

Desiring the 'Peaceable Kingdom'?

Use/respect dualism, the enigma of predation and human relationships to other animals

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Carol Adams and Marjorie Procter-Smith write:

...animals cannot be theological subjects as well as food on our tables or clothes on our back. And why should we not see them as theological subjects in light of emerging information on their consciousness and subjectivity?²

The call to view animals as theological subjects raises many questions for contemporary theology and religious reflection.³ It also raises questions about

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 - 2 C. J. Adams and M. Procter-Smith (1993), "Taking Life or 'Taking on Life'?" in C. J. Adams (ed.), *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Continuum, New York, p. 299.
 - 3 There is now a significant body of literature on animals and religion which addresses animals as theological subjects. See, for example, the literature on animals and Christian theology, spirituality and ethics which includes A. Linzey (1991), *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, Crossroad, New York; (1994), *Animal Theology*, SCM, London; (2000), *Animal Gospel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville; A. Linzey and D. Yamamoto (eds) (1998), *Animals on the Agenda*, SCM, London; J. McDaniel (1986), "Christian Spirituality as Openness to Fellow Creatures", *Environmental Ethics* 8, no.1, pp. 33-46; C. Pinches and J. B. McDaniel (eds) (1993), *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, Orbis, Maryknoll; L. G. Regenstein (1991), *Replenish the Earth: A History of Organized Religion's Treatment of Animals and Nature – Including the Bible's Message of Conservation and Kindness toward Animals*, Crossroad, New York; R. Wade (2000), "Towards a Christian Ethics of

our understanding of relationships between humans and other animals, between other animals themselves, and between animals, both human and other-than-human, and nature. I want to begin by outlining briefly a philosophical framework that is somewhat critical of Adams' and Procter-Smith's position and from this to consider one case of interrelationship between animals, humans and nature, namely predation, which presents particular challenges and possibilities for Christian and perhaps other theologies.

A philosophical framework

In her volume *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Australian ecophilosopher Val Plumwood analyses a system of mastery, not unlike the system of kyriarchy critiqued by feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.⁴ For Plumwood this system is formulated around a set of dualisms (man/woman; human/nature; human/animal; reason/emotion; mind/body; spirit/matter; self/other and so on) which reinforce a logic of colonisation within Western thought and practices.⁵ On the basis of this critique, Plumwood has identified a particular dualism that arises in some discussions of "animal rights and vegetarian duties".⁶ Plumwood is responding particularly to Carol Adams' position as represented in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* which sets out "a feminist-vegetarian critical theory" analysing the complex ways in which meat-eating and Western patriarchy are intertwined conceptually, symbolically, economically, and practically so that animals are routinely ontologised as food in ways that deny their subjecthood.⁷ But for Plumwood claims such as that of Adams and Procter-Smith that "animals cannot be theological subjects as well as food on our

Animals", *Pacifica* 13, no. 2, pp. 202-12; S. H. Webb (1998), *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals*, Oxford University Press, New York; R. N. Wennberg (2003), *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge our Moral Universe*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids USA and Cambridge UK.

- 4 See V. Plumwood (1993), *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London and New York, esp. pp. 41-68; E. Schüssler Fiorenza (1992), *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Beacon Press, Boston, esp. pp. 114-132.
- 5 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 43; see further her ongoing critique of this system in V. Plumwood (2002), *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Routledge, London and New York.
- 6 See Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, pp. 152-159; also, V. Plumwood (2000), "Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Socialist Analysis", *Ethics and the Environment* 5, no.2, pp. 285-322, and (2004) "Animals and Ecology: Towards a Better Integration", in S. Sapontzis (ed.), *Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat*, Prometheus, Amherst.
- 7 C. J. Adams (1991), *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Continuum, New York.

tables or clothes on our back" imply a "use/respect" dualism.⁸ That is, such claims rest on the assumption that the *use* of animals for food and clothing and *respect* for animals as "inherently valuable" or "morally considerable" in themselves are *mutually exclusive categories*. Plumwood argues that while *use* and *respect* are separated in a dualistic way in the systematic abuse of animals in factory farming and what may become flesh factories, growing organs for human transplant, *respect* for other animals need not always be mutually exclusive of their *use* for human sustenance and flourishing. As Plumwood notes, there are cultures, such as some contemporary Australian Aboriginal ones, in which the use of animals is predicated on respect for them.

Recognising that a variety of cultural perspectives concerning animals are possible and based on an understanding of both the interconnectedness and the diversity of Earth life, Plumwood highlights the problem of creating eco-hierarchies, by moving some other animals into the category of 'person' or 'morally considerable other' without challenging the hierarchical structure of Western dualism. In fact such a move reinforces the structure by creating "a dualism between conscious and non-conscious life in which only the former deserves moral consideration".⁹ Plumwood wonders, for example, what might be the "consciousness" and moral considerability or inherent worth, for example, of particularly long-lived plants? A further question which arises is that of relationship between individuals and species: what is at stake in emphasising the individual over the species and vice versa?¹⁰ Jennifer Everett argues for seeing the species being of an individual animal as part of the animal's 'nature'; but in her writing there is a slippage between individual and species which shows the

8 David Eaton claims that Plumwood's reading of Adams is unnuanced. See D. Eaton (2002), "Incorporating the Other: Val Plumwood's Integration of Ethical Frameworks", *Ethics and the Environment* 7, no. 2, pp. 153-180. While Eaton makes some sound points, his claim that Plumwood's work is unnecessarily abstract and disengaged from her subject matter when writing of animals ignores the significance and concreteness of her writing on predation as well as on factory farming in, for example, V. Plumwood (1999), "Being Prey", in D. Rothenberg and M. Ulvaeus (eds), *The New Earth Reader: The Best of Terra Nova*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, USA and London, UK, pp. 76-91 and Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, pp. 159-66.

9 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, p. 155.

10 See J. Everett (2001), "Environmental Ethics, Animal Welfarism, and the Problem of Predation: A Bambi Lover's Respect For Nature", *Ethics and the Environment* 6, no. 1, pp. 42-67.

difficulty of valuing one over the other.¹¹ Tom Settle, in contrast, sees the case of farm animals as a challenge to the over-valuation of species.¹²

While Plumwood is deeply concerned for the abuses of farm animals in factory farming, from an activist philosophical position she is also critical of the way in which predation, both human and other-than-human, is treated in the literature on animals and ecology. There are several approaches to predation from an animal advocacy position:¹³

1. all human predation is morally wrong (or fallen) and predation by other animals is wrong (or a symptom of the fall);
2. all human predation is morally wrong and predation by other animals is not wrong but regrettable;
3. human predation is cultural and avoidable, animal predation is natural and unavoidable;
4. human and animal predation are natural and evolutionary, and humans should participate in "natural" predatory activities such as hunting, even if "cultural" predatory activities such as factory farming are immoral;
5. all consumption of the other, animal or plant, is in some respects "predatory", but this does not imply that all forms of predation are equally morally acceptable.

Plumwood takes issue with all but the last, which is close to her position.¹⁴ She also wants to affirm that human predation needs to be seen in its cultural context, that not all predation involving other animals denies respect for them. Significant for her argument is an understanding of the interdependence of humans with other animals and plants, and with organisms that may not be described as strictly animal or plant.

Within this web of interconnectedness, humans need to know themselves as both predator and prey, consumer and consumed. The knowledge of ourselves as prey is something that unlike Plumwood - who herself barely survived attack by a crocodile - most Westerners do not face.¹⁵ In Australia when a crocodile attacks a human, the usual response is for the 'authorities' to hunt and kill it. Notably in her own case, Plumwood argued against the crocodile being hunted and killed. But apart from mosquitoes bites, lice outbreaks among our school age children,

11 Everett, "Environmental Ethics", p. 54.

12 T. Settle (2000), "Farm Animals' Challenge to Ecological Thinking: Skepticism about the Prospects for an Inclusive Ethics of Health", *Ethics and the Environment* 5, no. 2, pp. 245-6.

13 For the basis of this list, I am in debt to Everett, "Environmental Ethics" and Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks", pp. 307-314.

14 Plumwood "Integrating Ethical Frameworks", pp. 315-18; *Environmental Culture*, pp. 158-9.

15 Plumwood, "Being Prey".

or fleas in a newly-rented premises most of us in Western urban settings do not take much note of ourselves as food for others. In some contexts, however, for example, where Denghi fever and malaria are prevalent, even mosquito bites can be life-threatening. Nevertheless, as many have pointed out justly, usually our being food for mosquitos, fleas, or lice, is little more than a temporary inconvenience, whereas factory-farmed animals are subjected to systemic suffering when they are ontologised as food for humans or their companion animals.

But Plumwood makes a strong point for the subversive effects of seeing ourselves as prey as well as predator:

The radical difference between the individual justice and the food/ecological framework is real, as you discover when as a person whose sense of identity has been defined in the individual justice framework you are suddenly catapulted into that other older, shocking, subversive and denied Heraclitean framework in which you are food.¹⁶

For Plumwood these two frameworks underlie two distinct narratives concerning the relationship between nature and culture, or between humans and the more-than-human world we inhabit.¹⁷ For Westerners the challenge to integrate these two narrative frameworks is pressing, if almost insurmountable.

Plumwood's analysis, which I have only sketched here, calls, therefore, for a radical rethinking of our interrelationships with Earth others, a certain humility with respect to our understanding of ourselves, other animals, and the myriad other organic and non-organic constituents of the Earth community, and a rethinking of our illusions of control, which are sometimes reinforced by the strong form of appeal to moral veganism. Plumwood argues instead for a contextualised semi-vegetarianism. But what does her critique imply for Christian theologies of animals?

Challenges to Christian Theologies of Animals

I think a number of challenges arise. Firstly, in what ways can our diverse experiences of other animals inform our religious reflection on animals? As feminists have long argued, experience has a place in informing our theologising. In considering animals as theological subjects, we need to heed experiences such as Plumwood's of "being prey", particularly when these experiences have been the subject of serious philosophical reflection. Further, as Stephen Webb has shown, the intimacy and mutuality some people experience with their

16 Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks", p. 316. I think the mythology surrounding crocodile and particularly shark attacks in Australia is evidence of the way in which our potential as prey is something we have all but repressed.

17 Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks", p. 316.

companion animals, their observation of their companions' passions, disappointments and joys *can* inform our theologies concerning other animals.¹⁸ Further, our experience of compassion when faced by the suffering of other animals *is* theologically significant.¹⁹ This is not to say that we can affirm experience unequivocally as a source of theological insight. As always we will need to be suspicious of our own enculturation particularly for those of us whose identities have been shaped within a Western cultural context that has progressively ontologised some animals as meat and nothing else, and which has created a split in our thinking and practice between pet animals, food animals and wild animals.²⁰

Secondly, we need to consider what it means for us to be predator and prey. In our characterisations of predation, what is suggested about our relationships to wildness and domesticity? How do these characterisations affect or reflect our understanding of the divine? Thirdly, we need to consider the ways in which our theologies allow for and respect the differences between animals, as Clare Palmer suggests, with regard to "species membership, domestication, historical context and location".²¹ What is the moral significance of these differences? In the remainder of this paper, I want to look at one motif that has figured in Christian theologies of animals and on which these questions bear, namely the motif of the peaceable kingdom.

In Isaiah 11 a hoped-for future of peaceful restoration for the people of Israel is imaged by a reconciliation of predators and prey:

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,

18 As Stephen Webb ably shows in his *On God and Dogs*.

19 See McDaniel, "Christian Spirituality". In relation to the environmental and survival values of human compassion, especially on sympathy as evolutionary, see Everett, "Environmental Ethics", p. 61.

20 Plumwood refers to a pet/meat dualism. But Western thinking about other animals sometimes includes at least a third group of 'wild' animals, such as wombats, which non-Aboriginal Australians see as neither strictly companion nor food animals, but sometimes as needing our protection. In fact in Australia alone the interrelationships between our understandings of food animals, companion animals, native animals and feral animals can be quite complex. Plumwood takes this complexity into account when she seeks to reclaim the notion of a particular animal as a 'familiar', disrupting the categories of pet/meat and wild/tame. See Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, p. 165.

21 C. Palmer (2003), "Animals in Christian Ethics: Developing a Relational Approach", *Ecotheology* 7, no. 2, p. 168.

their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH
as the waters cover the sea.²²

The text is the basis of the idyll of an anticipated Peaceable Kingdom, which for Milton is also a paradise lost.²³ In his paintings Edward Hicks interprets the Peaceable Kingdom in the context of the colonisation of the 'New World'. Stanley Hauerwas and John Berkman, Stephen Webb and others have appealed to the vision of the Peaceable Kingdom as an indication that animals share in divine redemption.²⁴ At times the motif of the Peaceable Kingdom is associated with domestic, particularly companion, animals.²⁵ At others it becomes a banner for a Christian call to ethical vegetarianism.²⁶

While the last has much to recommend it, what do these images of the Peaceable Kingdom imply for our understandings of 'nature' and the divine? If an end to predation is a metaphor for a desired parousia, if predation is absent in Milton's primeval garden, is predation then to be viewed as a 'natural' evil, as a sign of nature as 'fallen'? For Christian theologians, such as Michael Lloyd the answer is a resounding 'yes'.²⁷ But ecocritic Kate Rigby, for example, suggests that we be cautious in our estimations of nature as either evil or good.²⁸

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the ways in which some readings of this motif in Christian writing about animals can be criticised from

22 Isa 11:6-9 in *The New Revised Standard Version*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1989.

23 J. Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book 4, <http://www.literature.org/authors/milton-john/paradise-lost/chapter-04.html> (accessed 17 August 2004).

24 S. Hauerwas and J. Berkman (1993), "A Trinitarian Theology of the 'Chief End' of 'All Flesh'" in C. Pinches and J. B. McDaniel (eds), *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, Orbis, Maryknoll, pp. 62-74; Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, p. 103; Linzey, *Animal Gospel*; W. S. Towner (1996), "The Future of Nature", *Interpretation* 50, no. 1, pp. 27-35; S. Webb (1996), "Ecology vs. the Peaceable Kingdom: Toward a Better Theology of Nature", *Soundings* 79, nos 1-2, pp. 239-51; Webb, *On God and Dogs*; Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, pp. 292-5.

25 See Webb, *On God and Dogs*, pp. 44-65, 181-4.

26 See Linzey, *Animal Theology*, pp. 125-37, esp. 129.

27 M. Lloyd (1998), "Are Animals Fallen?" in A. Linzey and D. Yamamoto, *Animals on the Agenda*, SCM, London, pp. 147-60.

28 See Kate Rigby, "On 'Not Eating the Limb of a Living Animal'" in this issue of PAN.

the perspective of biblical studies.²⁹ Rather what is at issue is the way in which this motif, sometimes with the paintings of early-nineteenth-century Quaker Edward Hicks in the background, have informed contemporary Christian writings about animals.³⁰ In the Earth Bible volume 4, part of an Australian-based ecojustice project to re-read the Bible from the perspective of Earth, John Olley notes that in the book of Isaiah animals are represented and valued in their diversity and “embraced as full participants along with humans in the Earth community”.³¹ In relation to Isaiah 11:6-9 and the related passage in Isaiah 65, he argues that animals, both wild and domestic remain part of an envisioned future harmony and, moreover, that “animals are included in the ‘knowledge of YHWH’”.³² While his approach affirms the interconnectedness of humans and other animals within the divine purpose, the key idea emerging is of an eschatological end to predation. This resonates with theologies that speak of a fall into predation for humans and see animal predation as a symptom of the fall. The peaceable kingdom is read as an eschatological vision of liberation from suffering for both humans and other animals.³³ Towner identifies the eschatological vision of a future as expressing a call to moral choices and ethical living in the present.³⁴ The moral force of the eschatological vision within the literature on animal theology, then, is its call for Christians to engage in ethical relationships with both other humans and other animals anticipating the kind of relationships envisaged in the “peaceable kingdom”.

Without turning from the ethical call to right relationship between humans and other animals, and the participation in ‘redemption’ through personal choice and political action this entails, there are good reasons for being suspicious of theological appeals to the motif of the “peaceable kingdom”. The

29 However, for a reading of this motif in the history of Christianity see J. F. A. Sawyer (1996), *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, pp. 220-40. For a considered reading of the motif in Isaiah and Hosea, see G. M. Tucker (2000), “The Peaceable Kingdom and a Covenant with the Wild Animals” in W. P. Brown and S. D. McBride Jr (eds), *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Silbey Towner*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, USA and Cambridge UK, pp. 215-25.

30 Indeed a detail from Edward Hicks’ *Peaceable Kingdom* is in the foreground, as the cover photo, of Linzey and Yamamoto, *Animals on the Agenda*.

31 J. W. Olley (2001), “‘The Wolf, the Lamb, and a Little Child’: Transforming the Diverse Earth Community” in N. C. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, The Earth Bible Volume Four, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, p. 221.

32 Olley, “‘The Wolf, the Lamb, and a Little Child’”, p. 226.

33 See, for example, Olley, “‘The Wolf, the Lamb, and a Little Child’”; Towner, “The Future of Nature”; Webb, “Ecology vs. the Peaceable Kingdom”.

34 See Towner, “The Future of Nature”, pp. 31-34.

key question is *the extent to which our interdependence* (and that of other species) *with Earth others*, an interdependence which is expressed most clearly in the reality of consumption, of drawing from others our nourishment and of providing nourishment for others from our bodies, of being in some senses predator and prey to others whether animal or plant, is or is not fallen. To claim that this aspect of the embodiment of humans and other animals is fallen seems to suggest that a non-fallen state is somehow disembodied or not embedded in the more-than-human world.³⁵ It suggests, too, a certain focus on the individual animal over against other possible ways of understanding interrelationships between animals, including humans, and between animals and the wider Earth community, in terms of the myriad patterns of consumption at work there.³⁶

Another point for consideration is the question of theologies of suffering. In what ways can theology acknowledge the tragedy of predation without either valorising or effacing the sufferings of humans and other animals? The vision of liberation from suffering which accompanies appeals to the motif of the peaceable kingdom is problematic. Without reinstating theologies which valorise suffering, particularly the suffering of women and many others subordinated to the project of Western mastery, theologies need to acknowledge the tragic without completely wishing it away in an idealised future which is unfaithful to its present contexts. I suspect an eschatological vision of freedom from suffering for prey and for predator needs to be consonant with their lived experience as predator and prey, which includes the fear and sometimes tragic outcome of being prey and the way in which the embodied experience of being potentially prey shapes a life. In this respect then the full humanness of a human, the full sheepiness of a sheep, the full mousiness of a mouse, the full eagleness of an eagle, is a transformation which honours and incorporates rather than solely interrupts the tragedies as well as the joys which have formed us as human, sheep, mouse and eagle.

In our theologising about animals, therefore, we need to reconsider what it means to be food “for others”. Pregnant and breastfeeding women know something of this in their bodies in a way that has been idealised but is not without its costs. Without assuming that the animal, human or other-than-

35 Plumwood makes a similar point in her critique of “ontological veganism”; see Plumwood, “Animals and Ecology”.

36 A further point of concern is the way in which visions of a return to Eden have been implicated in the projects of colonisation, particularly in the Americas but also in Australia and elsewhere. For expositions of this colonising effect, see C. Keller (1994), “The Breast, the Apocalypse, and the Colonial Journey”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10, no. 2, pp. 53-72, and C. Merchant (1995), *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, Routledge, New York, pp. 27-56.

human, that is nibbled or wholly consumed by the other, welcomes this, that is, without assuming that the animal lays down its life for the other in a self-giving sacrifice, we can draw from the interdependence of consumption, a notion of the sociality of the Earth community, in which being is in some senses always “being toward”.³⁷

Is there a constitutive “hospitality” to Earth life, such that by virtue of our membership of the Earth community we are “for the other”? This underlying “hospitality” should not be idealised. It is tragic and at times joyful. There is a continuity between the joy of celebratory meals and the tragic patterns of consumption that support them. It is a point for ethical consideration and fine argument the extent to which the tragic edge of hospitality can be avoided altogether. For Christian theology the question of a constitutive hospitality holds promise for rethinking eucharistic symbolism and language. As Adams and Proctor-Smith have shown such symbolism and language is problematic from an animal advocacy position, but as Webb has argued eucharistic symbolism and language can also support an animal advocacy position.³⁸ Perhaps both positions need to be nuanced by an understanding of the “for the other” quality of hospitality, which is so central, for example, to the Lukan presentation of eucharist.

An affirmation of the interdependence of Earth life, with its implications for living with the theoretical messiness as well as the material tragedy of predation for individual animals, both other-than-human and on occasion human, implies a humility with respect to the Earth community and the enigma of predation and a rethinking of our notions of the divine. Contra Towner, I suggest that we need to affirm the continuity between the Earth community and the divine as well as the differences between them.³⁹ We need to rethink notions of creator and creation, so that our images of creator do not simply mirror our desire for control over the tragedy that accompanies predation.

How might we re-think the divine? While Milton’s Satan is the archetypal predator stealing into the primeval garden, Gerard Manley Hopkins portrays the divine as predator.⁴⁰ Yet without necessarily imaging either Satan or G*d as predator, it may be necessary, as eco-critic Kate Rigby suggests, to construct a

37 More generally, on being as “being toward”, see J-L. Nancy (1997), *The Sense of the World*, trans. J. S. Librett, University of Minnesota Press, London and Minneapolis, p. 15.

38 See Adams and Proctor-Smith, “Taking Life or ‘Taking on Life’?”, pp. 305-8, and Webb, *On God and Dogs*, pp.155-67.

39 Towner, “The Future of Nature”, p. 34.

40 Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book 4. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1953), “(Carrion Comfort)” in G. M. Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, selected and edited by W. H. Gardner, Penguin, Middlesex, pp. 60-61; see also “The Windhover” in Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, p.30.

theology which accounts for not only our compassion toward prey but a certain humility before the enigma of predation. Within the interpretative framework of emerging goddess traditions figures such as Kali allow an encompassing of evil and good, destruction and creativity within the divine. A Christian theology may need to return to a mystical tradition. Here it might reclaim a kind of stance of unknowing with respect to the divine, within whose compass both predator and prey and we ourselves in our complex relationships to each, are held in our uniqueness and inter-connectivity.

But this does not imply that we have a warrant actively to create tragic outcomes for individual animals, for example through recreational hunting. Nor does it imply that we have a warrant to support either as a producer or a consumer the systematic abuse of animals in factory farms. Rather, for humans, being “for the other” requires an ethic of openness to the other animal, an openness which is marked sometimes by hospitality, sometimes by compassion, sometimes by letting be. Plumwood writes of

... envisaging an ecological order which is itself potentially an ethical order with its own values and standards of sharing, generosity, and radical equality between species, and with its own stringent obligations to recognize the other as equally positioned, as potentially food and always more than food.⁴¹

A consideration of predation raises many apparent contradictions for theology and seems to challenge our ethical impulses toward non-violence and preservation of life. But to assume that predation is a temporary feature of a yet-to-be-redeemed nature is a dangerous shortcut in our ecotheological thinking, because such an assumption oversimplifies the meanings and functions of predation within a whole environment and denies the complex character of our own domestication, and more particularly of our embeddedness in a more-than-human ecological order which we share with many other individuals and species.

41 Plumwood, “Integrating Ethical Frameworks”, p. 318.