is some evidence. As one environmental educator put it, humans have ‘no more right to exist than any other species’.¹²

Of course, there *is* an environment, and there are many threats to it. Attitudes to environmental questions divide into two philosophical camps: the ‘shallow’ and the ‘deep’ (the words are meant as description, not evaluation). The shallow view, which appeals especially to those with a scientific orientation, is concerned about threats to the environment and recommends research to understand and counter them, but does not see any need for fundamental changes in world views or ethics. The shallow view is unappealing to visionaries, who generally argue that we need to see the natural world in a completely different way, one that recognises it as having an intrinsic value independent of human interests — perhaps as having a right to remain undisturbed.

Shallow and proud of it is John Passmore, author of one of the first books on environmental philosophy, the widely read *Man’s Responsibility for Nature*. Passmore was one of the first of Anderson’s disciples to become a professional philosopher.¹³ His first extensive works were on the relation of Andersonian views to the then-new philosophy of logical positivism,¹⁴ and he then worked on the history of philosophy, in which his *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* and its sequel, *Recent Philosophers*,¹⁵ summarised the opinions of a large number of philosophers that few other people had the energy to read. He wrote on public issues before it was fashionable for philosophers to do so,¹⁶ discussing

¹¹ J.K. Williams, ‘The religion of environmentalism’, *Economic Witness* no. 50 (6/7/1990); M. Drummond, ‘Australians finding a new religion in environmentalism’, *Rural Business* 2 no. 22 (1990): pp. 8, 10.

¹² T. Trainer, ‘Towards an ecological philosophy of education’, *Discourse* 10 (1990): pp. 92–117, at p. 104.

¹³ J. Passmore, *Memoirs of a Semi-detached Australian* (Melbourne, 1997), ch. 7.

¹⁴ S. Grave, *A History of Philosophy in Australia* (St Lucia, 1984), pp. 85–9; J. Passmore, ‘Philosophy and science’, *AJPP* 17 (1939): pp. 193–207; ‘Logical positivism’, *AJPP* 21 (1943): pp. 65–92; 22 (1944): pp. 129–43, 24 (1948): pp. 1–19.

¹⁵ J. Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (London, 1957, 2nd ed, London, 1966); *Recent Philosophers* (London, 1985); also *Ralph Cudworth* (Cambridge, 1951); *Hume’s Intentions* (rev. ed., London, 1968); his account of Australian philosophy in *The Pattern of Australian Culture*, ed. A.L. McLeod (Ithaca, NY, 1963), pp. 131–68.

¹⁶ J. Milliken, ‘John Passmore: A very Australian intellectual’, *National Times* 30/8–5/9/1981: p. 27; ‘John Passmore’, in M. Thomas, *Australia in Mind* (Sydney, 1989), pp. 194–206; F. Jackson, ‘Passmore, John’ in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7, pp. 247–8; his papers in National Library MS 7613.

in substantial books art, education, the impact of science and environmental issues. His work is interdisciplinary in a way that is accessible to the general public but sometimes raises suspicions among specialists. He remarks in his memoirs that though his works are at 'too high a level of generality to suit environmentalists, educators, art critics, they are too concrete in their references for philosophers. And, one can add, too historically-minded for either, although not enough for historians.'¹⁷ The philosophy of these books is Andersonianism at a lower emotional temperature. Though there are things that make him angry — Catholicism, for example¹⁸ — the general tenor is an even-handed distribution of praise and blame, combined with an opposition to any views that smack of irrationalism or mysticism. Thus his *Science and its Critics* agrees that modern science is to blame for some technological disasters, but argues against the more extreme humanist views that science is bad in itself. *The Perfectibility of Man* is a historical account of attempts to aim at human perfection. It is deeply suspicious of utopians and visionaries, from the ancients to the drug gurus of the Sixties. His book on the environment, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, is similar. It admits there are environmental problems which require urgent research and action, but argues that more hard scientific thinking is needed, not less. It has no sympathy with those who demand a totally new, mystical ethic:

It is at this point, indeed, that the cry grows loudest for a new morality, a new religion, which would transform man's attitude to nature, which would lead him to believe that it is intrinsically wrong to destroy a species, cut down a tree, clear a wilderness. As I have already suggested, these demands strike one, at a certain level, as merely ridiculous. One is reminded, indeed, of the exchange between Glendower and Hotspur in Henry IV Pt. I (III.i.53):

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur: Why so can I, or so can any man,

But will they come when you do call for them?

A morality, a religion, is not, as I have already argued, the sort of thing one can simply conjure up. It can only grow out of existing attitudes of mind, as an extension or development of them.¹⁹

Passmore is firmly against any attribution of rights to nature. Bacteria and men do not have any common interests, he says, therefore they do not form a community and so there cannot be any mutual

¹⁷ Passmore, *Memoirs*, p. 132.

¹⁸ Passmore, *Memoirs*, pp. 115–6; Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (2nd ed, London, 1980), p. 131 fn; cf. p. 162.

¹⁹ Passmore, *Man's Responsibility*, p. 111.

obligation between them. “The idea of “rights” is simply not applicable to what is non-human.”²⁰

At the time Passmore was writing, the early 1970s, apocalyptic predictions about the fate of the earth — spectacularly unrealised — and the general utopianism of the times prompted rethinking of the whole framework in which discussions had so far taken place.²¹ The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess promoted the notion of ‘deep ecology’, which attributed to nature intrinsic values and rights of exactly the kind Passmore found incoherent.²²

Australia was among the first centres of interest.²³ The early leaders were Richard and Valerie Routley, who were also Canberra environmental activists, especially in opposition to woodchipping.²⁴ Richard Routley (later Sylvan) hoped environmental philosophy would give Australian philosophy as a whole a distinctive cast, making it something different from a collection of imports from the northern hemisphere.²⁵ In line with Peter Singer’s attempt in *Animal Liberation* at about the same time to break down the moral division between

²⁰ Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility*, p. 116; similar in B. Maley, *Ethics and Ecosystems* (Sydney, 1994), ch. 2; S. Waight, B. Tapp & D. Brooks, ‘Eco-philosophies: Exercises in irrelevance’, in *Ecopolitics V Proceedings*, ed. R. Harding (Kensington, 1992), pp. 460–4; objections in V. Routley, Critical notice of Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility*, *AJP* 53 (1975): pp. 171–85; other ‘shallow’ theories in H.J. McCloskey, *Ecological Ethics and Politics* (Totowa, NJ, 1983); D.H. Monro, *Ethics and the Environment* (Melbourne, 1984); C.A. Hooker, ‘On deep versus shallow theories of environmental pollution’, in *Environmental Philosophy*, ed. R. Elliot & A. Gare (St Lucia, 1983), pp. 58–84; B. Medlin, *Human Nature, Human Survival* (Adelaide, 1992).

²¹ C. Ware, ‘Some considerations for an ethic of ecology’, *Dialectic* (Newcastle University) 8 (1972): pp. 39–48.

²² Account in W. Fox, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology* (Totnes, 1995), part 3; N. Witoszek & A. Brennan, eds, *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (Lanham, Md, 1999); also *The Deep Ecologist* newsletter, Ballarat, 1982–91.

²³ D. Mannison & M. McRobbie, Introduction, in D. Mannison, M. McRobbie & R. Routley, eds, *Environmental Philosophy* (Canberra, 1980), pp. 1–7; (obituary of Mannison in *AJP* 68 (1990): p. 131).

²⁴ R. & V. Routley, *The Fight for the Forests* (2nd ed, Canberra, 1974); R. Routley & V. Plumwood, ‘The *Fight for the Forests* affair’, in *Intellectual Suppression*, ed. B. Martin (Sydney, 1986), pp. 70–3; V. Plumwood, ‘The struggle for environmental philosophy in Australia’, *Worldviews* 3 (1999): pp. 157–78.

²⁵ R. Sylvan, ‘Prospects for regional philosophies in Australasia’, *AJP* 63 (1985): pp. 188–204; R. Sylvan, ‘Issues in regional philosophy: Austrian philosophy? And its Austral image?’, in *Austrian Philosophy Past and Present*, ed. K. Lehrer & J.C. Marek (Dordrecht, 1997), pp. 147–66; Sylvan papers are in University of Queensland Library.

human and non-human, the Routleys proposed to extend the sphere of environmental moral concern to all sentient beings, that is, beings which could have interests. 'Human chauvinism' would thus be overturned.²⁶ Their 'deep-green theory' was unlike deep ecology in being against new-age sloganising with tinges of pagan spirituality. They approved of argument to establish a coherent ethical (rather than spiritual) theory.²⁷ Their position was that the well-being of whatever is capable of well-being (that is, animate beings) may not be jeopardised without good reason.

In any of its versions, deep ecology must answer the question, what properties exactly make something have intrinsic value? And if one airily and democratically proposes to extend value to *all* life — to speak of an 'equal right to live and blossom' as early formulations of deep ecology did — why stop there? Why not rocks as valuable? And if so, why not as *equally* valuable? At that point, the theory becomes vacuous, since there are no remaining gradations in value. Surely, as Routley puts it, value is more patchily distributed in the universe, like yellow.

Further, one can apparently have too much of what would otherwise be a good thing, like plagues of rats: 'there is a principle (a sort of inverse of rariety) of *diminishing value* with increasing numbers, applying also to humans'.²⁸

²⁶ R. & V. Routley, 'Human chauvinism and environmental ethics', in Mannison, McRobbie & Routley, pp. 96–189; earlier partial versions in 'Is there a need for a new, an environmental ethic?', in *Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy* (Sofia, 1973), vol. 1 pp. 205–10; 'Against the inevitability of human chauvinism', in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century*, ed. K.E. Goodpaster & K.M. Sayre (Notre Dame, 1979), pp. 36–59; summary in Grave, *History*, pp. 223–5; replies in S.I. Benn, 'Personal freedom and environmental ethics: The moral inequality of species', in *Equality and Freedom* ed. G. Dorsey (New York, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 401–24; J. Begley, 'Do we need a new ecological ethics?', *Compass Theology Review* 25 (1990): pp. 28–36; discussion in McCloskey, *Ecological Ethics and Politics*, pp. 57–61.

²⁷ Emphasised in R. Sylvan & D. Bennett, *The Greening of Ethics: From Human Chauvinism to Deep-Green Theory* (Cambridge, 1994), ch. 5; survey of positions on breadth of moral community: introduction to A. Brennan, ed, *The Ethics of the Environment* (Aldershot, 1995); A. Brennan, 'Environmental ethics', *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 333–6; N. Low & B. Gleeson, *Justice, Society and Nature: An Exploration of Political Ecology* (London, 1998), ch. 6.

²⁸ R. Sylvan, 'A critique of deep ecology', *Radical Philosophy* 40 (Summer 1985): pp. 2–12 & 41 (Autumn 1985): pp. 10–22; discussion in W. Fox, *Approaching Deep Ecology: A response to Richard Sylvan's Critique of Deep Ecology* (Hobart, 1986).

If value is unevenly distributed, it is up to environmental philosophers to explain what properties of things confer these degrees of value. There are two main suggestions, both of some intuitive appeal but both with certain conceptual problems, and not easily combined, nor easily justified as criteria. The first is 'naturalness', the second 'diversity' or 'complexity'.

Elliot and Goodin suggest that the property of being naturally evolved (as opposed to made) is crucial to what gives a wilderness, for example, its unique value.²⁹ The value of a part of the environment thus depends on its history, in much the same way as the value of a work of art can depend on its genuineness: something really made by Leonardo is more valuable than a modern reproduction, even a perfect reproduction. This makes the value of environmental restoration tricky, and also means that a divinely created universe would have a different kind of value (though possibly an equal one).

The other possible source of value lies in aesthetic properties, of 'diversity, stability, complexity, beauty, grandeur, subtlety, harmony, creativity, organisation, intricacy, elegance and richness'.³⁰ On the value of diversity, Passmore quotes Aquinas: 'Although an angel, considered absolutely, is better than a stone, nevertheless a Universe containing angels and other things is better than one containing angels only.'³¹ As Passmore points out, this raises a problem with the invasion of exotic species, which increases diversity but conflicts with the value of naturalness. The cane toad and the prickly pear, however beautiful in themselves, are not welcome in the Australian ecosystem and do not add value to it, while the wallabies of Derbyshire have been little loved despite their contribution to England's impoverished biodiversity. The problem is made worse by the fact that intuitions were apparently different in the nineteenth century, when Acclimatisation Societies busily transferred species both ways.³² And if exotic species are a pest and restoration to the pristine state is desirable, should we take advantage of advances in cloning to resuscitate the Tasmanian tiger?³³ Or the Tasmanian Aborigines?

²⁹ R. Elliot, 'Intrinsic value, environmental obligation and naturalness', *Monist* 75 (1992): pp. 138–60; R. Elliot, *Faking Nature: The Ethics of Environmental Restoration* (London, 1997); R.E. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 2; cf. W. Godfrey-Smith, 'The value of wilderness', *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979): pp. 309–19.

³⁰ Elliot, 'Intrinsic value', at p. 151.

³¹ Passmore, *Man's Responsibility*, p. 119.

³² L. Gillbank, 'The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria', *Historical Records of Australian Science* 6 (1986): pp. 359–74.

³³ P. Bagust, 'The end of extinction?', *Australian Journal of Communication* 28 (1) (2001): pp. 1–81.

'Diversity' is a good that attaches more to species than individuals. So the more that value attaches to such large abstractions as natural ecosystems, the less there is for individual animals: if cruelty and predation are natural to an ecosystem, should the value of the individual or that of the ecosystem take precedence?³⁴ 'Complexity' as a good produces other problems. Individual life forms and perhaps ecosystems are not the only things with complexity or purposiveness. Should we not assign value to kidneys, even if they are not inside organisms? Or for that matter, to machines (which are exactly what the environmentalists wanted to disvalue)?³⁵ Indeed, should we not praise the engineer, who brings into being new ceramics and organic molecules with marvellous properties, which nature herself has left in the sphere of the merely possible? If natural evolution of complex life forms is good, is not speeding it up through biotechnology better?

Those thoughts may encourage a renewed emphasis on naturalness as a good. But the very effort to find non-human-centred criteria of goodness (like diversity, complexity and naturalness) and to see humanity as simply 'part of the universe' tends to destroy the distinction between natural and artificial and induces a kind of quietism. If one species has the habit of covering the earth with concrete jungles, why worry? That is just its nature. And too easy an acceptance of what happens naturally may deny us reason to object to asteroid strikes, ice ages or HIV mutations, which are certainly natural and may well clear the earth for a wealth of new evolutionary opportunities.³⁶

Obviously, it is not easy for environmentalists to get straight what they really mean to say. It is very hard, especially, to make sense of deep ecological ideas as an add-on to our usual views of the way the world is. Philosophical foundations for environmental philosophy need not be half-baked, but to bake the whole cake will take some intellectual effort. Passmore's claim that rights and values are not the kind of things nature can have need not be accepted, but if those ideas are to make sense at all, it seems they will need to be situated in a much larger metaphysical reorientation which will reveal the world to be rather different from the way the mainstream of Western thought has taken it to be. Some environmental thinkers have therefore looked for resonances between what they believe and older phi-

³⁴ L.E. Johnson, *A Morally Deep World: An Essay on Moral Significance and Environmental Ethics* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 4–5, 242–3.

³⁵ J. Thompson, 'A refutation of environmental ethics', *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): pp. 147–60.

³⁶ W. Grey, 'Anthropocentrism and deep ecology', *AJP* 71 (1993): pp. 463–75; also W. Grey, 'A critique of deep green theory', in *Beneath the Surface*, ed. E. Katz et al (Cambridge, Mass, 2000), pp. 43–58 (biography at www.uq.edu.au/~pdwgrey).

losophical traditions. Two leading candidates are Aboriginal philosophy and the pantheism of Spinoza.

Despite some misappropriations by environmentalists — Aborigines are not ‘conservationist’ in the contemporary sense³⁷ — there is something in the claim that Aboriginal world views incorporate a kind of ecological philosophy. Though there is a danger of falsifying Aboriginal thought by trying to express it in English, by and large experts have been happy to systematise and describe what Aboriginal views are in the area occupied in Western thought by philosophy. Anderson’s associate A.P. Elkin arranged Aboriginal opinions on the workings of nature under the headings of space, time, causation and number, and was happy to compare the dwelling of Dreamtime spirits with Leibniz’s monads.³⁸ It is agreed that the Dreaming is not a simple matter of feeling, or myth (in the Western sense), but an expression of an understanding of how reality is, and proof that ‘the blackfellow ... shares with us “the metaphysical gift”’.³⁹ It has definite content, corresponding with the eternal realities that Western religious traditions believe underlie the visible world.⁴⁰ The landscape has been

³⁷ L. Sackett, ‘Promoting primitivism: Conservationist depictions of Aboriginal Australians’, *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 2 (1991): pp. 233–46; J.L. Kohen, *Aboriginal Environmental Impacts* (Kensington, 1995); R. Swarder, *Mining, Metallurgy and the Meaning of Life* (Quakers Hill, 1995), pp. 11–13; B.J. Coman, ‘Environmental primitivism and the noble savage’, *Quadrant* 47 (3) (Mar 2003): pp. 38–43.

³⁸ A.P. Elkin, ‘Elements of Australian Aboriginal philosophy’, *Oceania* 40 (1969): pp. 85–98, at p. 89; ‘Berkeleyian’ in B. Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London, 1987), p. 14; annotated bibliography on Aboriginal philosophy and totemism in T. Swain, *Aboriginal Religions in Australia* (Westport, CT, 1991), pp. 79–87.

³⁹ W.E.H. Stanner, ‘The Dreaming’, in *Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. W.A. Lessa & E.Z. Vogt (3rd ed, New York, 1972), pp. 269–77; comment in S. Muecke, ‘Travelling the subterranean river of blood: Philosophy and magic in cultural studies’, *Cultural Studies* 13 (1) (1999): pp. 1–17.

⁴⁰ T. Swain, ‘Dreaming, whites and the Australian landscape: Some popular misconceptions’, *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): pp. 345–50; T. Swain, *A Place for Strangers* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 22–36; K. Maddock, *The Australian Aborigines* (Melbourne, 1974), pp. 27–8, 109–10; L.R. Hiatt & R. Jones, ‘Aboriginal conceptions of the workings of nature’, in *Australian Science in the Making*, ed. R.W. Home (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1–22, part II; review in J.B. Callicott, *Earth’s Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 172–84; D.B. Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra, 1996); D.L. Morgan & M.D. Slade, ‘Aboriginal philosophy and its impact on health care outcomes’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 21 (1997): pp. 597–601; discussion of later

fashioned by totemic ancestors,⁴¹ and hence special or sacred sites, the transformed bodies of timeless ancestral beings, are places of unusually close connection with the eternal.⁴²

The most hopeful Western philosophical tradition as a foundation for environmental philosophy is that of Spinoza. It emphasises the interconnections between humans and nature and conceives of nature itself as having ethical properties. It is often regarded as a version of pantheism, the view that the whole universe is God, or at least has divine attributes,⁴³ though the 'divinity' envisaged is far from a personal one. There has been an enduring stream of Spinozism in Australia — or perhaps one should rather say a recurrent rediscovery of the Spinozist option, since the thinkers involved very rarely mention their predecessors. There has probably been more writing by Australians on Spinoza than on any of the other classical European philosophers,⁴⁴ and many other thinkers who do not specifically mention Spinoza have developed similar theories.

developments in K. Maddock, 'Metamorphosing the sacred in Australia', *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 2 (1991): pp. 213–32.

⁴¹ T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions* (Melbourne, 1947), pp. 25–33.

⁴² R.M. Berndt, *The Sacred Site: The Western Arnhem Land Example* (Australian Aboriginal Studies no. 29, Canberra, 1970), pp. 1–10; also T.G. Thomas, 'The land is sacred', in *The Gospel Is Not Western*, ed. G.W. Trompf (Maryknoll, NY, 1987), pp. 90–4; B. Neidjie, *Kakadu Man* (Queanbeyan, 1985), pp. 46–9 (discussion in V. Plumwood, 'Plato and the bush', *Meanjin* 49 (1990): pp. 524–36); S. Muecke, 'Towards an Aboriginal philosophy of place', in *Speaking Positions*, ed. P. van Thoorn & D. English (Melbourne, 1995), pp. 167–79; M. Slade & D. Morgan, 'Aboriginal philosophy in Australian higher education', in *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education*, ed. G.R. Teasdale & Z. Ma Rhea (Oxford, 2000), pp. 51–78; some white attempts to populate the bush with spiritual entities in L.H. Allen, *Gods and Wood-Things* (Sydney, 1913).

⁴³ M.P. Levine, 'Pantheism, ethics and ecology', *Environmental Values* 3 (1994): pp. 121–38; M.P. Levine, *Pantheism* (London, 1994); G. Oppy, 'Pantheism, quantification and mereology', *Monist* 80 (1997): pp. 320–36; P. Forrest, 'Pantheism and science', *Monist* 80 (1997): pp. 307–19.

⁴⁴ J.A. Gunn, *Benedict Spinoza* (Melbourne, 1925); J.A. Gunn, 'Spinoza', *AJPP* 2 (1924): pp. 23–42; J.A. Gunn, *Spinoza, the maker of lenses: A play* (London, 1932); (Gunn's papers are in Melbourne University Archives); R. Jackson, 'The doctrine of substance in Descartes and Spinoza', *AJPP* 4 (1926): pp. 205–11; K. Hart, *The Departure* (St Lucia, 1978), pp. 33–4; A.C. Fox, *Faith and Philosophy: Spinoza on Religion*, ed. A.J. Watt (Nedlands, 1990); A. Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago, 1989); G. Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); G. Lloyd, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics* (London, 1996); M. Gatens & G. Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London, 1999); G. Lloyd, ed, *Spinoza: Critical Assessments* (London, 2001).

A theory of this kind was maintained by Samuel Alexander, the first famous Australian-born philosopher. Alexander was born in Sydney and grew up in Melbourne, but left for England at the age of eighteen in 1877 and never returned.⁴⁵ He maintained that space-time, existing entirely independently of thought, was the fundamental stuff out of which things and events were made. The evolution of the universe leads to the gradual emergence of more complex and higher levels of reality — life, and later consciousness. In due course, deity will evolve.⁴⁶ Alexander's main book, *Space, Time and Deity*, was based on lectures he delivered in Glasgow in 1918. They were attended by the young John Anderson, and their impact was a crucial event in his reorientation from the idealism of his teachers to his distinctive realism.⁴⁷ Of course he discarded Alexander's views that some levels of reality were higher than others. He characteristically said that *Space, Time and Deity* 'has given us the fullest and most logical statement of realism yet presented, but with such concessions to idealism as to render it ineffective.'⁴⁸

Alexander, like many of the school, was more concerned to present and develop his theory than to argue for it. Those who have looked for supporting arguments have often found something helpful in the strange world of modern physics. One obvious area worth mining is quantum mechanics, whose account of the nature of reality is unusual — on some interpretations, at least. This line of thought was pursued

⁴⁵ Alexander's recollections of Australia in S. Alexander, *Philosophical and Literary Pieces* (London, 1939), pp. 1–3; further in H. Munz, 'Professor Samuel Alexander', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* 1 (6) (1941): pp. 171–8; *ADB*, vol. 7, pp. 133–4; his contributions to Zionism in C. Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York, 1949), pp. 152, 117–8.

⁴⁶ Summary of his philosophy in C.R. Goodwin, 'On rediscovering Alexander', *Twentieth Century* 21 (1966): pp. 62–9; A. Boyce Gibson, 'Samuel Alexander: An appreciation', *AJPP* 16 (1938): pp. 251–4; Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 2nd ed, pp. 266–78; criticism in H.B. Loughnan, 'The empiricism of Dr Alexander', *AJPP* 9 (1931): pp. 91–102; H.B. Loughnan, 'Emergence and the self', *Monist* 46 (1936): pp. 211–27; (Fr Loughnan's book on Bradley, Bosanquet and Alexander, *Metaphysics and Ethics: A Scholastic Study of Three English Monists*, remains unpublished: D. Strong, *Australian Dictionary of Jesuit Biography* (Sydney, 1999), pp. 198–9); G.F. Stout, 'A criticism of Alexander's theory of mind and knowledge', *AJPP* 22 (1944): pp. 15–54; D.C. Stove, 'Two problems about individuality', *AJP* 33 (1955): pp. 183–8.

⁴⁷ B. Kennedy, *A Passion to Oppose* (Melbourne, 1995), pp. 47, 61, 117–9.

⁴⁸ J. Anderson, 'The non-existence of consciousness', *AJPP* 7 (1929): pp. 68–73 (repr. in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (Sydney, 1962), pp. 60–7); see also the index to *Studies* under 'Alexander'; Anderson's lectures on Alexander at setis.library.usyd.edu.au/oztexts/lectures.html.

in the 1950s by the freelance philosopher Jack McKinney, Judith Wright's husband.⁴⁹ He proposed to take literally the language of quantum physicists when they described reality as made up of events, indeterminacies and probabilities, 'waves of knowledge', and other ultimately non-physical constituents, all with a close relationship to consciousness.⁵⁰ He hoped such ideas would spontaneously lead to a change of heart that would turn humanity away from the destructive tendencies evident in the World Wars and the atomic bomb. Judith Wright recalls that meeting him 'set me, too, off on new tracks of thinking and put those years of Andersonian philosophy in quite new lights. The thinkers most people revered were being turned upside down ...'⁵¹ His ideas formed the basis of her later environmental activism.⁵² When asked by an interviewer, 'What are you trying to do in your poetry?', Wright answered, 'The job philosophy has opted out of.'⁵³

The clearest and best-argued presentation of a Spinozist philosophy, and also the one that connects it most closely to environmental philosophy, is Freya Mathews' *The Ecological Self*.⁵⁴ She argues that Einstein's General Relativity is best seen as showing that the basic

⁴⁹ J. Wright, *Half a Lifetime* (Melbourne, 1999), ch. 8; V. Brady, *South of My Days* (Sydney, 1998), pp. 113–22, 126–8, 163, 170–1; Wright in *ADB*, vol. 15, p. 252.

⁵⁰ J.P. McKinney, *The Challenge of Reason* (Brisbane, 1950); 'Philosophical implications of the modern revolution in thought', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 18 (1957): pp. 35–47; 'Experience and reality', *Mind* 67 (1958): pp. 386–93; *The Structure of Modern Thought* (London, 1971); articles in *Meanjin* 1–3 (1942–4); *Language* 1 (1952); on these publications, Wright, *Half a Lifetime*, pp. 224–5, 261, 276.

⁵¹ Wright, quoted in Brady, pp. 116–7; also M. Noonan, 'A leap to air: The evolution of Judith Wright's thinking on the mystery of creation', *Compass* 30 (Winter 1996): pp. 7–14.

⁵² J. Wright, 'Conservation as a concept', *Quadrant* 12 (1) (Jan–Feb 1968): pp. 29–33; J. Wright, 'The principles of conservation', *Wildlife Newsletter* 17 (Nov 1968): pp. 4–6.

⁵³ V. Vallis, 'Doing philosophy's job', *Times Literary Supplement* 3865 (9/4/1976), p. 432.

⁵⁴ F. Mathews, *The Ecological Self* (London, 1991); also F. Mathews, 'Conservation and self-realization: A deep ecology perspective', *Environmental Ethics* 10 (1988): pp. 347–55; and briefly in F. Mathews, 'Terra incognita: Carnal legacies', in L. Cosgrove, D. Evans & D. Yencken, eds, *Restoring the Land* (Melbourne, 1994), pp. 37–46; F. Mathews, 'Ecological philosophy', *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3 pp. 197–202; some other partly similar works: W. Fox, 'Deep ecology: A new philosophy for our time?', *Ecologist* 14 (1984): pp. 194–200; W. Fox, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology* (Totnes, 1995); A. Gare, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (New York, 1993).

furniture of the universe is force-fields and their variations, and what appear to be substantial things are only semi-permanent fluctuations in the basic fields.⁵⁵ As to quantum mechanics, she does not accept idealist interpretations according to which reality is dependent on 'the observer', but argues that non-classical principles like 'non-locality and intrinsic dynamism' again suggest a holistic view of the universe.⁵⁶ Certain parts of the world, though, such as living organisms, have an internal organisation that tends to keep them in existence; they have an integrity that makes them 'matter to themselves', whether or not they are conscious of it. This confers on them an intrinsic value, independent of any valuation of them by anything external.⁵⁷ Rocks are different: they are only stuck together by external forces: 'A rock is no way self-affirming, demarcating and preserving its own identity; a rock is just a lump of matter, arbitrarily hewn out, waiting to be worn away by wind and rain.'⁵⁸ (Here Mathews comes close to Alfred Deakin's words of a century earlier: 'if the unity of the universe were merely the unity of a rock, which might be more properly styled homogeneity, or the unity of an arch or of a circle, it could not inspire feeling of any kind. The vital factor in Wordsworth is that he holds the universe to be a *living* unity, which therefore inspires faith.'⁵⁹)

Mathews does not exactly hold the universe to be a living unity, but grants it a low level of self-organisation and hence a kind of 'background value', like the cosmic background radiation.⁶⁰ That has no bearing on our actions, since we cannot affect the existence or non-existence of the whole universe. But particular living things that do have value to themselves, and strive to maintain their existence against difficulties, deserve our respect and our recognition of their vital needs, to the extent that they do not conflict with the vital needs of other selves.

There have been attempts to work out a Christian philosophy of the environment,⁶¹ though they face suspicion from the orthodox as

⁵⁵ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, pp. 50–60.

⁵⁶ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, pp. 54–7.

⁵⁷ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, pp. 104–5.

⁵⁸ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, p. 104.

⁵⁹ A. Deakin, *The Gospel According to Wordsworth* (1884), quoted in K. Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin* (London, 1923), p. 137.

⁶⁰ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, p. 118.

⁶¹ J. Scullion, A. Hamilton, T. Daly & W. Daniel, *God's Creation and Human Responsibility for the Earth* (Melbourne, 1981); P. Collins, *God's Earth* (Melbourne, 1995); R.M. Gascoigne, *The History of Creation: A Christian View of Inorganic and Organic Evolution* (Sydney, 1993) (obituary of Gascoigne

probably pagan and from the actual pagans as futile exercises in me-tooism. The most noted such attempt is by Charles Birch, for many years Professor of Biology at Sydney University. The first version appeared in 1965, the year in which Birch was engaged in nobbling Knopfmacher's application to Sydney University.⁶² 'The Universe', he says, 'turns out to be less like a machine and more like a life.'⁶³ Where materialists argue that since everything other than minds is material, so some way will be found to show minds too are reducible to brains, Birch argues in reverse: other parts of the universe have the purposiveness of minds, but to lesser degrees. 'Atoms resemble human experience in the sense of taking account of their environment without being totally determined by it.'⁶⁴ God is the Life of the World, literally.

The later chapters of Paul Davies' books on popular science may contain a similar view, but they are so vague philosophically that it is hard to tell.⁶⁵

These somewhat colourless abstractions about the nature of the universe are altogether too blokey for some. According to ecofeminists, the rape of nature is intimately connected with the rape of women. They find deep ecology too abstract, alien, cognitive, positivist and generally too focused on the evils of humanity, rather than of men, and not political enough.⁶⁶

in *Australasian Association for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Science Newsletter* no. 48 (Aug 1994)).

⁶² C. Birch, *Nature and God* (London, 1965).

⁶³ C. Birch, *On Purpose* (Kensington, 1990), p. xi.

⁶⁴ Birch, *On Purpose*, p. xii; also C. Birch & J.B. Cobb, *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge, 1981), summary in Collins, *God's Earth*, pp. 138–41; interview in C. Jones, *The Search for Meaning* (Sydney, 1989), pp. 63–75; "Heretic" scoops religion's richest prize', *SMH* 7/3/1990, p. 1; Birch papers in Sydney University Archives, P.131; cf. P. Edwards, 'Panpsychism' in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6, pp. 22–31; similar views in W.E. Agar, *A Contribution to the Theory of the Living Organism* (Melbourne, 1943, 2nd ed, 1951), ch. 3; R. Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* (London, 1992), ch. 3; papers in *Concrescence: The Australasian Journal of Process Thought* 1 (June 2000) (www.alfred.north.whitehead.com/AJPT/ajpt_home.htm); a version closer to Spinoza in J. Evans, *Theistic Monism* (London, 1928).

⁶⁵ P. Davies, *The Mind of God* (Melbourne, 1992), chs 7–8, etc; analysis by J. McCaughan reported in M. Kay, 'On Paul Davies and *The Mind of God*', *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 10 (1996): pp. 188–93; Davies' prize for Progress in Religion, *SMH*, 9/3/1995, p. 3.

⁶⁶ P. Hallen, 'Reawakening the erotic: Why the conservation movement needs ecofeminism', *Habitat Australia* 22 (1) (Feb 1994): pp. 18–21; A. Salleh, 'The ecofeminism/deep ecology debate: A reply to patriarchal reason', *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): pp. 195–216; A. Salleh, *Ecofeminism*

These themes appear in the later work of Val Plumwood (formerly Routley).⁶⁷ She has the advantage of being able to draw on her experience of a close and nearly fatal encounter with the forces of nature, when a canoe trip alone in Kakadu led to an attack by a crocodile. The crocodile attacked the canoe several times. Plumwood managed to jump from the canoe into the lower branches of a paper-bark tree beside the river. At the same moment the crocodile grabbed her legs and rolled her into the water. She writes of her near-death experience:

In its final, frantic attempts to protect itself from the knowledge of vulnerability and impending death that threatens the normal, subject-centred framework, the mind can instantaneously fabricate terminal doubt of extravagant, Cartesian proportions: *this is not really happening, this is a nightmare, from which I will soon awake*. This desperate delusion split apart as I hit the water. In that flash, when my consciousness had to know the bitter certainty of its end, I glimpsed the world for the first time 'from the outside', as no longer *my* world, as raw necessity, an unrecognisably bleak order which would go on without me ...

The water however was not deep, and at the end of the roll, Plumwood was able to draw breath. A second roll had the same result, and finding herself near an overhanging branch, she hung onto it. The crocodile let her go and she was able to climb into the paper-bark. But the crocodile again leapt out and seized her by the thigh and a third roll ensued. At the end of it, the crocodile had tired and Plumwood was able to crawl slowly up a mudbank. Despite her severe injuries, she was able to travel some distance and was found in time by rangers. She eventually made an almost full recovery in hospital.

She later meditated on what the experience of being prey showed about human vulnerability. Referring to a strange rock formation that had given her a sense of unease shortly before the incident, she wrote:

The wisdom of the rock formation draws a link between my inability to recognise my vulnerability and the similar failure of my culture in its occupation of the planetary biosystem. The illusion of invulnerability is typical of the mind of the coloniser; and as the experience of being prey is eliminated from the face of the earth, along with it goes something it has to teach about the power and resistance of nature and the delusions of

as *Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (London, 1997); C.J. Mews & K. Rigby, eds, *Ecology, Gender and the Sacred* (Clayton, 1999); reply in W. Fox, 'The deep ecology-ecofeminism debate and its parallels', *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): pp. 5–25; R.S. Laura & R. Buchanan, 'Towards an epistemology of ecofeminism', *Education Research and Perspectives* 28 (1) (2001): pp. 57–90.

⁶⁷ V. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London, 1993); V. Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* (London, 2002)

human arrogance. In my work as a philosopher, I now tend to stress our failure to perceive human vulnerability, the delusions of our view of ourselves as rational masters of a malleable nature ... Let us hope it does not take a similar near-death experience to instruct our culture in the wisdom of the rock.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ V. Plumwood, 'Human vulnerability and the experience of being prey', *Quadrant* 39 (3) (Mar 1995): pp. 29–34; also *SMH* 25/2/1985, p. 3.