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**Self, Ethics and 'Goddess'
in the Thought
of
Alice Walker,
Audre Lorde and Sarah Lucia Hoagland**

A thesis presented

by

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to

The University of St Andrews
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Master of Philosophy

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Declaration

I, Jennifer B. Kerr, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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Dr. M. Daphne Hampson
Research Supervisor

Abstract

In order to consider the thought of Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and Sarah Lucia Hoagland, the categories of self, ethics, and 'Goddess' are employed. The term 'Goddess' is indicative of a study that takes in ideas such as deity, the sacred, myth and ritual in a non-patriarchal and post-Christian way. Although each of these scholars emphasises a different strand of feminist and womanist theory concerning the self and ethics, it is in the category of 'Goddess' that they show the most divergence.

Alice Walker is a Black American womanist writer. She believes in the innate goodness of people and of 'All Creation', and that people can find ways to become more in tune with this goodness. She commends a meditative approach to self-acceptance, which leads to a compassionate and activist ethics. A pantheist, she describes herself as a 'pagan', someone whose primary spiritual connection is to 'Nature' and 'Earth'.

Black American Lesbian feminist Audre Lorde was a poet and author of memoirs and essays. What may be called her 'epistemology of the self' is described. It is through this 'epistemology of the self' that she encouraged an interior process of self-understanding that becomes exterior as words are found to communicate one's knowledge to others. Thus self-consciousness is the groundwork for the ethical task of connecting with others as equals across difference. She embraced the animism and polytheism of traditional African religion, reclaiming selected Yoruban deities and suggesting that deepening self-knowledge and self-direction are aspects of apotheosis.

The 'Lesbian Ethics' of white US philosopher Sarah Lucia Hoagland are discussed. She writes of ethics and values that she has found among Lesbians and that she thinks may contribute to the development of Lesbian wholeness/integrity, agency, and community. She stresses the concept of 'the self-in-community' for which she coins the term 'autokoenoeny'. She has rejected traditional religions, wishing instead to further 'Lesbian Ethics', sometimes using feminist stories of Amazons as inspiration. She sees 'lesbian spirituality' as something that increasingly 'autokoenoous' Lesbians are likely to choose to develop.

This is encouraging and provocative material for those interested in emerging post-Christian religious and spiritual sensibilities and practices.

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Beverly A. B. Kerr Helmich 17 April 1929 - 12 December 1998 REQUIESCAT IN PACE
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Many of my feminist friends say that spirituality is important in their lives. For some, their church, temple, or synagogue is a welcoming, nurturing, challenging religious and spiritual community. Perhaps they have known it from their youth, or discovered it after a long search for like-minded people. Others find that their spiritual needs are met or partly met through practices such as daily meditation, prayer, or quiet time; long walks or cycling; gardening; cooking; music; time shared with a relation, partner, friend, or animal. They may use rituals from traditions new or old, such as lighting a candle to remember someone, burning incense to help clear away bad memories, facing in turn the four points of the compass to concentrate the mind or will, using tarot cards or dream interpretation to aid in self-understanding, making a libation at a crossroads or the confluence of streams to mark a new beginning. Some, however, still remain at a loss as to where to look or how next to proceed.

My own spiritual journey has involved me in several of these approaches. Growing up white in 'smalltown USA', I was an active member of the Reformed Church in America. As a questioning young adult I attended services of many other Christian denominations, and a few Jewish services too. I practiced daily meditation on topics (or non-topics) suggested by an Eastern mystic. In my early years at university I struggled to be a 'Christian feminist', but gave up this battle in 1979, influenced especially by Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*.¹ Since then a post-Christian, I have wondered what kind of spiritual meaning there could be in my life. I have been spiritually moved in nature, through music, and in relating to another human being; lit candles and poured libations. But like some of my friends I have felt the lack of a way to think about myself, my part or purpose, and the meaning of everything. I have wanted a new world view, a bigger picture (in) which I could believe.

In this thesis I shall discuss three US American writers who not only share some of my questions about meaning and spirituality but also seem to have made considerable progress in developing their own 'bigger pictures'. The writers are Alice Walker (b. 1944), Audre Lorde (1934-1992), and Sarah Lucia Hoagland (b.

¹M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

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1945). All are feminist or womanist, and marginal to the white heterosexual male mainstream, in their being Black, and/or Lesbian, and/or bi-sexual. I have set myself the task of presenting my reading of their views under headings which I shall call 'self', 'ethics', and 'Goddess'. In this way I shall share the partial results of my searching and re-searching for world views and spiritual resources that may be consonant with my post-christian feminist living. By saying that my results are 'partial', I mean at least two things. First - inevitably - I learned many things while preparing to write down these findings, including things that are too sketchy or seemingly unconnected to cohere with the writing that follows. Second, these results are 'partial' in the sense that they are peculiar to me, and, while I hope that others may find them thought-provoking and enjoyable, I am not trying to elicit agreement but only seeking to encourage others to pursue their own spiritual paths, if any, and to consider Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland as possible sources. Sally Miller Gearhart has written that 'any attempt to persuade is an act of violence',² and Joyce Trebilcot has described what she calls 'dyke methods' for using language 'without imposing [one's own] "truths" - the analyses and values that are meaningful to [oneself] - on others'.³ Because I think that these assertions are part of an important discussion about language, control, and coercion, I shall try to be more descriptive than disputatious in my presentation. Nonetheless, these results have been shaped by me and my concerns.

I want to be as clear as possible from the very beginning about some of the ways in which I am using words and language. So, I shall explain at this first opportunity some of my vocabulary. This exercise will also air some of the presuppositions that I bring to my working. It will help you, the reader, to get to know me and some of the ideas behind my writing.

Some readers will already have noticed that I used the verb forms 'living' and 'working' above where I might have used the nouns 'life' and 'work'. I follow Sarah Lucia Hoagland in using the verbal '-ing participle' forms, rather than the non-verb nouns. The aim is to stress the sense of journey and movement rather than arrival and thingness. Hoagland draws on linguist Julia Penelope in doing this.⁴

²S. M. Gearhart, 'The Womanization of Rhetoric', in *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2, (1979), pp 195-201. Quoted in J. Trebilcot, *Dyke Ideas: Process, Politics, Daily Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p 57.

³Trebilcot, *Dyke Ideas*, p 57.

⁴See Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value* (Palo Alto, California: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), p 224.

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In using the term ‘world views’ as I do, I mean modes of thought and being that indicate or shape frames of reference, life philosophies, matrices of meaning; belief systems, or some kind of lens through which the world and one’s experiences can be perceived. ‘Meta-narrative’ is perhaps a connected idea, although I do not expect to discover anything quite so grand. Since I came to realise, in 1974, that the received patriarchal world view was inimical to me as a young feminist, I have been aware of great voids of meaning and a sense of disorientation. I often think of the title of Vita Sackville West’s novel, *No Signposts in the Sea*.⁵ Due to my own lack of signposts or of orientation I have been drawn to authors who seem to have found ways to get their bearings. In referring to ‘spiritual resources’, I am saying that I intend to write about the divine, or deity, or holiness; that the nature of my concerns is theological. Meaning, for me, is bound up with *spiritual* meaning.

‘Post-christian’ is a word I use not to mean simply secular and ‘Western’, but to describe someone who acknowledges their religious roots in Christian tradition but who does not believe in or practice Christianity. Mary Daly first used this word, and stresses that it is about a departure, about a launching into ‘New Time/Space’⁶. Daphne Hampson explains that, while she is promoting a radical discontinuity from the patriarchal Christian past, she remains a religious person in the Western tradition, that is, using some elements from Anglo-European spiritual and intellectual culture and history (and not embracing another religious tradition, say, Eastern Buddhism or African animism).⁷ Both of these post-christian scholars, while rejecting Christianity as a whole, recognise that there are influences and resources from Christianity that can be appropriated for forward looking post-christian spiritual feminism/s. It is interesting to note that the post-christian departure has been, in a sense, ecumenical, with Daly’s background having been Roman Catholic, Hampson’s Protestant, and my own, as I have said, Reformed.⁸

By ‘feminist’, I mean a woman who recognizes that a social structure of hierarchical dualism with men at the top and women at the bottom harms everyone, especially women. Further, she takes steps, when she can, to join with others who

⁵V. Sackville-West, *No Signposts in the Sea* (London: Virago, 1985). First published in Great Britain by Michael Joseph Limited, 1961.

⁶M. Daly, and J. Caputi, *Websters’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), p 88.

⁷See D. Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

⁸To clarify re. Hampson, see Julie Clague, ‘BISFT Interview with Dr. Daphne Hampson’, in *Feminist Theology*, 17 Jan. 1998, pp.39-57.

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are like-minded in order to expose the cruelty and waste of this structure and to render it ridiculous, irrelevant, obsolete, non-functional, and a thing of the past. Feminists problematise not only social, political, and economic institutions, but also the ethos, the expectations and the prescriptions, that are inextricably interwoven with these institutions in the daily life of individuals. As Michelene Wandor puts it, feminism addresses not only 'the social structures in which we live', but also 'people's total relationships to each other'.⁹ To my way of thinking - in which a feminist must be a woman - the term for a man supportive of feminist analysis and activism is 'pro-feminist'. Of course feminism is a 'broad church', in the sense that it encompasses disagreements and variations in emphasis, and the 'can a man be a feminist' question is one of those that is routinely contested. My view is widely held among radical and Lesbian feminists. It follows from the recognition that, by definition, and other things (like race and occupation) being equal or often not-so-equal, every man in a patriarchy is in the ruling class relative to every woman. A man has different choices to make about how to contribute to the end of patriarchal and other oppressions, and to me it makes sense to name his work or approach differently.

The strand of feminism with which I identify most closely is radical feminism. I have been influenced in this by the writings of Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin, the lyrics and music of Meg Christian and Alix Dobkin (all US Americans much taken up by British radical feminists), and the great wealth of UK grassroots consciousness raising, newsletters, conferences, and activist initiatives such as Women's Aid, Rape Crisis, Incest Survivors, Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), and the Glasgow Women's Support Project. British radical feminist writers of note include Sheila Jeffreys (now based in Australia), Celia Kitzinger, Jalna Hanmer, Jan MacLeod, Paula Jennings, and members of the *Trouble & Strife* magazine collective including Stevi Jackson and Liz Kelly. I was lucky to be in St. Andrews in the late 1970s when it was known as a centre of radical feminism - witness the *St. Andrews Lesbian Feminist Newsletter*; *Nessie: The Scottish Radical and Revolutionary Feminist Newsletter*, which emanated from St. Andrews; the 1976 National Women's Liberation Conference, held in St. Andrews; and contributions to the *Tayside* and *Edinburgh Women's Liberation Newsletters* and the UK publication W.I.R.E.S.¹⁰ An attempt to define radical feminism could fill

⁹M. Wandor, 'The Small Group', in *The Body Politic: Women's Liberation in Britain 1969 - 1972*, M. Wandor (Ed.), (London: stage 1, 1972), p 113.

¹⁰W.I.R.E.S. was the Women's Information, Referral and Enquiry Service, a newsletter of the UK Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

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another book, but I note here three features that are widely held to be included in a definition. The first is that radical feminists believe that the oppression of women by men is at the very root of socially constructed inequalities; this is in contrast to the emphasis put by socialist feminists on analyses of capital and labour. The second is that radical feminists are committed to the creation, maintenance, and celebration of 'women-only space' in order to learn from one another and be mutually enabling away from the pressures and distortions of mixed-sex power dynamics. The third is shown in this quotation from publicity for a conference in Massachusetts in January 1999:

If you know that men are waging a war against women; that rape, battering, incest, pornography and prostitution are some of the main instruments of male supremacy, you're a radical feminist.¹¹

Liberal, libertarian, and socialist feminists are among those who hold positions that are at variance with this radical feminist view. Also consistent with my radical feminism is my use of the terms 'women' and 'men', where some other feminists would prefer to say 'people' or 'human beings', for example. Even though I recognise that the woman/man dichotomy has serious limitations, I find that the gender-specific terms are often politically helpful.

In contemporary literature and theory, the concepts 'Black' and 'Lesbian' are employed in complex and multi-layered ways. I shall address some of these complexities in the course of this thesis. Meantime, I explain my use of the upper case in the following ways. In using the word 'Black' when discussing Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, I am using vocabulary that they themselves use (though not consistently with an upper case 'B'). They also call themselves 'African Americans', or 'of African descent', and I use these words as well. Following the practice of writers such as Mari Evans and Anita Cornwell, I choose to capitalise the word 'Black' used in this sense, in order to stress history and dignity.¹²

My use of the upper case for the word 'Lesbian' is also about history and dignity. The word originated in reference to Sappho of Lesbos, acclaimed poet of the sixth century BCE. Modern poets and scholars such as Judy Grahn use this (capitalised) form, pointing to a continuous cultural tradition across the millennia,

¹¹Advert for 'Radical-Feminist Lesbian Festival', in *off our backs*, xxix:1, January 1999, p 16.

¹²M. Evans, *Black Women Writers* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1984); A. Cornwell, *Black Lesbian in White America* (Tallahassee, Florida: Naiad, 1983).

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from Sappho to Audre Lorde and beyond.¹³ I am aware that some readers may find jarring my repeated use of the word 'Lesbian' in the chapter on Sarah Hoagland's work. I remember when I first heard Alix Dobkin's album 'Lavender Jane Loves Women' in 1976. She was saying 'Lesbian' repeatedly in almost every song, and how distracting and disturbing these lyrics seemed, even to me, a Lesbian out to myself and a few others for a whole year by then! Eventually, I came to understand that for Dobkin, as also for Hoagland, their normal context, community, and audience are Lesbians. This separatist focus is central to their work, which cannot be discussed without specific reference to it. If Hoagland's 'Lesbian Ethics' fires up your imagination, then perhaps the words used to speak of it - as well as the discomfort they cause (or not) - and the questions they raise may be part of what you find interesting.

Having expanded on some of my vocabulary and presuppositions, I return to my earlier statements that my search in this dissertation is for world views or life philosophies, and that I shall concentrate my efforts on the work of the three writers Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and Sarah Lucia Hoagland. I am looking for spiritual resources for myself as a post-christian. My intention is to appreciate, compare, and share a spirit of enquiry with these influential thinkers. None calls herself post-christian, but all have rejected the traditional Western religions of their youth. None is a theologian by profession, although all have some background in philosophy, and all refer to religion and spirituality in their writing. All have taught in colleges and universities, and written both academic and popular texts.¹⁴ I shall rely most heavily on their essays, journals, interviews, and theoretical work, and also have recourse to their fiction and poetry.

Each of the next three chapters draws together one writer's thoughts in the three categories which I have called 'self', 'ethics', and 'Goddess'. For the category of 'self', I have a cluster of questions. What does it mean to be a human being? What is to be said of 'human nature'? What are the dimensions of personhood? In what ways does the writer define, describe, and demarcate a person's individuality, uniqueness, and identity? How does one know one's self? Similarly, there are questions regarding 'ethics'. What are the routes to choosing right action? What does it mean to be a good person? How ought one to treat other people - and indeed

¹³J. Grahn, *The Highest Apple: Sappho and The Lesbian Poetic Tradition* (San Francisco: Spinsters, Ink, 1985).

¹⁴I realise that academic/popular is not always a clear-cut distinction, especially with feminist writing.

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anyone or anything animate or inanimate with which one may come into direct or indirect contact? By calling my third category 'Goddess', I intend to pitch my tent clearly away from the Christian patriarchal mainstream. It is here that I shall focus on the spiritual. Who or what is divine, or holy? What is to be said of a deity or deities? What of transcendence and immanence? What of religious cultural heritage? Spiritual experience? Ritual? A mythic dimension? Ultimate meaning, value, reality, truth, and good?

I shall begin with Alice Walker, Black author and activist, the most well-known of the three writers. She has said that she has long been preoccupied with spiritual matters, and that even at times when she wished to put them aside they always found ways to sneak up on her!¹⁵ This preoccupation has shown itself in an oeuvre infused with considerations of some of the range of questions that I have posed above. Because she directly addresses the issues of religion and spirituality in her work, and also considers 'human nature' and ethical topics, it is clear that her views on what I am calling self, ethics, and 'Goddess' have developed a consistency and depth. We shall see that she commends a 'paganism' that is both thoughtful and celebratory. For her, a deep acceptance of the self as a 'beloved expression of the Universe' leads to a will to express one's uniqueness as fully as possible, and to join with others who wish to 'enter into the Creation' through concerted activism. 'The Universe' and 'Creation' are two of the many holy names used by Walker when speaking of her pantheistic belief that 'God is everything that is, ever was or ever will be'.¹⁶ She eschews the concept of blame in favour of understanding and compassion, not expecting anyone to be 'perfect', and looking for creative responses to destructive actions.

Turning to Audre Lorde, a Black Lesbian, we shall see that, because she was first of all a poet, it is sometimes difficult to distill from her writing a blunt statement that I can call an answer to one of my theological questions. Nonetheless, her journals, speeches, essays, and the autobiographical prose that she termed 'biomythography' have been not just influential but inspirational for feminist theorists of the self, ethicists, and theologians alike. Without labelling herself 'pagan', she attunes herself to classical African spirituality through a kind of animism that says, with Alice Walker, that there is 'spirit' in us and all around us,

¹⁵See A. Walker, *The Color Purple* (10th Anniversary Edition), (London: The Women's Press, 1992), pp 1-2.

¹⁶A. Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (London: The Women's Press, 1997), p 3.

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whether in a bush, a river, or the moon. Lorde additionally calls on both 'Goddess' and a selection of traditional Yoruban deities, reclaimed by her for peoples of the African diaspora. She uses the term 'erotic' in a special way, to refer to our most complete experiences of love, which she says serve as 'the bridge' between 'the spiritual and the political'¹⁷ and can provide our measure or set of standards for a rich and full life. Another key term for her is 'difference', which refers first to the self's multiplicity and diversity, and once this begins to be understood, has its use in delineating creative space for communication (and activist coalition) between oneself and another. At the heart of her work is what I call an 'epistemology of the self', which is her description of a way of moving inward in order to grasp the knowledge of our deepest feelings and outward in expression of that knowledge.

Whereas Walker and Lorde celebrate and utilise aspects of their African heritage, Sarah Lucia Hoagland (not an African American) concentrates her work as an ethicist within a particularity that is Lesbian.¹⁸ It is Lesbians, she says, who create Lesbian meaning and who are shaping not only Lesbianism itself as an unfolding reality but also what she calls 'Lesbian Ethics'. Unlike Walker or Lorde, her sensibility is separatist, in that the sole concern of her 'Lesbian Ethics' is for Lesbian survival, flourishing, and community. Thus 'Lesbian Ethics' are values which are enacted among and of benefit to Lesbians. Hoagland recognises that many a Lesbian self is multiplicitous, which is to say that a Lesbian may also inhabit other 'worlds'¹⁹ to the survival of which she may wish to contribute (such as a Hispanic or a Jewish 'world'). This recognition, as well as her refusal to provide a rigid definition of 'Lesbian', gives what I think of as a softer rather than a harsh or uncompromising edge to her separatism. Hoagland discusses self and especially ethics in depth, but her comments regarding 'Goddess' are often merely parenthetical. She is less interested in the whole of what is, was, and shall be than in the kind of visionary work done by, for example, Mary Daly, María Lugones, and indeed Audre Lorde. In their writing they invent and imagine 'worlds', relationships, moments in which Lesbians embody and celebrate 'autokoenyony' (Hoagland's own word for 'one self among many'), integrity (wholeness), and agency. And equally importantly for those

¹⁷A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (The Crossing Press Feminist Series), (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984), p 56.

¹⁸See Hoagland's preface to her *Lesbian Ethics*, p xiii, for her own practice regarding upper and lower case letters.

¹⁹In the sense in which María Lugones uses the word 'world' in her well-known phrase, 'playful world travel'. See her 'Playfulness: World Travelling, and Loving Perception', in *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, Jeffner Allen (Ed.), (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

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of us seeking 'Goddess', Hoagland notes that Daly and Lorde reclaim and embellish stories and myths of communities of women called Amazons.

While Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland diverge significantly in their world views, they also hold much in common, as we shall see. As part of their feminist and womanist life philosophies, they counsel practices of self-understanding, self-direction, and self-actualization, as well as values associated with mutuality and community. They commend, too, a certain idealism or visionary approach, an enabling rather than a disabling or condemnatory ethos, and paths through the spiky thicket that is the theodicy question. These world views, practices, values, and recommendations constitute considerable resources for me as a post-christian feminist. We have here neither liturgy nor minister, but a spiritual sensibility grounded in creative possibility. While for some this may not prove to be enough - for example, I found that I was envious of my Jewish, Reformed Church, and Episcopalian sisters' recourse to prepared songs and prayers while mourning our mother's death - it is a great deal more than a hopeless bobbing in a sea without signposts.

Early in each of the next three chapters I shall make brief biographical remarks in order to set the writers in context. In the chapters on Alice Walker and Sarah Hoagland, I shall then explain their special concepts of 'pagan' (Walker), and of separatism, 'heterosexualism', and Lesbian (Hoagland). In the chapter on Audre Lorde I shall make initial comparisons with Walker. Then in all three chapters I shall continue with my descriptions of self, ethics, and 'Goddess' in the thought of each author. I shall present their ideas as clearly as I can, as I believe that they 'speak for themselves' very effectively, and so that readers can draw your own conclusions. Some of my own conclusions will be noted both at the end of these chapters and in the final chapter. Those readers who wish to preview my selection of helpful points from each author may wish to refer to the ends of the three central chapters before turning to the middles. As I have said, I am not suggesting that my own approach to or synthesis of this material ought to suit anyone other than myself. However, so many of my friends have said that spirituality is important in their lives that I do want to share what I have found in the work of these three thinkers. Each of them has been encouraging and useful to me in my post-christian spiritual journey.

Chapter 2

Alice Walker

Alice Walker has written novels, essays, short stories, poetry, and documentary. Her most well-known work is the novel *The Color Purple*, which was published in 1982, and made into a film by Steven Spielberg.¹ She is also recognised for popularising the neologism ‘womanist’ in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*.² Both the ‘womanist’ concept and the anti-patriarchal immanentist theology of *The Color Purple* are widely used by Christian feminists - and womanists.

However, Christian uses of Walker’s work are not our focus here. Rather, we shall see that Walker’s writings are a fruitful starting place for our search for resources and signposts for postchristians who wish to recognise and develop a spiritual dimension in their lives. Her contribution is in describing herself as ‘pagan’, and suggesting a ‘pagan’ theology with commensurate activities or practices. This chapter will start with a brief biography of Walker, followed by a substantial introduction to her ‘paganism’. Then the constitutive strands of self, ethics, and ‘Goddess’ will be discussed. Finally, I shall draw some conclusions regarding the usefulness of this material for me.

Walker was born in 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, USA, the beloved eighth and youngest child of a poor sharecropping family. At the age of 8 she was blinded in one eye due to a stray shot from her brother’s BB gun. Her family background was Southern Methodist; she rejected this religion when she was a young girl. She attended Spelman College in Georgia and Sarah Lawrence College in New York State, from which she obtained her B.A. As a college student, she took an active part in the Civil Rights Movement. During the summer before her final year, she worked in Ghana, and toured briefly in Europe.

In 1967, Walker married a white Jew from New York City and they went to live in Mississippi. There her husband practiced civil rights law and she pursued her

¹A. Walker, *The Color Purple* (London: The Women’s Press, 1983).

²A. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London: The Women’s Press, 1983).

writing and teaching in the Black community in adult education and literacy as well as continuing her work in Black voter registration. 'Miscegenation' only just having been removed from the statute book in Mississippi, she gave birth to their daughter. The couple were married for ten years, after which she lived for a time in New York City.

Walker has worked as an editor, and taught at Wellesley College and at Yale University, among other institutions. She is now based in California. She writes, tours, and is involved in activism around female genital mutilation, ecological issues, and the rights of indigenous peoples.

I turn now to a preliminary consideration of Walker's 'paganism'. By recounting two stories, one of Walker's rejection of Christianity in favour of 'Nature', and the other of her commitment to civil rights activism, I intend to evoke something of this 'paganism'. First, she describes a period of six years between the BB gun incident, which permanently blinded one of her eyes, and the removal of a scar from that blind eye. She writes that during this time of painful self-consciousness and hiding her face, she learned to 'see' things differently, to understand people differently, to listen and perceive in a different way. She became aware of her attention being drawn to the world outside the windows of her community's small church, rather than by the message from the pulpit. She felt wonder in the trees, the stones, the flowers, and the people around her. The religious condemnation of sinful humanity did not fit with her sense of loving and being loved, or with what seemed to be the essentially good-hearted struggles of the people she knew. The exclusion of women from addressing the congregation felt to her like an affront, when it was clear that women contributed at least as much as the men to the church. She rejected this Christian tradition, as she came to develop an increasing awareness of a spirituality centred in 'Nature' and 'the Universe' - two of her holy names, or ways that she speaks of 'Goddess'.³ When asked about her 'paganism' at a recent reading in Glasgow, Walker's initial reply was to tell of these early experiences of 'pagan' sensibility.⁴

³See especially, 'Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, pp 384-393; and, 'The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind (Off Your Land and Out of Your Lover's Arms): Clear Seeing Inherited Religion and Reclaiming the Pagan Self', in A. Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (London: The Women's Press, 1997), pp 3-26.

⁴A. Walker, 'An Evening with Alice Walker' (The Women's Press Twentieth Anniversary Tour: Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, 30 April 1998).

Second, it is when Walker writes of her embracing of the Civil Rights Movement that she uses the language of a conversion experience. She first saw images of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on a television set purchased by her mother with savings from her (mother's) work as a maid. King was shown in a newsclip being rather unceremoniously shoved into a police van on arrest. Something about this situation, and King's committed and calm demeanour, caused her 'soul [to be] stirred'.⁵ Walker saw her own possibilities as a human being in a new way. She writes:

Because of the Movement, because of an awakened faith in the newness and imagination of the human spirit, because of 'black and white together' ... because of the beatings, the arrests, the hell of battle ..., I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to be myself, to be something more than a shadow or a number, than I had ever done before in my life. Before, there had seemed to be no real reason for struggling beyond the effort for daily bread. Now there was a chance at that other that Jesus meant when He said we could not live by bread alone.

I have fought and kicked and fasted and prayed and cursed and cried myself to the point of existing. It has been like being born again, literally. Just 'knowing' has meant everything to me. [1967]⁶

Inspired by King, a Baptist minister, and by a historical moment, she participated in the great marches, voter registration, and adult community education. Although steeped in the biblical traditions of the Black Church, she was not 'stirred' to return to Christianity, but to become herself - her 'pagan' self.

We can see that key themes are emerging from these two stories of changing awareness. Walker's spirituality is about perceptivity, 'Nature', wonder, and love. It is about equality, dignity, survival, and fullness of life. The comment may be made, however, that much of this is often said of Christianity. So we shall need to be more specific about this 'paganism'.

Walker explains that the term 'pagan' means 'of the land, country dweller, peasant' and someone 'whose primary spiritual relationship is with Nature and the Earth'.⁷ She says that pagans 'were all there are and were before colonizing and

⁵Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p 124.

⁶Ibid., p 125.

⁷Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 17.

Christianity and the sort of religious brainwashing that has happened over centuries'.⁸ She names as pagan her own ancestral traditions of Africa, Native America, and Old Europe, as well as other cultures.⁹ She says that 'paganism is where all of the people of the earth meet, where we live on the earth with wonder'.¹⁰ Referring to Carl Jung, she suggests that such pagan spirituality goes back two million years, and is present in and for everyone, including, for example, those Christians who retain a spiritual connection with nature.¹¹ We could reasonably call this a form of natural theology, that is, a learning about the sacred from creation.

I noted on the previous page that Walker uses 'Nature' and 'the Universe' as ways to speak of 'Goddess'. Another of the many holy names used by her is 'All Creation'. As we shall see, this has important ethical ramifications. I mention it here because it points towards her pagan sense of kinship with 'the Earth' and all life forms. She writes of the Native American concept that 'everything is a human being'. Native Americans refer to everything from the sky to a snake to a tobacco plant in parental, sibling, or other 'family' terms. By this is meant, she notes, that 'all of creation is of one substance'.¹² All of the elements and constituents are interrelated, and in constant mutual exchange. The whole is utterly inclusive. Each moment and each manifestation of life is completely unique, and equally a part of 'All Creation', or 'All That Is'.

We may find it useful to think of this approach as in some ways animistic. Walker might be said to be an animist both in the sense of thinking that there is a spiritual force animating the universe, and also in the sense that she believes that everything in nature is possessed of (a) spirit. Indeed, she recounts conversations with such spirits, mainly those of trees, as it is with trees that she feels a special affinity. A belief in the existence of nature spirits, and the experience of shamanic communication with a spirit world, are associated with the religions of traditional Africa as well as Native America. Walker is comfortable appropriating these into her distinctive paganism.

⁸A. Walker, *My Life as Myself: An Intimate Conversation* [Audio Cassette], (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True, 1995).

⁹Ibid.; and Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*.

¹⁰Walker, 'An Evening with Alice Walker'.

¹¹Ibid.; and Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*.

¹²A. Walker, *Living By The Word: Selected Writings 1973 - 1987* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p 187.

Walker's belief in spirits extends also to ancestral and guardian spirits. Again, in this, she is very much in tune with African, Native American, and other indigenous traditions, in which 'a fourth dimension of invisible ancestors' is a source of shamanistic power.¹³ She says that certain of these spirits encourage her, uplift her, and speak plainly to her when this is needed. In addition, she has described herself as 'author and medium', who brings forth by means of her novels characters who have their own spirit lives separate from her.¹⁴ She does retain some measure of scepticism about the 'reality' of the spirits, in that she entertains the possibility that out of our own creative spirits, out of the creativity and the needs of our own souls, we create the spirits who communicate with us. Whether or not this is true, she maintains, we have real experience of them: they are part of what we know.¹⁵

In his summary of what he calls 'classical African religions' Ninian Smart describes such a reliance on religious experience.¹⁶ Shamanistic belief and practice are informed by not just an awareness of natural phenomena, but also attention to the power of dreams, and instances of altered consciousness, illness, and healing. He maintains that the spirits and 'the deities of Africa are [understood to be] really present in society and are commonly *experienced*'. He continues: 'They are not theoretical entities but living presences, as also are the ancestors. The mountains and rivers and prairies and jungles are laced with presences.'¹⁷ This aspect of African cosmology suffuses Walker's thought and work, as it does the writing of other eminent Afro-Americans such as Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison.¹⁸

It is important to note, however, that Walker makes a clear distinction between spirits and deities or gods. For the idea of 'gods', she has a greater scepticism. She asserts:

¹³J. Hopkins, 'Radical Passion: A Feminist Liberation Theology', in D. Hampson (Ed.), *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1996), p 78.

¹⁴Walker, *The Color Purple*, p 245.

¹⁵Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

¹⁶N. Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p 303.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸See for example, Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (London:Virago Press, 1987), first published by J.B. Lippincott Company, 1934; Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 1997), first published in the UK: London: Chatto & Windus, 1987.

We create our gods out of our own spirits. We obviously need this huger figure, a big lap to put our heads in - the lap of the Buddha. So creativity being what it is in the soul, in the spirit, this is what we get: the biggest guardian spirit of all, God.¹⁹

A deity or deities are products of the human imagination, answering the need for comfort, for peace, for unconditional love. We shall see that Walker's pagan theology is much less anthropomorphic and more diffuse than any fixed notion of deity such as, for example, the Christian trinity. She does believe, however, that human beings both need and deserve love, and that the *best* god for any people to imagine and embrace is 'a God that made them, and likes them'.²⁰ She states that this 'is why Nature, Mother Earth, is such a good choice. Never will Mother Earth find anything wrong with your natural way. She made it ... Everyone deserves a God who adores our freedom: Nature would never advise us to do anything but be ourselves.'²¹ For her, there is mutual worship and adoration between 'Nature' and humans - to the extent that people are willing or able to take their part in the mutuality.²²

The idea that 'Nature' upholds us in our efforts to 'be ourselves' is a further key to Walker's pagan thought. For her, a human being is 'an Earthling growing naturally out of the Universe'.²³ 'Nature' supports us toward being most truly ourselves, as the sunflower and the horse are supported in being most truly themselves. Each is a beloved and unique expression of 'the Universe' and of life that is ongoing. Each is unique but neither separate nor separable from 'All That Is'. One learns of 'the Universe' through giving attention to and accepting oneself and one's surroundings. 'Not only are we the world,' Walker writes, 'we are the universe, the cosmos. Therefore we have only to truly *listen* to hear ourselves speak.'²⁴ She confirms that she agrees with the pagan theology of Shug Avery, a character in three of her novels.²⁵ Shug says: 'God is inside you and inside

¹⁹Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

²⁰Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 26.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p 4.

²⁴A. Walker, *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult* (New York: Scribner, 1996), p 148.

²⁵Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, pp 3-4. The 3 novels are *The Color Purple*; *The Temple of My Familiar* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (London: Vintage, 1993).

everybody else. You come into the world with God.'²⁶ And Shug adds: 'I believe God is everything that is or ever was or ever will be.'²⁷ It is not surprising that Walker's thought has been called pantheistic, and pansophistic.²⁸ We shall give these descriptions further consideration when we discuss her theology *per se*.

The final component of Walker's paganism to highlight at this stage is one that sets it apart from not only Christian tradition but also other paganisms. Her emphasis is on fulfilment, rather than on sacrifice. Along with many feminists, she rejects especially the economy of *self-sacrifice*. In her novel *Meridian*, the eponymous central character, a civil rights worker, becomes preoccupied with the thought that, 'the only new thing now would be the refusal of Christ to accept crucifixion'.²⁹ Saints, *Meridian* is given to think, should make the contribution that they can, and then retire to the country before their own life is destroyed.³⁰ This insight is far removed from pagan, and indeed non-pagan, religious practices ranging from self-flagellation and harsh asceticism to martyrdom undertaken because a deity is believed to enjoy or expect it. She commends, instead, a process that she calls 'decolonizing the spirit'. This 'decolonizing' brings an experience of fulfilment, of blossoming. Of it, she writes:

One begins to see the world from one's own point of view; to interact with it out of one's own conscience and heart. One's own 'pagan' Earth spirit. We begin to flow, again, with and into the Universe. And out of this flowing comes the natural activism of wanting to survive, to be happy, to enjoy one another and Life, and to laugh.³¹

It is not that people need not make any kind of effort, but that survival and joy are to provide the motivation, never suffering or sacrifice for its own sake. Walker has no wish to perpetuate any conceptualization of a dominant and punitive god lording it over a submissive and unworthy creature. Hers is a paganism in which the unique

²⁶Walker, *The Color Purple*, p 166.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p 167.

²⁸S. L. Hankinson, 'From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*,' in *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 38:3, (1997), pp 320-328.; and R. P. Byrd, 'Spirituality in the Novels of Alice Walker: Models, Healing, and Transformation, or When the Spirit Moves So Do We' in J. M. Braxton and A. N. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

²⁹A. Walker, *Meridian* (London: The Women's Press, 1982), p 150.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p 151.

³¹Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 26.

'natural self' is believed to be good. 'To be more of that self', she says, 'is the truest form of gratitude for being, and also of worship of what is here, of the planet and the Universe'.³²

We can now summarise our introduction to Walker's paganism. It is a nature-based spirituality, deemed to be expressive of human life on this planet. It recognises the interrelatedness not just among humans and with the earth, but also of all life forms, 'All Creation'. It encompasses a belief in ancestral, guardian, and nature spirits, due to the vivid experience of communicating with them. Because deities seem so obviously to be projections in answer to human needs, they are understood to come from the human imagination. If, then, there is to be worship of a god, Walker, as a pagan, chooses 'the Universe', or 'Mother Earth'. Every person, each equally an 'Earthling', is here to blossom as a unique moment in 'All That Is', in the 'Great Mystery', in that which is called 'God'.

We turn now to a more detailed discussion of Walker's contributions in the areas which I have called self, ethics, and 'Goddess'. Turning first to the self, we have seen that she speaks in terms of a self that is 'unique' and 'natural'. She notes that it is rare for people to have an 'instant grasp of who they are and what they are'.³³ We are, she says, speaking of a long and fluid process of 'becoming'. 'An internal flowering that has its expression externally' may happen so subtly that 'you never quite see it but it's still happening'. People learn and grow and are transformed. While there may be a sense that this process is one of uncovering, discovering, or recovering some fixed identity, it is also clear that it is a singular and unrepeatably process of creation and development. Because each self is unique, each has the opportunity to find ways to be more fully that very individual. If we begin by nurturing a deep self-acceptance, we can make increasingly informed choices about the directions of our own growth. While herself taking on some labels - such as 'pagan' and 'bisexual' - as accurate and politically useful, Walker stresses that she does not see herself as any sort of final product, but as someone changing all the time. The paradox of continual change, yet 'being able to be yourself through all your changes', is simply held to be part of human experience, indeed to be something in which we can delight.

³²Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

³³Ibid. Ref. for this paragraph.

Walker goes further than to say that we are all unique selves. She maintains that we are beloved expressions of a 'Universe' which is good. We are all born good, 'as innocent as trees'.³⁴ 'Nature', she says, 'support[s] this goodness'.³⁵ The deep self-acceptance that she counsels is the realization that we are each 'a fine expression for this moment'.³⁶ Goodness is not, however, perfection. She does not think that anyone is, or can be, perfect. But we can grow and develop through being aware of our own 'faults', struggling against them, and persevering in our lives.³⁷ It is unclear whether our 'faults' are innate, or the results of circumstances. But Walker does make clear that 'we're "educated" away from ourselves'.³⁸ Our parents and our cultures indoctrinate us, burden us with misinformation, and enforce certain areas of ignorance. She believes, for example, that her Christian inheritance taught her, a Black woman, via the Bible stories of Eve and Ham, that women are the cause of the world's ills, and that 'God' dictated the hardships of Black peoples, including the institution of slavery. Other 'education' to which she objects are the ideas that babies are born in sin rather than in innocence, that people need dogmatic training to understand how to be themselves and to relate to 'the Universe', and that any one way will serve all people. She commends, on both personal and social levels, the eradication of such 'education', in order that the good and natural self/selves may emerge.

When speaking of the self, Walker sometimes uses terms that indicate a sympathy with the concept of reincarnation. One such instance occurs when, in an interview,³⁹ she cites the character Lissie, from her novel *The Temple of My Familiar*, as an important 'archetypal' figure for her. Lissie is 'someone who has had many lifetimes as both male and female', and even perhaps going back to a proto-humanity with whom apes were 'cousins' sharing the same forest homes and foods. She states her belief that people, after death, 'don't go anywhere'. 'I think', she adds, '[that] we are really on this earth and we're here for the duration'. Similarly, when she describes her increasing immersion in her paganism, she says that she has 'reconnected to [her] ancient self', and that she 'claims the self of 50,000 years ago, [and] feels happy with who [she] was'. It is not clear that a discrete self or

³⁴Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 19.

³⁵Walker, *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult*, p 167.

³⁶Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

³⁷Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p xxiii.

³⁸Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

³⁹Ibid. for this paragraph. See also 'Looking for Jung: Writing *Possessing the Secret of Joy*', in Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, pp 118-121.

soul is being referred to here. There is, however, a strong sense that we humans are encompassed by and not separable from 'All That Is', that what I may call our 'body-spirits' are in continuity with 'All Creation'. She puts it this way: 'Everything is all you, and, in a way, before it's all over, we will be everybody here and everything here.' This area of her thought seems to owe to Carl Jung, whose work she admires, and to scientific concepts of continual exchange of energy/matter, as much as it does to Eastern religious concepts such as karma.

We have now brought into our picture some aspects of Walker's thought on the self. She believes that everyone has a natural self which is both unique and good. However, for many people, she says, 'by the time [they] reach adulthood, they don't know who their true self is any more because it's already been talked out of them'.⁴⁰ This 'true self', which she also calls the 'earth self', can not only be recovered but also come to flourish. While the self is always changing, it remains a unique 'expression of the Universe'. As such, it has the knowledge or the potential of the knowledge or access to the knowledge of how to become more truly itself. This is the same for all people in all times and all places. We begin to see how Walker comes to terms with the human experience of being both fixed and flowing ('being yourself through all your changes'), and also with the conundrum of being an individual while indistinguishable from the totality (both 'unique' and 'Everything').

We turn then, secondly, to ethics. Her ethical position is one in which the apparent contradictions of acceptance and activism are not just held in tension, but seen as part of the same project. Self acceptance is the starting point. Then comes acceptance of everyone and everything else. These provide the fertile ground from which grows action for social change. Let us unfold the logic of this position.

As we have already noted, for Walker, 'the Universe' is good. 'Earth', 'Nature', the totality is good. Each person, through their attentiveness to the world around them, and indeed to the world inside them, can know of the goodness, Goddess, God. Details of 'what we're here for' can be discovered by listening to that 'inner voice'. It tells each of us how to be more fully our natural self, expression of 'the Universe', of the good. The practice of listening that she recommends is silence, or meditation. She herself has used Transcendental Meditation (TM) since the

⁴⁰Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

1970s. TM involves a quieting of the thoughts and an emptying of the mind. She describes a feeling of returning to 'a place where I lived as a child, in my spirit, in a very open, spacious, loving place, where I felt totally at peace and in myself'.⁴¹ This is both a 'centering' of the self, and a 'disappearance from the self', which is about 'not needing to be the center, so that you can just be quiet and let what is, be'.⁴²

More recently, Walker has also used a Buddhist form of meditation called metta meditation. She learned of metta, which means 'lovingkindness', from the work of Sharon Salzberg, a US American teacher of Buddhism. Walker was so impressed with Salzberg's *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* that her endorsement appears on some editions of the book, saying that it is 'a gift of peace to the world'.⁴³ The programme involves directing thoughts or feelings of lovingkindness toward oneself, toward friends, toward neutral people or acquaintances, and toward enemies, finally including 'all beings' or all of life. The practice comprises a relaxation of the mind and body, and a repetition of phrases, which are like prayers or blessings, formulated around wishes of safety, peacefulness, healing, and well-being.⁴⁴ This pattern, of beginning with the self, with an acceptance of and a love for the self, is exactly what Walker advocates. She has said: 'What people have to realise is that they're really just fine the way they are.'⁴⁵ And again: 'If we can really understand how precious we are, and how much we deserve our own love, we will make major changes in the world.'⁴⁶

Walker sees the 'major changes' as being fuelled in two ways. The first is straightforwardly consistent with self-acceptance and self-love. We will change the things that we ourselves need to be different in order to promote our own flourishing. The more clearly we perceive ourselves, both actual and potential, the more clearly we perceive what is needed for us to grow. The more fierce our self-love, the stronger our activism.

⁴¹'A Wind Through the Heart: A Conversation with Alice Walker and Sharon Salzberg on Loving Kindness in a Painful World' (5 March 1997), *Shambhala Sun Magazine*, Archives on line at <http://www.shambhalasun.com/alice.html> on 5 June 1997.

⁴²Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

⁴³S. Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp 30-31.

⁴⁵Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

⁴⁶Walker, 'An Evening with Alice Walker'.

Secondly, however, this is not merely a noble exercise in self-love. The 'major changes' are fuelled by something even bigger than that. As metta practice widens to include all of life, so an understanding of the self as a 'beloved expression of the Universe', or as Walker occasionally says, a 'child of God', leads to a wider consciousness of 'all beings' as equally acceptable, precious and beloved. To this way of thinking, everything is beautiful, in its own way. Every manifestation of 'Nature' is equally deserving of the opportunity to blossom and live out its unique individuality. When we see this, and when we see 'All That Is' as an integral whole from which we are not separable, we are moved to 'make major changes in the world' so as to remove the obstacles put in the way of such blossoming and life.

Thus, along with many environmentally aware thinkers, Walker believes that if people come to a right understanding of who they most truly are as human creatures, an ecological ethic, mindful of fellow creatures and the very earth, will ensue.⁴⁷ She goes further in believing that the resulting ethic will be not only ecological but also anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-imperialist. She does not offer any kind of formula or set of priorities or rules to follow, but suggests an *approach*. She illustrates it with stories of instances in which the choices made in weighing up the various claims of 'equals' (i.e. herself and a snake or a cat) have been more or less successful. The approach is thoughtful, inclusive, and committed to 'harmlessness'.

'Harmlessness' is a term used by Walker in a way informed by her studies of Buddhism. She describes it as a 'lack of interest in maiming, starving, killing, conquering, or otherwise inflicting humiliation and suffering on anyone or anything'.⁴⁸ Those practicing 'conscious harmlessness' have instead 'the desire to cherish and to make whole'.⁴⁹ Along with this is an additional 'lack of interest' in apportioning blame or exercising punishment. The recommended course is to understand as much as possible about a regrettable or hurtful situation, and to make a *creative* response.

⁴⁷J. Deckers, 'A Proposal for a Weak Anthropocentric Ecological Ethic: A Challenge to the Christian Churches' (Theology Research Seminar, University of St. Andrews., 17 November 1997).

⁴⁸Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 40.

⁴⁹Ibid., p 41.

Are Walker's ethics, then, verging on the simplistic, sweet, and naive? Is the advice to let harmlessness be your approach entirely satisfactory when it seems that 'equals' have competing claims? Furthermore, if 'All That Is' is understood to be good, and each expression of 'It' is wholly acceptable, is there a compelling reason for anyone to strive for anything different? How can one account for evil? How can evil be diminished without punishment or the concept of blame? We shall address each of these questions in turn.

One illustration of the problem of competing claims between equals is a story that Walker tells of herself and a garden snake.⁵⁰ She discovered the small snake living in a plot of land on which she wanted to grow a garden. On two occasions, she directed the snake away from the area of her plantings, but on finding the snake again a third time, she called in a neighbour to help. The neighbour misunderstood the situation - thinking Walker was terrified - and immediately killed the snake. Walker regretted this act of violence in her new garden, feeling that the killing could not be a good way to begin the project. Furthermore, the action was quite fruitless as other snakes continued to frequent the plot, and deer ate her entire crop of tomatoes. She also learned that such snakes are not only harmless to people but also helpful to gardeners because they eat mice that would eat the plants. So she could have done something different, most logically learned more about the area and its animal inhabitants and left the snake in its home while investing in fencing that would deter the deer. Through this example, Walker does not offer us any prescription or set of rules. She encourages open-mindedness and a spirit of enquiry, rather than an easy formula. The more information one gathers, the more compassion one will feel for everyone involved in a situation, and the less one will wish for more harm or retribution. The deeper one's understanding, the more likely that one will find a way to be creative in one's response.

Further, the terms of this question about competing claims are not consonant with Walker's position. She holds that 'Nature', of which humanity is a part, is not fundamentally about competition, and especially not about mutual aggression. She is in agreement with many feminists who reject such a view of human relatedness. We are not here to fight our corner and win, but to survive and take delight together. Even a snake in the grass could be a friend. She writes: 'I believe people exist to be

⁵⁰Walker, *Living By The Word*, pp 142-3.

enjoyed', to 'enjoy one another and Life'.⁵¹ She states that peaceful coexistence is both imaginable and not without precedent. Thus she declares: 'Evidence shows that for thousands of years before male domination of Earth, women headed vibrant cultures that traded, reasoned, and celebrated with each other without the need to erect forts or walls.'⁵² Many scholars are coming to concur with a version of this once highly controversial assertion. For example, Rita Gross, teacher of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Wisconsin, while very cautious about possible religious ramifications of what she calls the 'prepatriarchal hypothesis', makes a similar point. Gross writes:

The archeological evidence supports the likelihood of relative peace and egalitarianism and argues against large-scale warfare and significant hierarchy in early foraging and horticultural societies [such as Neolithic Europe]. It also supports the view that women had relatively higher status in these societies than in later patriarchal societies.⁵³

For Walker, this information strengthens the argument that people, animals, and the natural world are not essentially antagonists, but sharers in the delight of 'the Universe'. The challenge is to discover ways of maximising this love and acting harmlessly, when the routes are not obvious.

We turn now to our questions about the problem of evil. We have asked, How can one account for evil? and, How can evil be diminished without punishment or the concept of blame? Walker faces squarely many terrible realities. She does not shy away from writing about incest, rape, battery, or murder; cultural imperialism, slavery, lynchings, or genocide; deforestation, pollution, or genetically engineered vegetables; poverty, disease, or starvation; facial scarring of children or female genital mutilation. She believes that the context of all of this is complex - and that there are ways to diminish evil and promote the good.

Walker recognises that evil is generated when people are damaged by starvation of love's resources, never learning to care for themselves or for others. She characterises Brownfield Copeland, who appears in her first novel, *The Third*

⁵¹Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, pp xx, 27.

⁵²Ibid., p 40.

⁵³R. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p 161.

Life of Grange Copeland, as someone without understanding or imagination.⁵⁴ The poverty, pain, and loneliness of his childhood are depicted in a way that can only encourage the reader to feel compassion for him in his stunted development from innocent infancy. She paints very bleak pictures of Brownfield's suffering from malnourishment, and the distress and misery that follow. However, she creates a contrast between Brownfield and his father, Grange, who does find just enough of love's resources to turn around his own life and to open up some options for his granddaughter. Grange undergoes a certain measure of transformation.

Walker also believes that injustice - for instance, the acts and structures of racism, sexism, and prejudice against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals - results from ignorance, misunderstanding, habituation, lies, and indoctrination. These are things that are handed down through the generations, and often are enforced by people claiming authority. The proponents of Biblical religions have been serious offenders, perpetuating misinformation and hatred, teaching and glorifying hierarchy, domination, and the nobility of suffering. The biblical god, she says, is 'too cruel, too violent, too willing to destroy whole villages'.⁵⁵ Speaking of the conquering and conversion of pagan cultures, she suggests that, 'perhaps the god that they were forced to believe in was not the one for them'. And she adds, 'so they have no way to love themselves'.⁵⁶ When one loves oneself, believing in the beauty and love of 'All That Is', one does not settle for such injustice.

As well as deprivation and indoctrination, human limitations are behind evil-doing. Walker says: 'I also think that people are mean often out of ill health and out of feeling bad. There is a certain amount of despair and weariness that turns into criticism of others and hatred of joy.'⁵⁷ People are sometimes drained of creative energy which is not replenished. The result can be bitterness and destruction. We note again here the importance in Walker's thought of withdrawal from struggle and refusal of any demand for self-sacrifice. She admonishes us to take time for silence and self-nourishment.

Walker recognises that the human condition of finitude, of not having all the information about the contexts or the consequences of our actions, means that we

⁵⁴A. Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (London: The Women's Press, 1985).

⁵⁵Walker, 'An Evening with Alice Walker'.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

make mistakes; that even our best intentions sometimes lead to unpredictable and/or undesirable outcomes. Greediness and lashing out against others can be spawned by panic or fear, themselves born from limited knowledge and from unclear perception of circumstances and of the goodness of 'the Universe'. Walker's myth of the origins of race-hatred, and of human-against-human and human-against-animal violence illustrates this well. This story is told by the character Lissie in *The Temple of My Familiar*.⁵⁸ In it, an albino African child, in a long-ago time when humans lived at peace with the other animals, lived happily and was accepted by his people, until he saw his own reflection. He reacted with terror and violence, turning against his Black partner and his animal friends.

Evil can result, then, from people having been damaged, from ignorance or indoctrination, from human limitations and exhaustion, from the condition of finitude and its associated mistakes. Given this view, how does Walker think that people can heal and grow, avoid evil-doing, and behave in ways that are ethically sound? Her belief in the possibility of transformation is primary and long-held. This optimism came to her at least partly via Bible stories of transformed lives. She has said: 'I grew up - until I refused to go - in the Methodist church, which taught me that Paul will sometimes change on the way to Damascus, and that Moses - that beloved old man - went through so many changes he made God mad. I believe in change: change personal, and change in society.'⁵⁹ In all of her novels, central characters change and grow, not only because a story is being told, but also because Walker is offering to her readers a compassionate and encouraging vision of the possibility of transformation. One example is Grange Copeland. Another is Arthur, the abusive husband of Celie - the central character in *The Color Purple* - who changes enough to be acceptable and accepted as a member of Celie's chosen extended family.

How does such transformation come about? This question returns us to the theme of the practice of silence. In silence, the inner voice can be heard. One can gain in awareness of one's unique self and 'the Cosmos'. One can grow in self-love and love of all of 'Life', also sometimes named by Walker, 'That Which Is Beyond Understanding But Not Beyond Loving'.⁶⁰ This can feed a process of change, of choosing to be *more* of the beloved self.

⁵⁸Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, pp 392-400.

⁵⁹Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p 252.

⁶⁰A. Walker, *The Color Purple* (10th Anniversary Edition) (London: The Women's Press, 1992), p 2.

Similarly, the question of transformation leads us back to Walker's commendation of open-mindedness and information gathering. This approach applies to every kind of situation, whether one hopes for self-transformation or wishes to comprehend the actions of another. Compassion can be developed for people despite their shortcomings, 'faults', and hurtful behaviour. The more we increase our 'clear seeing' in this way, the less we will be compelled to apportion blame or to wish to mete out punishment. Blame and punishment do not hold a place in Walker's thought. Moral blame, it seems, will always be too simplistic, and punishment does not significantly change situations, but escalates the problems that have caused them.

Walker recognises that a deepening of understanding may not always be sufficient grounds for moving on from a very hurtful experience. She says that in these extreme cases, forgiveness may be the better option. 'Forgiveness', she says, 'has a great deal of sadness attached', but sometimes 'there's no [other] way you can make things better'.⁶¹ It is a way of releasing both yourself and the one (or ones) that has hurt you. The past is allowed to recede into the past. Meditation, such as metta, can help a person to find the strength to forgive.

Most of the time, however, with deeper understanding, a person will be able to imagine a creative response to harm. Walker maintains that the best response to evil is always a creative one. She says: 'Creativity - for me, that is where the power is, that is where the healing is. To make something that is beautiful ... or ... useful and not destructive: that is the healing power of the artist.'⁶² One can make a story or a quilt, or make friends, or join together to make a political movement and social change.⁶³ As characters in her novels grow, whether to leave behind despair as Celie does or to turn away from evil-doing as Albert does, they become more creative in their lives: Celie designs clothing, Albert begins to sew, Lissie and Hal paint, Arveyda, already a musician, bakes bread, Fanny becomes a massage therapist, Carlotta a percussionist, Shug, already a singer, establishes a church. When discussing what is needed to end the practice of female genital mutilation, Walker writes that the creative response she favours is to nurture an ethos of harmlessness and to promote the development of 'understanding, patience, and commitment' among like-minded women and men, who will take joint action to create social

⁶¹Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

⁶²'A Wind Through the Heart', *Shambhala Sun Magazine*.

⁶³Ibid.

change.⁶⁴ As forgiveness offers a release in some circumstances, so too can understanding become a way of fighting back and of short-circuiting a cycle of bad feeling and harmful action, especially when the understanding is turned into imaginative acts of creation and healing.⁶⁵ This form of retaliation - understanding and a creative response - is nothing less than a way of being in tune with and participating in 'All Creation'. 'Human compassion is equal to human cruelty and it is up to each of us to tip the balance.'⁶⁶ After all, people are born good, 'as innocent as trees'.⁶⁷ This is her belief.

We turn now to another question that we asked of Walker's ethics: If 'All That Is' is understood to be good, and each expression of 'It' is wholly acceptable, is there a compelling reason for anyone to strive for anything different? The reply consists in three points: evil does exist, 'Life' is ongoing, and we can 'enter into the Creation'.⁶⁸

Firstly, evil does exist. People make mistakes, and act thoughtlessly; people panic and lash out; people behave in the most grotesque manner and cause terrible harm. Evil, Walker says, makes her feel deep disappointment, and disillusionment, and despair.⁶⁹ She has learned, however, 'the futility of expecting anyone, including oneself, to be perfect'. She writes: 'It is the awareness of having faults, and the knowledge that this links us to everyone on earth, that opens us to courage and compassion.'⁷⁰ Even in spite of 'so much bad history, so much fear' and suffering, we can move towards a 'healthier tomorrow' by seeing ourselves - 'everyone on earth' - clearly 'in our shame and our joy'.⁷¹ Accepting that evil exists leads to activity, not passivity.

Secondly, then, what we may call the *underlying reality* - of humans and of 'Everything' - is good. This is something that we can learn through listening to that of 'All That Is' that speaks in our own inner voice or silence. We can learn also from honest recognition of and compassion towards human limitations and human wrong-doing. The honesty and compassion are to be applied both to the self and to

⁶⁴Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, pp 40-1.

⁶⁵Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

⁶⁶Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p 270.

⁶⁷Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 19.

⁶⁸Walker, *The Color Purple* (1983), p 170.

⁶⁹Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p xxiii.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., p 166.

others. The knowledge that 'Life' is ongoing is something in which we can rest, not punishing ourselves or others for any lack of perfection. We learn to act out of love, not fear, not duty, as 'Life is Life' and will continue to be. Walker offers this vignette:

When I tackle something like female genital mutilation, I give to the extent that I can, and then I sit back and I eat tomatoes. And I enjoy them, and I look out at the landscape and I love it, and I walk and I go swimming and I love being alive, and I enjoy my life. And then when I get my strength back, I go out again.⁷²

She says that, when it comes to social change, 'starting is better than not starting'.⁷³ Her heart is light, she says, because she is taking a step toward change. There is a process going on - 'Life' - and we make a contribution. Nothing is concluded yet; there is nothing that has been made final.

Thirdly, Walker suggests that we can 'enter into the Creation'. This is a phrase used by Celie in *The Color Purple* at the point when she turns away from her years of experiencing numbness and nothingness, and toward self-respect.⁷⁴ Through the stirrings of self-love and the nurturance of a loving community, Celie is being transformed. Where there are obstacles to the flowering of the natural self, we can find joy through taking steps to remove them. Or, as Walker puts it at the end of her 1997 novel, 'RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY!'⁷⁵ A destructive response diminishes us and detracts from 'the Divine'. In contrast, by finding a creative response, we are acting in a way that is in tune with 'All Creation'.

Has Walker offered us enough, then, for us not to deem her ethics naive? Is it sufficient that we may come to know that the message is in and all around us that 'Life' is good, that it is ongoing, that our intention is to do our part in the slow creation of a world in which atrocities are unthinkable and peace, understanding, and harmlessness replace ignorance and fear? Is her clearseeing and optimism an answer for East Timor, the rainforest slashed and burned, the drug and gun culture of urban U.S. America, or Northern Ireland? I cannot stop myself from wishing for a more robust ethics, for something quicker and sharper than this assurance of underlying and overarching love and this faith in personal and social change. However, I

⁷²'A Wind Through the Heart', *Shambhala Sun Magazine*.

⁷³Walker, 'An Evening with Alice Walker'.

⁷⁴Walker, *The Color Purple* (1983), p 170.

⁷⁵Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p 264.

suggest that Walker's approach is no more naive than the assertion that the meek shall inherit the earth or than passivism in any tradition. And she and others like her are getting results. There is, for example, a global movement against female genital mutilation (f.g.m.) instead of the silence and whispers that stunned Walker when she first visited Africa as a student. For more than two decades she gathered information and contemplated what she might be able to do about f.g.m. When she took action, it included the writing of her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and collaborating with British-based film-maker Pratibha Parmar in making the documentary *Warrior Marks*, both of which focus on the practice of f.g.m. and its consequences. Even after talking with women in Africa who performed mutilation, which she clearly names as evil, she has been able to say: 'I have learned nothing about human beings that has stopped my loving them.'⁷⁶ And again: 'It is the act of genital mutilation we wish to get rid of, not the people who do it, all of whom need our understanding and our love.'⁷⁷ Such compassionate love and active harmlessness have undeniable strength and momentum. One may hope that there are increasing numbers of people who believe this - or who choose this path in preference to despair. Whether 'Nature' and human society give us more Nelson Mandelas or more Oklahoma City bombers remains to be seen. Walker, naive though she may seem, asks us to lend our weight toward a critical mass of less ignorance, fear, and distorted life and more loved and loving humanity.

We now turn to Walker's theology, and her consideration of 'Goddess'. We shall trace something of the development of her thought from the early 1970s, then focus on her use of holy names, and on her pantheism, her pansophism, and her 'non-exclusive' approach to religious matters.

Walker has developed her pagan position from one that seemed quite gaunt and edgy - if I may characterise a theological position in such a way - to one that is expansive, compassionate, inclusive, and more optimistic. In an early interview (1973), reprinted in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, she set out certain tensions in her thought.

Although I am constantly involved, internally, with religious questions - and I seem to have spent all of my life rebelling against the church

⁷⁶Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 144.

⁷⁷Ibid., p 143.

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and other people's interpretations of what religion is - the truth is probably that I don't believe there is a God, although I would like to believe it. Certainly I don't believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man [sic] is God. So is a leaf or a snake ...
Like many, I waver in my convictions about God, from time to time.
In my poetry I seem to be for; in my fiction, against.⁷⁸

Thus she was already starting to articulate a somewhat tentative nature-based theism. Having left behind Christianity when a young girl, she was searching all the more for ways to speak of, and indeed conceive of, the divine.

The animistic quality of Walker's belief was already firmly in place. In the same 1973 interview she stated that, with others of African and Native American heritage, she retained from these traditions 'the belief that everything is inhabited by spirit'.⁷⁹ She added:

It does not surprise me that scientists are now discovering that trees, plants, flowers, have feelings ... emotions, that they shrink when yelled at; that they faint when an evil person is about who might hurt them.⁸⁰

We have already noted her willingness to remain unclear about ancestral and guardian spirits in particular, the question being whether they exist separate from the human imagination. On balance, however, it would seem that, for her, feelings, 'life', breath and 'spirit' are attributes of everything in nature.

By the time she wrote *The Color Purple*, less than ten years later, Walker had worked out more of the details. In this book, she shared her own theological understandings through the voice of Shug Avery.⁸¹ From a conversation between Shug and her beloved friend Celie, we note that God is not best thought of as a bearded old white man. Indeed, anthropomorphism of this kind is rejected, and Shug adopts the pronoun 'It' when speaking of God. 'It' is everything and everyone, and can be discovered by looking within, or equally by appreciating, for example, the colour of a field in bloom.⁸² Similarly, Celie and Shug are given to ponder the information in a letter from Celie's sister Nettie, a Christian missionary in Africa,

⁷⁸Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p 265.

⁷⁹Ibid., p 252.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 3.

⁸²Walker, *The Color Purple* (1983), pp 164-8.

that the local Africans worship a kind of large jungle leaf as, 'in its own humble way, God'. Even Nettie, a committed Christian, cannot bring herself to dismiss this way of thinking.⁸³ For Walker, loving 'It' is intuitively right for humans as Earth-dwellers.

Although without human form, 'It' is described as trying to engage people's attention and love, and as feeling disappointment and frustration when people do not respond.⁸⁴ Human beings and 'It' are in mutual relationship. Thus, by this time, Walker's position has become clearly theistic. 'Goddess', in the sense of that which is chosen for love and worship, is 'The Universe'. This is more than pancosmism, the recognition of the oneness in which the diversity of the cosmos is unified. She believes not only in oneness, but also in purpose and transcendence.

Walker has continued to refine and develop that which she has since come to call her paganism. Her views on the self and ethics attest to this development. So also does the variety of holy names that she employs in her writing. No longer bogged down with the question of believing or not believing, she paints her theism from a rich palette. The earth-based aspect of her spirituality is shown in the names, 'the Earth', 'Nature', 'the Universe', 'the Cosmos', 'trees, stars, wind, and everything else'. From African, Native American, Old European, and other pagan traditions, she uses: 'Ultimate Ancestor', 'Great Mystery', 'the Great Goddess', 'God/Goddess', 'Mother Earth', and 'That Which Is Beyond Understanding But Not Beyond Loving'. Further abstract dimensions are added with: 'Life', 'the Divine', 'the Spirit', 'All That Is', and 'All Creation'.⁸⁵ Most recently, she has suggested a second pronoun as well. In a 1997 recounting of Shug's conversation with Celie, Shug states: 'God ain't a he or a she, but a It. Maybe a "us"'.⁸⁶ This new 'us' is neither polytheistic nor Trinitarian. It is, rather, attesting to the abundant diversity, not least the many names, of 'All That Is', and to the idea that everyone and everything are playing unique and interconnected parts in the whole of 'Life'.

We have already noted that Walker's theology has been called pantheistic and pansophistic. (See p 6) We shall consider each of these in turn. In her most recent collection of essays, Walker says that she agrees with Shug's statement, 'I believe

⁸³Ibid., p 131.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp 164-8.

⁸⁵Walker, *The Color Purple* (1992), pp 1-2; *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*.

⁸⁶Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 7.

that God is everything that is, ever was or ever will be'.⁸⁷ I think, then, that to call her pantheistic is not in error. Stacie Lynn Hankinson also expresses this view. She writes of Celie's coming to agree with Shug as a 'conversion' from monotheism to pantheism.⁸⁸

Mary Daly concurs. Although she does not claim to give a definitive label to the theology of *The Color Purple*, she suggests that Shug and Celie are developing 'a sort of "Nag-Gnostic pantheism"' in their search for ways to think about and speak about the category that has heretofore been named the patriarchal God.⁸⁹ Daly uses the conversation between Celie and Shug as an encouraging example of women together creating fresh theological avenues and options. There are, she says, 'myriad ... possibilities for Naming transcendence'.⁹⁰ Any pronoun, including 'It', is as good as any other - depending on the context - for naming of 'deep Reality'⁹¹, of 'the inexhaustible Other'.⁹² So, while not necessarily agreeing with all of their conclusions, she is generally approving of Shug and Celie's efforts, to the extent of using 'Nag-Gnostic', one of her own new words, to describe them. In typical playful fashion, she is evoking nags (annoying people, especially women), agnostics (people who assert a lack of certainty about something), gnosis (spiritual knowledge), and even two religious positions (the historical Gnostic movements, devoted to intuitive spiritual knowledge, and agnosticism, which claims that it is not possible to have knowledge of God). Her definition of 'Nag-Gnostic' is this:

The philosophy of those who sense with certainty the reality of transcendental knowledge and at the same time never cease to Nag our Selves and Others with recurrent awareness of questions and uncertainties; the philosophy of those who overcome the pseudodichotomy between transcendence and immanence, between otherworldliness and worldliness.⁹³

⁸⁷Ibid., p 3.

⁸⁸Hankinson, 'From Monotheism to Pantheism', p 320. (See above, ref. 27.)

⁸⁹M. Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p 400.

⁹⁰Ibid., p 403.

⁹¹Ibid., p 404.

⁹²Ibid., p 403.

⁹³M. Daly and J. Caputi, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p 83.

This seems to me an apt portrayal of the tenor of Walker's project. Pantheism - God as everything - is nothing if not a bringing together of world and 'otherworld', immanent and transcendent.

Charles Hartshorne discusses an approach similar to Daly's 'overcoming the pseudodichotomies' in his complex encyclopaedia entry, 'Pantheism and Panentheism'.⁹⁴ He analyses, across the categories of God and humanity, the logical 'polarity of necessary-contingent', and finds that to combine rather than oppose the two poles generates a result that he can recommend. This logical process, he says, works for other opposites as well. He commends the work of 'the American philosopher E. S. Brightman (1884-1952)' for the use of 'the phrases "finite-infinite" and "temporal-eternal" of God'. Such an approach (combining rather than opposing categories), Hartshorne writes, is shared by what he calls 'neoclassical theism' and by panentheism.

Would it then be accurate to call Walker panentheist rather than pantheist? Were she to say that 'everything is in God', or that 'God contains everything', panentheist would be the better description. However, she seems comfortable both to equate 'the Universe' with Goddess, the world with the divine, and to say that there is something that is expressing itself in 'All Creation'. Thus we do have a kind of immanent-transcendent. It is not so much a logical problem as an acceptable theological mystery in her pantheistic thought.

We may wish to specify further that Walker's is a 'cosmic' pantheism. That is to say, her starting point is the world or cosmos and its finite and changing realities, the whole of which she names divine. She does not take up, from Hindu tradition, for example, 'acosmic' pantheism, which begins with an awareness of the divine and then finds ways to take up the world into it or indeed to deny the reality of the world by calling it illusion. She has titled one of her publications, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know*; the book is subtitled, *Earthling Poems*. This reference to the planet Earth as seen from space, everything, and knowledge, is an indication of her cosmic pantheism. As with Hartshorne's combining of opposites, and her own holding together of change and continuity in the self, she holds together the

⁹⁴C. Hartshorne, 'Pantheism and Panentheism' in M. Eliade (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1987), p 168.

development and diversity of 'All That Is' with the totality, and the material with the immaterial or the spiritual.

We turn now to the description of Walker's theology as pansophistic. As far as I have been able to determine, this term first appears in Rudolph P. Byrd's 1990 essay which is subtitled, 'When the Spirit Moves So Do We'.⁹⁵ Byrd addresses what is meant by 'the Spirit' when Walker writes that a womanist '*loves the Spirit*'.⁹⁶ He states:

If it can be satisfactorily defined, the Spirit for Walker is that ubiquitous, pansophic Incorporeality that creates and sustains all life and in Whose benevolence all life discovers its meaning, its purpose.⁹⁷

I have said that 'the Spirit' is one of Walker's holy names. Byrd's insight is helpful. He suggests that 'the Spirit' is everywhere, the source, the lover that everyone is meant to know. Also, he says, 'the Spirit' is 'pansophic'. This word is not to be found in theological dictionaries. However, there is no doubt that it is derived from the Greek words *pan*, meaning all, and *sophia*, meaning wisdom. One hears the echo of Walker's phrase: *Her Blue Body Everything We Know* ('Her Blue Body' meaning the planet Earth). In everything, there is wisdom. 'The Spirit' is available to us through any part of the whole. We can know the world and our purpose in it through seeing the beauty of nature as an expression of love, through practicing silence and listening to our own innate wise voice telling us how to 'enter into the Creation'.

One might also note that *Sophia* (upper case) has many traditional references. These range from (a grammatically feminine noun for) the emanance or the 'spirit' of God in the Hebrew scriptures, to the Holy Spirit of the New Testament, to the supreme deity as 'She' rather than 'He', to the female partner of the male God, to the Goddess, to a female principle complementary to a male principle. Walker increasingly uses holy names that are female, especially Goddess and Mother Earth, dual-gendered, such as Goddess/God, and non-gendered, such as 'the Universe'. She advocates the reinstatement of women - with men, children, and 'Nature' - as sacred, and she commends feminists and indigenous peoples for their contributions to progress in this area.⁹⁸ And again, she makes reference to the profound

⁹⁵Byrd, 'Spirituality in the Novels'. (See above, ref. 27.)

⁹⁶Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p xii, her italics.

⁹⁷Byrd, 'Spirituality in the Novels', p 364.

⁹⁸Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, pp 20-1.

interconnectedness of all life in terms of all creatures breathing the same air, sharing the same spirit. 'Conspiring' is a word she uses, from the Latin for breathe together. In these ways, Byrd has chosen well in using 'pansophic' to evoke her thought.

Walker's eclectic religious approach can be characterised as 'non-exclusive'. The term 'non-exclusive' is sometimes applied to Japanese religious practice, in which individuals may participate in more than one tradition, such as Shinto and a form of Buddhism. Charlene Spretnak is a non-exclusive thinker, who, in her book *States of Grace*, advocates elements from Buddhism, Native American spirituality, 'contemporary Goddess spirituality' as it has been developed among some Western feminists, and 'the Semitic traditions'.⁹⁹ Examples of Walker's non-exclusive approach that we have already noted are her use of elements from Buddhist thought, and African and Native American traditions. Another example is her reconsideration of Rastafarianism, which she initially rejected because of its sexism. Having listened again to Bob Marley's (1945-1981) reggae music, she now wishes to celebrate and commend a 'rasta' spiritual dimension in his work. This dimension she describes as 'a commitment to a religion of attentiveness and joy'.¹⁰⁰

Another strand of Walker's non-exclusive approach is her use of Christian tradition. In a similar reclaiming mode to her reassessment of Rastafarianism, having long ago rejected the Bible as a holy book due to its sexism, racism, imperialism, and violence, she does now read the Bible (and other patriarchal religious texts) in order to discover its spiritual insights. From her Christian background, she has always retained her belief in the possibility of transformation, both personal and social. She cites Paul and Moses as people from this tradition who went through radical changes.¹⁰¹ She has retained also from her early experience of the Black Church a belief in the importance of community, with its caring, continuity, and rituals for marking the patterns and changes of life.

Rituals, Walker believes, are important for affirming community. She feels that there is much work to be done in developing rituals that are not oppressive. This is creative work that can be done by putting harmful customs 'to a very good scrutiny and analytical consideration and then choosing what sustains us'.¹⁰² She mentions in

⁹⁹C. Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in a Postmodern Age* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

¹⁰⁰Walker, *Living By The Word*, p 116.

¹⁰¹Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p 252.

¹⁰²Walker, *My Life as Myself*.

this light the efforts of some Jewish women who have rewritten the seder, and also the African-American festival of Kwanza, which dates back to 1966 and draws on African traditions connected with the harvest.¹⁰³ Rituals that she herself practices are *ad hoc* and flexible, or devised for particular occasions by those who wish to recognise them. She celebrates the winter solstice each December. Her comments about this are instructive. Her celebration of the day involves - 'usually' - a sauna (as a form of the Lakota ceremony of the Sweat Lodge), 'a vegetarian feast, and music making and dancing, with friends'.¹⁰⁴ For several days prior to this, she enjoys 'a heightened awareness of the losing ground of winter', and in the days after, a 'quiet appreciation of the possibility of another spring (my favorite of all seasons) and thoughts of seeds and planting'.¹⁰⁵ Writing of the overlay of the winter solstice with Christmas, she says:

The birth of Jesus has been affixed to the seeming rebirth of the sun, but the rebirth of the sun has been worshiped since many millennia before Christ. Undoubtedly it has been worshipped, by plants and single-cell animals, since the very beginning of the planet's life.¹⁰⁶

Consistent with her non-exclusive approach and her own advice, she has scrutinised the situation and the options and chosen a pagan observance that sustains her.

To conclude this chapter, I shall draw together some of the elements of Walker's spiritual thought that I consider to be especially helpful. Firstly, because my aim is to identify resources for postchristian spirituality, I value her non-exclusive approach for its sheer practicality. If one accepts that patriarchal religions, including Christianity, have been the vehicles, however distorted, for human spiritual expression, then one also allows that there may be retrievable material in them for postchristian humanity. If one assumes that any human project is going to have limitations, then one can have little difficulty with the idea that several such projects may have something worthwhile to offer as well as to dismiss. Like Mary Daly's self-described 'plundering' of theological and philosophical traditions,¹⁰⁷ Walker's

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 84.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷M. Daly, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (London: The Women's Press, 1993), back cover, p 78, 110, et al.

non-exclusive approach appropriates themes and practices which she moulds together in her individual way. In keeping with her belief in continual change and the fluidity of 'Life', she is contributing both to the reshaping of major traditions (Note the number of Christians who have taken up her work, and the attention given by Native Americans to her linking the cause of Black South Africans under apartheid with their own.¹⁰⁸), and to the development of hybrid alternatives. Critics and concerned traditionalists may worry that the integrity - and indeed the special truth claims - of their traditions are at risk from such pick-and-mix concoctions. However, I believe that if the practice of any Christian tradition, for example, cannot be moved forward without racism, sexism, and other oppressions, no matter how customary, then such a tradition is entirely expendable. If this consigns major historical religious movements to past history, then we shall need all the more the constructive efforts of Walker and others.

Secondly, I think that Walker's womanism is a strength, specifically in its concern for all people. A womanist, she writes, is 'not a separatist, except periodically, for health'.¹⁰⁹ Obviously the allowed exception is open to interpretation, but basically her outlook is universalist, in that her interest lies with the whole of humanity and indeed 'All Creation'. As Delores S. Williams has explained, a womanist is woman-affirming, woman-loving, self-loving, and also inclusive in her scope and appreciation.¹¹⁰ This approach struggles against hierarchies of colour, class, sex, or sexual preference.¹¹¹ Walker recently remarked on her becoming an adult, which happens at age 52 in Cherokee thought. She stressed her commitment to trying to be 'an elder *for all*'.¹¹² While proclaiming particularity - feminist of colour - she is aiming to promote not divisiveness, but individual wholeness and healthy community, locally and globally.

Thirdly, Walker grounds her work solidly in the facts of living on this particular planet. The status of 'Earthling' is concrete, bodily, and shared by everything on Earth. Her perception is ecological, which is to say both environmentally aware and respectful of the contribution made by every

¹⁰⁸See her 'My Big Brother Bill', in *Living by the Word*, re. her friendship with Bill Wahpepah of the International Indian Treaty Council.

¹⁰⁹Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p xi.

¹¹⁰D. Williams, 'Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices' in U. King (Ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1994), p 82.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Walker, 'An Evening with Alice Walker'.

interconnected part of the whole. This kind of sensibility is very welcome in an age of BSE, nuclear pollution, and virtual reality.

Fourthly, Walker's 'Divine' is primarily non-anthropomorphic, an important corrective for anyone in the Western tradition who is trying to 'git man off her eyeball'.¹¹³ This is not to say that 'Mother Earth' and 'the Great Goddess' are not uses of female imagery. In the case of 'Mother Earth', however, the reference is to the entire matrix of life as well as to actual birthgiving, nurturance, and the cyclic 'rebirthing' nature's seasons. In the case of 'the Great Goddess', Walker wishes to make an archetype of sharing and abundance more available to both women and men. Her use of a multiplicity of holy names helps to keep her from a new female idolatry or the mere substitution of the male traditional God in drag, i.e. retaining the patriarchal Biblical Father-God but calling him or a deity with all of his attributes 'Mother'.

Fifthly, with her non-anthropomorphism Walker combines the assertion that 'the Universe responds'.¹¹⁴ So we are not faced with the prospect of an inert First Cause or remote Clock-Maker, but with that which is known relationally. I agree with her sentiment that everyone deserves to love a 'God' who loves them.¹¹⁵ She sees love as the most basic relationship. 'My religion is love', she has said¹¹⁶; her practice of metta/lovingkindness is one dimension of this. She believes that each of us has a 'sweet, generously appointed place in the makeup of the Cosmos', and that 'we must be loved very much by whatever Creation is to find ourselves on this wonderful Earth'.¹¹⁷ There is a warmth in this non-anthropomorphic theology.

Sixthly, Walker's belief in spirits derives from her experience of communicating with them. This experience overrides her own sense of scepticism about the existence of ancestral, guardian, and nature spirits. William James offers a context in which to consider this belief. James is not discussing belief in spirits but mysticism. I find that his approach to mysticism helps me to think about Walker's belief in spirits. He writes:

¹¹³Walker, *The Color Purple* (1983), p 168.

¹¹⁴Walker, *Living By The Word*, p 187.

¹¹⁵Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, pp 25-6.

¹¹⁶Walker, *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult*, p 33.

¹¹⁷Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, p 26.

1. Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.¹¹⁸

This, he explains, is because such individuals have been convinced by the experiences of their own senses.

2. No authority emanates from them [mystical states] which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.¹¹⁹

People must rely on the evidence of their own senses and critical judgement. His third point is:

The existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe.¹²⁰

That is to say, those which seem to be 'our own more "rational" beliefs' may only be enabling us to see a portion of 'a more extensive and inclusive world'.¹²¹ The mystic may be seeing an additional or different portion. James' first two points are pertinent to Walker's communication with spirits. No one can deny that this is her genuine experience, nor need anyone who lacks similar experiences accept her interpretation into their own belief system. Many people, of course, especially those with backgrounds in the traditional religions of Africa, Native America, the Maori, and others, will not find her interpretation problematic. James' third point - that any one of us may not be aware of the full dimensions of what is - may be more contentious than the implied relativism of the first two taken together, but it is a point with which I am inclined to agree.

Seventhly, it is important that Walker nowhere appears to have truck with anything like that which James calls 'diabolical mysticism'.¹²² She never cites

¹¹⁸W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, Edinburgh, 1901-1902), (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p 422.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., p 427.

¹²¹Ibid., pp 423, 428.

¹²²Ibid., p 426.

communication with destructive or evil spirits. Although her life has not been free of illness, depression, loss, and abuse, the spirits themselves are helpful and supportive to her. They may be stern and bluntly spoken, but they are benevolent, never evil-minded. One gets no sense of the 'spirit world' as a minefield of danger and demons as well as angels. Either this is outwith her own experience of spirits, or she has chosen only the kind and loving side of the traditional 'spirit world' as being concomitant with her belief that 'the Universe' is good. Or both. But for me, it makes her position more convincing because of its consistency.

Eighthly, Walker's suggestion that we all have it in us to 'enter into the Creation' is encouraging and compelling. I see this in at least two ways. One is that it rests on honesty and compassion. People are inherently good, even though evil does happen. We are limited beings in what are sometimes bad circumstances, not able to see all of the consequences of our actions. Although we are ignorant in this way, we can learn, and move on. Although people are damaged, change and transformation can come - through love. Walker urges us always to seek a creative response to wrongdoing in preference to the punitive.

The other aspect of the idea of 'entering into the Creation' that I especially appreciate in Walker's writing is that it provides a rationale for ethical behaviour. Pantheists can find themselves caught up in what I call a 'tautological loop', where there is no reason to act for personal change or social justice because everything, it is thought, is (already) God/good. Walker, however, is very clear that bad things do happen and that there is suffering in the world. She believes also that all life equally deserves the freedom to flourish, and that 'All That Is' is intrinsically good. Together, these generate momentum for change. We have the opportunity to 'enter into the creation'. We puzzle out what our loving contribution can be, and figure out something different if it doesn't work out as we had hoped or in a way that we can see as good. There is something to be learned from every situation, and 'the Universe' is always here supporting us. This kind of activism is a way to develop happiness, to access joy, and to help us and 'All Creation' in expressing our unique selves.

Ninthly and finally, Walker's spiritual thought is essentially hopeful. She affirms that people are, in our selves, acceptable, that goodness underlies all, and that 'Life' is diverse, whole, and ongoing. We are here not just to strengthen our courage in adversity, but even more to increase in our capacity for joy.

Alice Walker's worldview, then, offers us an idea of the self as beloved and acceptable. With a quiet, listening, and attentive approach, we can promote our own development as creative agents increasingly in tune with 'All Creation'. We can come to act for the enhancement of not only our own lives but also the lives of our fellow 'Earthlings', and towards the increase of 'Life' itself. 'Mother Earth' loves us and upholds us, and our 'natural' selves can flourish in reciprocating this love for 'That Which Is Beyond Understanding But Not Beyond Loving'. There is a balance of involvement and detachment that is commended here, of entering the fray and stepping back to rest and reconsider, of sharp-edged critique and non-judgementalism, of openness to the 'Universe' and concentration on the unique individual.

Chapter 3

Audre Lorde

Whereas one might describe Alice Walker as warm, good humoured, and radiating an ethereal calm, the late Audre Lorde had the passion and occasional quiet moments of the lightning storms that I remember from my girlhood summers. In comparison with the serenity and gentle fires of Walker and her bedrock belief in 'Nature's' all-embracing love and goodness, Lorde is urban, gritty, and streetwise, her work rooted in the immediacy of struggle and painful experience in the world. Lorde values difference as integral to what is, on every level, so that it cannot be surprising that she adopts a kind of polytheism in addition to the animist sensibility that she shares with Walker and so many others of the African diaspora.

Lorde is very seldom to be found relaxing into the benevolent 'Universe'. Rather, she places her hope in the disused depths of experience and feeling, a kind of personal primordial soup that is within each of us and out of which we can fish or fashion our own power and unique voice. Throughout her work she writes about this 'place' of feelings and the life project of connecting with it and its potent knowledge, then coming to understand and to communicate what has been sensed or experienced. This 'place' and project appear again and again in different guises: here we are told that the urge of the poet is to express that which originates in this place of feelings; there, that 'the erotic' (in Lorde's special meaning of that word) concerns its potency and ardour; there again, that the spiritual and the political are rooted in its depths; and again, that because it is chaotic and confusing, dark and somehow female it has been depreciated, distorted and denied. Further, she tells us that when each of us follows the poetic urge to find words for that which we know most deeply - 'the mattering core'¹ - we are our own dark female progenitor and matrix; we are our own author and poet, and the poet is 'the Black mother within'. Still again, she encourages us toward an apotheosis, asking us to blossom out and become the Black goddess daughter of the African goddess mother of all, to live out her part in us.

Through this multi-layered profusion of imagery, Lorde shares with us her vision of the world, her dreams of richer, fuller lives for everyone. In the chapter that follows, I consider some of these layers, separating some of the strands of the weave so that they can be seen under my spotlights of self, ethics, and 'Goddess'. I begin

¹A. Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (London: Sheba, 1984), p 256.

with a biographical introduction to Lorde, and further comparisons with Alice Walker.

Audre Lorde, Black American Lesbian poet, was born in 1934, the third of three daughters. She was severely visually impaired throughout her life, and delayed speaking until the age of four, when she also learned to read. Her parents were immigrants to New York City from the Caribbean islands of Granada, and she was raised in a Roman Catholicism influenced by its Afro-Caribbean roots. She did not practice Catholicism after leaving home as a teenager. She supported herself in a variety of jobs, while studying towards a literature and philosophy degree from Hunter College, then a master's degree in library science from Columbia University. During a year's study at the National University of Mexico, she was introduced to the history and prehistory of the indigenous peoples there. In New York, she moved between the separate spheres of her work, school, Black literary circles, political causes, and the life of a 1950s 'gay-girl'. She was married to a white Jewish attorney from 1962 to 1970; they had a daughter and a son. At the time of the publication of her first book of poetry (*The First Cities*, 1968), Lorde took up the invitation to teach as Poet-in-Residence during spring term at Tougaloo College, a traditionally Black college in Mississippi. While pursuing her work as a poet, she continued to teach in higher education in New York City, and as her writing became more well-known, she travelled, lectured and taught in North America, Africa, Australia and Europe. After her divorce her life partner was Frances Clayton, a white academic. Lorde wrote ten books of poetry and five books of prose (consisting of essays, journals, speeches, and what she called 'biomythography'), receiving many awards. She was first diagnosed with breast cancer fourteen years before her death from cancer in 1992.

A comparison of the lives of Lorde and Alice Walker shows that they have much in common. Both are writers and poets. Both identify as Black or African American, and as women. Both are mothers, Lorde of a son and a daughter, Walker of a daughter. Both were married to and later divorced from white northern Jews. Both were involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Both were raised as Christians and rejected Christianity early in their lives. Both achieved hard-won tertiary education and teaching positions. Both have struggled through long periods of illness, Lorde with cancer and Walker with long-undiagnosed Lyme Disease. Both have a vision that is global and inclusive rather than separatist - and have been acclaimed internationally. And, importantly for this thesis, both are committed to re-naming and re-claiming the spiritual, especially an earth-based spirituality that is no more nor less female than male.

There are also notable differences between the two writers. Lorde was a northern, New York City Black, and Walker is from the rural south. Lorde's African forebears were slaves in the Caribbean and her parents chose to relocate in the USA; Walker's forebears were slaves in the very Georgia countryside in which she was raised. Lorde was raised Roman Catholic, Walker Methodist. Lorde was Lesbian; Walker is bisexual. Lorde was a 'Black feminist'; Walker is a 'womanist'. Lorde was a reclaimer of selected African deities; Walker is a pantheist and calls herself a 'pagan'.

We turn now to Audre Lorde's consideration of self, ethics, and Goddess. In discussing her view of the self, we shall see that it comprises a certain epistemology. By this I mean that, for her, the way that knowledge is gained, transformed, and used is a key to what it means to be a self. In this regard, she writes of feelings, particularly anger, pain, fear and love. In her discussion of love, she uses the term 'the erotic' in a special way that transforms it, as Haunani-Kay Trask has written, from the 'patriarchal sexual definition to something much larger, more encompassing, and enriching'.² And finally, we shall see that her concept of 'difference' is central to her view of the self, and it leads us into a discussion of her view of ethics.

First, we turn to that which I call Lorde's 'epistemology of the self'. In this epistemology, the most genuine and immediate knowledge is that of our feelings. These include physical and mental sensations, emotions, and experiences. Feelings may be bodily or physical, as in the tingling of one's scalp, the sweat behind a knee,³ the smell of yeast or Caribbean spices, the recognition in a hand and arm of the giving way of the clove of garlic under the pestle.⁴ They may be 'body senses'⁵ - things that you know or feel in your body before you find words to express them. Feelings may be emotional, as in anger or rage. She makes no effort to distinguish among feelings by categorizing the physical separately from the emotional. She is

²H. Trask, *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p 160.

³A. Cornwell, 'I am Black, Woman, and Poet: An Interview with Audre Lorde', in *Black Lesbian in White America* (Tallahassee, Florida: Naiad, 1983), p 39.

⁴See Lorde, *Zami*.

⁵A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series, (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984), p 109.

saved thereby from a task that must inevitably generate many grey areas, as in the case of dreams, which may be said to be of physical, or mental, or emotional origin, or any mixture of these. The important thing for her is that feelings and experiences should be felt, and should be respected. That they may be messy and chaotic, half-formed or fleeting, chimeric or beguiling, must not deter us.

Feelings, then, are the raw and primary data of the self. Such knowledge is private and silent. This silent knowledge may be transformed into *understanding*. The transformation is brought about through the use of our rational faculties. For Lorde, analytic thought serves and gives form to that basic knowledge which is our feelings. Rationality and feelings can work together, and neither need function at the expense of the other. She contrasted this epistemology with what she considered to be the male European tradition and practise of rejecting feelings and elevating analytic thought. When basic knowledge (feelings) is rejected and a secondary process (rationality) is given undue prominence, the result is a truncation of one's very humanity. Such 'patriarchal thinking' trains us to follow limited paths of understanding 'in certain old ways'.⁶ Lorde commends, instead of those 'old ways', a reintegration of feelings and analytic thought. In this, she is like many other feminists. We shall see, however, that she offers us her own perspective on this reintegration. Meantime, there is more to explain of her 'epistemology of the self', which does not stop with silent and individual understanding.

An understanding built from feelings and analytic thought may then go through a further transformation from understanding into *language*. Then, as language, it can be communicated and acted upon, which is to say, as Lorde often did, 'made useful'. Thus, in the essay 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury', her earliest piece of prose rather than poetry,⁷ she explained about converting feelings into language as follows:

We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it.⁸

This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are -- until the poem -- nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of

⁶Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 101.

⁷A short story by her was published under a pseudonym prior to this piece. See *ibid.*, pp 86-7.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp 37-8.

experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream
births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes)
understanding.⁹

The self feels, analyses, understands, and then communicates - in new words or the language of poetry if need be. One may have to struggle to express and share emotions and experience, but the struggle is worthwhile. New or previously unheard voices should be heard. They make valuable contributions to the human story because they have a deep honesty and a rich authenticity, unlike the truncated and unbalanced versions that come from those who are over-reliant on their rational faculties. Furthermore, the new voices are not only contributing to a fuller description of humanity as we are, but also generating or bringing to light fresh ideas and strategies for bringing about a better future. For Lorde, feelings and silence are to be transformed not only into understanding and language but also into action.¹⁰ We shall see more of this latter discussion - of action and a better future - when we consider her view of ethics.

We have now been introduced to an epistemology of the self in several stages. They are: *feeling*; the application of *rational thought* to feeling in order to develop *understanding*; the transformation of understanding into *language* - perhaps poetry - and *communication/action*. Before we move on, we must consider in more depth the core stage, which is feeling. At least four kinds of feelings are especially important in Lorde's thought. These are anger, pain, fear, and love. The first two, anger and pain, she says, give us information about some parts of our living in which there are problems. Anger and pain alert us to circumstances that require to be changed. In 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism', she states:

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. [A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is ... liberating and strengthening.¹¹

She expresses a great deal of anger in her own writing. As an appropriate and positive response to rampant racism, sexism, homophobia, and imperialism, it is referred to again and again. It is interesting to note that Beverly Wildung Harrison, a

⁹Ibid., p 36.

¹⁰Ibid., p 42.

¹¹Ibid., p 127. My elision.

Christian feminist, thinks along the same lines as Lorde. In her essay 'The Power of Anger in the Work of Love' Harrison writes: 'Anger is not the opposite of love. It is better understood as a feeling-signal that all is not well in our relation to other persons or groups or to the world around us.'¹² With regard to the feeling of pain, Lorde states similarly that, 'the pain which comes from being tried beyond your utmost' can be 'mutated' into fresh information and strength, and in this way made useful.¹³ However, she writes, if anger and pain are not turned into language or action, they may turn inward and become damaging. She urges us not to waste them in this way, but to feel them deeply, transform them, and be empowered with, as she says, 'our own power', power from within, from the depths of our selves.¹⁴ She quotes an early lover, who was a breast cancer survivor, an alcoholic, and a brilliant anthropologist, who told her: 'Waste nothing, not even pain. Particularly not pain.'¹⁵ The pain that is wasted, useless, or potentially self-destructive is the pain that is not transformed, from which we do not learn. So too with anger. It is not that there is any intrinsic value in anger or pain, or that they are in any sense ennobling in themselves - Lorde sought training in self-hypnosis in order to gain relief from the pain of her cancer¹⁶ - but that when they are felt, they can be assessed, understood, communicated, made useful.

The third of the important feelings that I wish to highlight here is fear. Lorde writes that if we allow fear to silence us or hold us back, then we allow the forces of non-life to win - because, according to them, 'we were never meant to survive'.¹⁷ And further, our 'silence does not protect' us: whether or not we are silent, death will come, as it is part of life.¹⁸ It is in the repeated facing of death in her own life that Lorde finds much of her own strength. She recounts in journals and essays that she almost died from flu in 1967, found a tumor that turned out to be benign in 1977, underwent surgery for breast cancer in 1978, and lived with cancer in her liver from 1984 until she died eight years later. Her fears were put into a sharper perspective each time she grappled with a new illness, and she came to understand more deeply the crucial lesson that whether or not we have told our story, spoken from our innermost core, taken responsible action based on our own feelings and experiences,

¹²B. Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, Carol S. Robb (Ed.), (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p 14.

¹³Cornwell, 'I am Black, Woman, and Poet', p 39.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Lorde, *Zami*, p 236.

¹⁶A. Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand, 1988), p 128.

¹⁷Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 42.

¹⁸Ibid., p 41.

our human lives will end. For her, the corollary was that fear could be transformed into, or put aside in favour of, courage. If death is the worst that can befall us as a result of our speech or action, and if death is for each of us inevitable, let us take courage and speak, and live 'from within outward' our most real lives, rather than obeying (and internalizing) external rules.¹⁹ In *The Cancer Journals* she writes:

As women we were raised to fear. If I cannot banish fear completely, I can learn to count with it less. For then fear becomes not a tyrant against which I waste my energy fighting, but a companion, not particularly desirable, yet one whose knowledge can be useful. When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less important whether or not I am unafraid.²⁰

This message is reinforced in her writing about the suicide of her best friend when they were aged sixteen, the serial murder of Black women in Boston in 1979, the lynching of southern Blacks and other Civil Rights activists, the shooting of Black children by white police in New York and in Soweto. She recounts these and other losses and atrocities in order that they be *remembered and transformed* from anger, pain and fear into life-giving visions and actions.

We turn now to the fourth of the feelings that has special importance in Lorde's thought and epistemology of the self, which is love. For her, not only is love one of the basic materials (feelings) from which understanding is fashioned, but unlike anger, pain and fear, which provide information through what could be seen as a negative route, it provides information through that which is positive. From our experiences of love we can learn about satisfaction, whole-heartedness, completion, excellence.²¹ This is the meaning of her special use of the words, 'the erotic'. In her landmark essay, 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power', she states that "'erotic" derives from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects - born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony'.²² This is a reference to early Greek mythology, in which Eros 'was represented as one of the primeval forces of nature'.²³ This Eros was the son of Chaos, who (or which) was, 'in one ancient Greek myth of creation, the dark, silent abyss from which all things came into

¹⁹Ibid., p 58.

²⁰A. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1980), p 15.

²¹See Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 54.

²²Ibid., p 55.

²³'Eros (mythology)', *Microsoft® Encarta® 97 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1996 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

existence'.²⁴ This is clearly not the same as the now more familiar imagery from the later Greek pantheon in which Eros was represented as 'a handsome and intense young man, attended by Pothos ("longing") or Himeros ("desire")'.²⁵ Nor is it the concept of consuming sexual desire that we are used to from Christian tradition - although Christian feminists including Carter Heyward, Rita N. Brock and Mary Hunt have taken up Lorde's special idea of 'the erotic'. Lorde herself does not enter into any discussion of Plato, Aristotle and Paul, as she would if she wished to make comparisons with their *eros*, *philia* and *agape*.

Lorde is careful to distinguish between 'the erotic' and what she calls its opposite, pornography, which to her represents 'a direct denial of the power of the erotic', because pornography is not about the *expression* of feelings, but about their *suppression*: 'sensation without feeling'.²⁶ 'The erotic weaves throughout our lives', she says, and sexuality, although a 'deep lode of our erotic lives and knowledge', is only a part of it.²⁷ She explains:

The erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.

It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.²⁸

The realm of 'the erotic', this 'place' of deep feelings, is a well-spring of the self. Here we can learn especially of our capacity for joy in the here and now, our authentic human needs (including the need to share joy), and the strength of our own life force. Furthermore, Lorde affirms, the spiritual and the political are connected by 'the erotic', 'those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love in its deepest meanings'.²⁹ To this concept of 'the spiritual' we shall return.

In this discussion of what I have called an 'epistemology of the self' we have seen that Lorde urges her audience to defy the male European tradition of

²⁴'Chaos', *Microsoft® Encarta® 97 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1996 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

²⁵'Eros (mythology)', *Microsoft® Encarta® 97*.

²⁶Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 54.

²⁷Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, pp 18, 15.

²⁸Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 54.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p 56.

commitment to rational thought at the expense of feelings. Instead, we are to do our living 'from within outward',³⁰ from the potent - if also at times messy and chaotic - well-spring of the self which she names 'the erotic'. We must not be put off by the cultural-historical dismissal and reviling of feelings, emotions, and experiences which are labelled *dark* and *female*. On the contrary, all people are encouraged to embrace the dark and female (from) within themselves, and move toward a reintegration of our faculties and a connection with and increase of our own power, which is power from within. The aim is to be increasingly self-aware, self-conscious, self-actualizing, self-directed. This way, we can gather up our own potential and our strength, and identify ways to communicate our insights, dreams and visions to those who are willing and able to listen. Clarity of focus, honesty and courage come from such 'unsentimental self-scrutiny'. Armed with the knowledge of our own limitations, including our mortality, we become 'warriors' - knowing too that the future 'belongs to those of us who conceive of it as belonging to everyone'.³¹ We can make a contribution to the evolution of humanity, planning our actions as best we can to move us in the direction of lives that are 'richer and more possible'.³² She does believe that women have a head start in this, due to our frequent refusal to deny our feelings.³³ She also believes that what she sees as an African sensibility - of approaching living as experience and wonderous adventure - has an as yet untried contribution to make to wider humanity, and that part of its gift may be to unseat the hegemonic notion of life as somehow oppositional or here to be 'mastered'.³⁴

This epistemology of the self has already led us into the topic of ethics, of suggestions for ways to live well, both as an individual self and in a community or a relational setting. However, it would be a mistake to leave a discussion of Lorde and the self without first addressing another of the concepts central to her thought: difference. In this regard, we note that throughout her writing, she refers to her 'selves'. Her self-descriptions are lists of words, such as: 'Black woman warrior poet',³⁵ 'Black feminist',³⁶ 'Black lesbian feminist',³⁷ 'Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an inter-racial couple',³⁸

³⁰Ibid., p 58.

³¹Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 99.

³²Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 55.

³³Ibid., p 101.

³⁴Ibid., p 37; *A Burst of Light*, pp 37-8, 53, 116.

³⁵Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 41-2.

³⁶Ibid., p 60.

³⁷Ibid., p 72.

³⁸Ibid., p 114.

'post-mastectomy woman',³⁹ 'Fat Black Female and almost blind' (as a young girl),⁴⁰ 'a woman, a black lesbian feminist lover mother poet all I am'.⁴¹ This is clearly not about 'selves' as in multiple personalities, or as in experiences of reincarnation. Rather, she is indicating the many communities of which she is a part and the many identities to which she lays claim. This naming of several aspects of herself - 'selves' - is part of her finding of words for her feelings and experiences and communicating the results of her self-scrutiny; part of her project of honesty, of replacing silence and mis-namings with authentic language and combinations more true to the complexity of living. She discovers in her self multifarious and plural selves - changing, shifting, ebbing and flowing, overlapping, seemingly contradictory, both given and developing. This complexity, multiplicity and not-sameness is what she refers to as 'difference', and it is in and of her very constitution. Difference comes into play at every level. First, within her self she finds many different selves. Second, her relationship to the 'white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure' norm is also characterised by difference.⁴² Third, she writes that she is an outsider to every group of which she is also a member. Some other Blacks, for example, do not accept her Lesbianism,⁴³ some Lesbians do not want to hear of her motherhood, some mothers turn their backs on her feminism, and so on. Yet she chooses to risk rejection, again and again proclaiming her difference, her 'myriad selves'.⁴⁴

Lorde practices this self-revelation for at least five reasons. One is that she wishes to be honest, for its own sake, rather than to hide herself/selves in silence. Secondly, self-revelation serves to disarm the malevolent by removing the ammunition that secrets provide.⁴⁵ Thirdly, speaking out promotes her own well-being, unlike keeping silent, the dangers of which she cites in the words of her young daughter:

You're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter

³⁹Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 9.

⁴⁰Ibid., p 40.

⁴¹Ibid., p 25.

⁴²Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 116.

⁴³See A. Lorde, 'My Words Will Be There', in *Black Women Writers: Arguments and Interviews*, Mari Evans (Ed.), (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp 262-3.

⁴⁴Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 11.

⁴⁵Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 98-9.

and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.⁴⁶

So, her health and wholeness are strengthened by making external - communicating - the results of her self-scrutiny. Fourthly, contributing what one discovers to be true about oneself to a public discussion is a way to show the personal as political and to help in the development of more accurate pictures of what is. And fifthly, she offers her internal difference, her self-descriptive lists, to her audience in order to give us the opportunity to recognise those ways in which we are *the same*.

The samenesses and the differences work together in Lorde's thought. She hopes that there will be a spark of recognition when she recites her list of selves, that a connection will be made and a dialogue begun. The script would start something like this: *Here is and are my self and selves. Some we have in common, and some delineate our difference from one another. We can meet on the basis of whatever we share - even if it is only our apprehensive goodwill, our multifariousness, and our human complexity of feeling, thinking, and acting. Those things in which we are different we can use to mark out inter-spaces which we can then try to bridge through our joint constructive efforts. Difference gives us creative opportunities. It does not have to be wasted through mutual attack or mistrust. Let us see what action can be taken for my good, your good, the good of the children and the planet, and toward a more just future.* Self-awareness and self-conscious living are clearly very important in such a plan for creative and justice-making relating. Progress relies on 'unsentimental self-scrutiny' followed by self-revelation. The speaking, the listening, the response all trace back to the (self-)understanding that is built on one's basic knowledge of feelings and experiences.

Thus again we see the crucial importance of what I have called Lorde's 'epistemology of the self'. For her, such a way of knowing - of 'tracing [one's] weave back strand by bloody self-referenced strand'⁴⁷ - is the primary project of one who wishes to 'alter the whole pattern', to 'turn the world around'.⁴⁸ Self-scrutiny, which includes facing up to our limitations, especially the circumscribing facts of our physical bodies and human lifespans, is invaluable in connecting us with our own strength. Lorde quotes more than once the words of Simone de Beauvoir: 'It is in the recognition of the genuine conditions of our lives that we gain the strength to act and

⁴⁶Ibid., p 42.

⁴⁷Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 11.

⁴⁸Ibid.

our motivation for change.⁴⁹ Lorde sees this work of recognition in both interior and exterior terms. We work to understand the (interior) knowledge that we have. And, we work to assess as well as we can our exterior situation; that which is happening around us, in our relationships, in our schools and places of work, in society and culture, in the ecosystem, in local and global economics and politics. This interior and exterior information together make up 'the genuine conditions of our lives'. Through recognising them we are strengthened, empowered with our own power. The strength and power that we gain are not passive or inert, but useful for action and for change: for changing the world. In particular, Lorde urges us to use difference as opportunity for creative change.

It seems that we have moved again and unstoppably from the topic of the self into the topic of ethics. From Lorde's idea of the self we already have an outline of one aspect of ethics: a way to do a good job of being a self is to find and to name one's selves honestly and openly. We can learn from even the most frightening and painful struggles, and can turn these lessons to the good. This path of discovery and sharing makes a contribution of truth and authenticity to the world, and sets the scene for creative relationships with others. We need our own power, gained through self-scrutiny and self-understanding, not only for personal development. Neither a self-obsessed tangle of emotions nor an insular monad is the kind of self that Lorde wishes to promote. Rather, one tries to function well in a world of which one is an interconnecting part. We are connected with our physical and social surroundings, and across time with our ancestors and our descendants both immediate and remote. She urges her audience to make a conscious commitment to a/the future. As she puts it in her important speech, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action',

I am myself, a Black woman warrior poet doing my work, come to ask you, are you doing yours?⁵⁰

Our 'work' is to identify our selves and our own power, as well as the exterior conditions in which we are living, and to speak out and/or act on our findings - with passion, with love. This process is the one that she commends, as it is the one that she has come to grips with in/from her own experience. She recognises that her choices will differ from those of other people, but proposes that her overall approach - of self-scrutiny, moving towards increasing self-direction and integrity/wholeness -

⁴⁹Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 117; *Sister Outsider*, p 113.

⁵⁰Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 21; *Sister Outsider*, pp 41-2.

is beneficial for everyone. Further, she claims that even the most isolated self-contemplation will lead us back to a sense of relationality and mutual accountability. She states:

Experience has taught us that *action* in the now is also necessary, always. Our children cannot dream unless they live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours? "If you want us to change the world someday, we at least have to live long enough to grow up!" shouts the child.⁵¹

This call to action seems to mean several things. One is that paying attention to our feelings and experiences will show us that our physical bodies need care, as do those of our children and everyone else. This reminds us to keep focused on the hard facts of survival itself. Second is to say that we are enmeshed in human society. We are indeed part of the world. This is about connectedness and its responsibilities. As we expect or hope that the children will contribute to a better world, so also must we contribute. A third is about the importance of dreaming as a kind of nourishment and encouragement. Our visions can draw us forward to a better future that we can and do actually begin to imagine. Fourth, Lorde is communicating her sense of urgency. 'The child' is not just commenting or making a request, but shouting. Frustration, rage, and tears feature strongly in Lorde's descriptions of her own childhood. Children both want and deserve our 'action in the now', so that there will be a future in which they can take up their responsibilities and act to realise their own dreams.

We turn now from a discussion of the self or selves and Lorde's recommendation that we connect with our own power (which we can then use to 'change the world') to a discussion of ethics in the sense of choosing right action and behaving well in relation to others. We shall first describe what she sees as the main problem to be faced, which is the misuse of difference, and her suggestion for a model better than hierarchical dualism. Then we shall take note of certain values that she wishes to promote. And thirdly we shall consider what her concept of 'reintegration' or integrity entails.

⁵¹Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 38. My emphasis.

Lorde's description of the status quo is trenchant. We are all, she says, taught and formed in the midst of interlocking systems of oppression, and these systems are very difficult to leave behind. She challenges her readers with her definitions:

Racism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance.

Sexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance.

Heterosexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby its right to dominance. (1978)⁵²

These 'isms', and others including ageism, elitism, and classism, as well as 'homophobia', she says, exemplify the 'old' definitions, patterns, distortions, and misnamings of difference. The old distortions uphold 'simplistic oppositions' such as 'dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior or inferior'.⁵³ They are all rooted in the same misuse of difference: hierarchical dualism. Sarah Jane Boss has explained the problem:

In the writings of feminists, 'dualism' usually signifies a relationship of domination, in which the superior party perceives himself or herself to be significantly different from, and in opposition to, the subordinate. At the same time, the superior treats all members of the subordinate group as though they were the same as one another, and thus fails to recognize their individual differences. A white racist, for example, will fail to take account of the shared humanity which characterizes both white and black people, and will simultaneously ignore the personal differences between individual black people, seeing them as 'all the same'. The dualist sees the world in terms of pairs of opposites, and thereby *misses both the unity and the diversity* of the world which he or she inhabits.⁵⁴

This is precisely the situation decried by Lorde, which I am calling *hierarchical dualism*. When we leave in place oppressive structures of superior/inferior, we remain tied up in intolerance, power over and powerlessness, and fragmented lives.⁵⁵

⁵²Ibid., p 45.

⁵³Ibid., pp 114, 115.

⁵⁴S. J. Boss, 'Dualism', in *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, L. Isherwood and D. McEwan (Eds.), (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p 41. My emphasis.

⁵⁵See *A Burst of Light*, pp 14-5.

Lorde sees the damage done by hierarchical dualism in political, economic, and social, as well as emotional terms. Institutionalised dominance-and-submission serve to separate and confuse, objectify, and dehumanise those who do not fit a particular norm. A profit-based system requires such a population of 'surplus' people, as 'deviant' 'others' when scapegoats or more workers are needed, and as potential teachers or so-called-beneficiaries when those in the 'superior' position require salves for their guilty consciences. Profit, hatred, and greed all work together to the advantage of a few of the 'right' ('normal') people, and to the detriment of everyone else.⁵⁶

Lorde warns us of both failure to see oneself in the other or the other in oneself (Boss: 'missing the unity'), and unsound assumptions of sameness ('missing the diversity'). She wishes us to identify both what we share and the ways in which we are different. She describes her efforts to 'find your part in me'.⁵⁷ This is not a casual attempt to think of something that we might have in common, but, typically of Lorde, an almost visceral struggle towards recognising our interconnectedness. She maintains that there is something of each of us in every other, and something of any other in each of us: you can never be completely non-me, nor I non-you.⁵⁸ At least two important corollaries follow from this. The first is that 'learning to love myself', 'reclaiming myself', making 'friends with all the different pieces of me', is the initial step in loving you, and is a necessary starting point.⁵⁹ The second is that if you are not free, neither am I; justice is not divisible. Our sameness - our 'unity' in Boss's terms - gives the lie to hierarchical dualism, and to its dominant/subordinant paradigm. Similarly, life is more complex than a simple oppositional up/down. Unless diversity is taken fully into consideration, our coalition or unified efforts are likely to founder.

A well-known instance of Lorde's application of this concern is her 'Open Letter to Mary Daly'.⁶⁰ In this response to Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*,⁶¹ Lorde says to Daly that in the book, 'our commonality as well

⁵⁶See *ibid.*; *Sister Outsider*, pp 114-5.

⁵⁷Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 70.

⁵⁸See *Sister Outsider*, pp 147, 169.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p 174.

⁶⁰Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 66-71.

⁶¹M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

as our difference' have been 'distorted'.⁶² In arguing this point, Lorde first takes care to highlight the experiences, analyses, and hopes that she and Daly share as 'Lesbian/Radical/Feminist' theorists. She also notes that they both share access to the same 'female' 'reservoirs of ancient power' inhabited by European and African goddesses and archetypes alike. Further, in the patriarchal world, sexism means the subordination and oppression of all women. These are Lorde's acknowledgements of sameness, of Daly's and her parts in one another. (It is perhaps interesting that she does not mention their shared background in Roman Catholicism.)

Lorde says, however, that in *Gyn/Ecology* Daly has not dealt sufficiently with their difference, in particular the 'various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression' that are shaped by racism. Lorde points out that all women living with racism need stories of Black women and other 'women of Color' not only as victims, but also as survivors, as strong and loving, as divine, and that Daly has not included those stories, even though they are (sparsely) available. Daly writes of female genital mutilation in Africa, but says nothing of the goddesses of the Yoruban pantheon, 'the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan'.⁶³ This omission, Lorde says, contributes to the disappearing or erasure of Black women's history and mythology and to the associated continuing oppression of 'women of Color'. It seems to her that Daly has assumed that positive imagery that is white and Eurocentric is enough to offer as counter-imagery to various global examples of gynocide and atrocities against women. It is the case, I have found, that in *Gyn/Ecology* Daly writes of Amazons but without reference to any specific tradition whether African, Asian, South American or otherwise,⁶⁴ and mentions (in one sentence) Spider Woman of the Hopi, Isis of the Egyptians, and Ishtar of the Babylonians.⁶⁵ Otherwise, Daly refers almost exclusively to Greek myth including the Furies, Arachne, Cassandra, the Harpies, Scylla and Charybdis, and Athena.

Lorde thinks that all women need to reconnect with that which is dark and female within - the 'Black mother', ourselves as poets - and that Daly has missed an opportunity to assist this. It is Lorde's assessment that, by disregarding not only 'noneuropean' traditions but also the 'Black mother' of/in us all, Daly fails to challenge racism and leaves white women in the dominant rôle and Black women and other 'women of Color' as subordinates. Such a failure is unacceptable to Lorde.

⁶²Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 70.

⁶³Ibid., p 67.

⁶⁴Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, throughout.

⁶⁵Ibid., p 403.

She feels very disappointed that Daly, like herself a radical Lesbian feminist, should seem to participate in the reinforcing of old superior/inferior patterns. Lorde tries hard to make her critique not an attack but a creative connection based in similarity and unmistakably honest about difference.

On my own first reading of this 'Open Letter', I found myself thinking, 'How can Audre expect Mary to know everything about everything?'. Other women have told me that their response was, 'Are we never to be able to discuss women or sexism without qualifying our comments according to race, geography, sexual choices, and any number of other factors?' I imagine that, in reply, Lorde might again quote Simone de Beauvoir: 'It is in the recognition of the genuine conditions of our lives that we gain the strength to act and our motivation for change.'⁶⁶ I say this because Lorde believed that the 'genuine conditions' of her and Daly's lives - in the urban northeast USA at the end of the 1970s - included fierce racism and its tensions, hatred, and violence; and that if Daly had really recognised this she would have found the motivation and strength to write not only of Greek legend and myth but also of African and other 'noneuropean' traditions of women's beauty, bravery, resistance, and divinity. She challenges each of us to decide for ourselves whether and in what ways this is the case for us, here and now.

Another example of Lorde's thought on difference pertains to a poetry reading tour that she did in 1985. In a journal entry later published in *A Burst of Light* she wrote that 'a group of white Australian women writers invited [her] to give the keynote address on "The Language of Difference" at a Women's Writing Conference held in Melbourne as part of the 150-year celebration of the founding of the State of Victoria'.⁶⁷ To those Australian women she explained the difficulties that she had had in preparing her talk, firstly because English is not a language that has been developed to express *women's* experience. I presume that this would have been a problem whenever she was writing or composing speeches, not just on this occasion, but that she referred to it because it identified something that she and her audience shared. Secondly, however, she said that even this problem that they had in common pointed to their difference, because of other aspects of their backgrounds and experience. Lorde explained that as a 'woman of Color' she shared 'common cause with [her] Black sisters of Australia, the Aboriginal women of [the land on which the conference was held] who were raped of their history and their children

⁶⁶Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 117; *Sister Outsider*, p 113.

⁶⁷Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, pp 69-70.

and their culture by a genocidal conquest'.⁶⁸ Lorde asked her audience to shift their attention from her, an itinerant Black American, to the indigenous Wurundjeri women, as it was from listening to them that the white women might learn about 'the true language of difference' and its use. She asserted that she was not trying to make the white Australian women feel guilty, but to encourage them to 'learn to hear and to feel' the 'haunting and brave and sad' voices of 'the daughters of those indigenous peoples of Australia with whom [the white women shared] a destiny'.⁶⁹ Precisely because of their shared destiny with one another, the white and the Black women had to scrutinise that which made them different, in order for a creative path to be found across their difference and toward a better, a more just, future.

As we have seen, Lorde asks us to think of difference as an arena of creative opportunity. If you and I are clear about who we are and where we are standing (our selves and our situations, which together make up the 'genuine conditions of our lives'), then our mutual telling delineates the space between us, space that both separates and connects us. It is across this space of our difference that Lorde anticipates our making bridges, our sending sparks that arc and release fresh energy. These are the directions that she hopes we will take in replacing hierarchical dualism. She asks us to 'recognize, reclaim and define [our] differences', and to devise 'patterns for relating *across our human differences as equals*'.⁷⁰ The patterns that we create as and with equals are the tools that are not 'the master's' - the master knowing (or choosing) only how to use inequality, to use the power differentials of the superior/inferior paradigm. Her pithy statement that, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', continues: 'They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.'⁷¹ With the majority of feminists, Lorde does not favour an increased investment in the status quo or 'a bigger piece of the pie'. It is rather divestment and 'a whole new recipe' that she urges us to envision and enact.

Lorde's legacy includes a number of projects 'among equals' which she participated in and inspired, including New York City's Lesbian Herstory Archives, the international activist group Sisterhood in Support of Sisters in South Africa, and Hunter College Women's Poetry Center which was named after her - the Audre

⁶⁸Ibid., pp 70-1.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp 72, 71.

⁷⁰Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 115. My emphasis.

⁷¹Ibid., p 112.

Lorde Women's Poetry Center - at its dedication in 1985.⁷² She was also committed to making her life partnership with Frances Clayton one which she could describe as 'a nonsexist relationship, one in which this society's pseudo-natural assumptions of ruler/ruled are being challenged'.⁷³ She wrote:

These assumptions ... are being questioned because Frances and I, often painfully and with varying degrees of success, attempt to evaluate and measure over and over again our feelings concerning power, our own and others'. And we explore with care those areas concerning how it is used and expressed between us and between us and the children, openly and otherwise. A good part of our biweekly family meetings are devoted to this exploration.

As parents, Frances and I have given [their son] Jonathan our love, our openness, and our dreams to help form his visions. Most importantly, as the son of lesbians, he has had an invaluable model - not only of a relationship - but of relating.⁷⁴

The idea - the 'invaluable model' - is that of honestly scrutinizing our selves and our situations, assessing and reassessing the power and power differentials in our relating, and imagining and bringing forth plans and actions that contribute to 'making our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible'.⁷⁵ Lorde stresses that this model of treating one another as equals requires time and energy. It is not an easy option. However, the rewards may include survival itself, that is, the possibility of having a future - which the unchecked march of hierarchical dualism and its destructive and exploitative 'power over' could deny - and an increasing richness of delight in living.

We turn now in our discussion of Lorde and ethics to a consideration of certain values that she wishes to promote. Three of her most highly regarded and commended principles of conduct we have already mentioned. The first is a constellation of practices involved in treating oneself as 'physically and emotionally real',⁷⁶ aspects of which she variously calls self-referencing, self-scrutiny, self-direction, self-actualization, self-possession, and the 'living of a self-considered life'. This, she says, is where revolution begins: with the unsentimental tracing back to

⁷²See J. Gomez, 'Introduction' to Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (London: Pandora: Harper Collins, 1996), p xi; Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, pp 78, 77.

⁷³Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 79.

⁷⁴Ibid. My elision.

⁷⁵Ibid., p 55.

⁷⁶Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 57.

their sources of the selves that we have come and are coming to be.⁷⁷ Self-understanding and honesty are essential to our armoury as we battle for survival and quality of life. The second principle of conduct is not unrelated. It involves giving credence and scope to our imagining, to our dreams. For her, our visions help to draw us forward toward a better world, because they form and re-form our knowledge of what is or may be possible. Everyone carries within them not only their share of chaos and confusion, but a chance to make out of their nightmares and their dreams something creative, some 'erotic' (loving and com/passionate) impetus or fuel, some voice as yet unheard, some poetry, some picture of change for the better. Our imagination helps us to be clear about what we hope to achieve, and the manners in which we wish to pursue our aims. This clarity is part of the bedrock of effective coalition. One might call these two values 'self-consciousness', and 'vision'. Thirdly, there is, as we have described on the preceding page, the drive toward greater mutuality, equality in partnerships, and the creative use of difference.

Other than these, only a few values or principles are explicitly promoted by Lorde. She does highlight the need for accountability. Whatever our feelings and experiences may be, she asks us to be accountable for the ways that we respond to them. 'We must', she says, 'observe the implications of our lives.' Our self-scrutiny should give us the kind of information that we need in order to explain our actions - and to move toward growth and change.⁷⁸ She does expect that her audience wishes to promote social change, notably the dismantling of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, elitism, classism, and homophobia, as well as other destructive hierarchical dualisms. She repeatedly explains the importance and urgency of this work, using down-to-earth examples like the shooting of Black children, the lack of educational opportunities for the poor, and the inadequate health care provision for Black women. Greed and a profit-based economy also are targeted by her: she prefers to hope that human need - which is tied in with an ecological awareness - may come to be a more primary consideration than greed. She says, again echoing Simone de Beauvoir, that as a result of piecing together 'an accurate picture of the world', we will gain our 'most effective weapons for survival and growth as well as [our] motivation for social change'.⁷⁹ Such 'clearseeing' - if I may use the Buddhist term employed by Alice Walker - the world around us (and our part in it) opens out before us our options and incites us to action. Lorde does not expect complacency, but courage. She writes that 'the future belongs to' those of us who are 'fashioning it

⁷⁷Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 14; *The Cancer Journals*, p 11.

⁷⁸Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, pp 14, 17.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p 41.

with a vision rooted in *human possibility and growth*, a vision that does not shrivel before adversity'.⁸⁰ 'Human possibility and growth' is a key idea here. Lorde is looking toward growth, toward an expansive sense of human possibility. There is so much more that we could do and be, and the materials, the ingredients are all available to us. As has been discussed above, we can make use of anger, pain, fear, and our other passions from the sphere of 'the erotic'. The beauty and drama of nature is all around us, and lend themselves to poetry and other artistic (self-)expression.⁸¹ We have the inheritances of our bodies, of language, of the lives of those survivors on whose shoulders we stand, of the myths, stories, and archetypes that surround us in society and culture.⁸² We can 'use human difference as a springboard for creative change'.⁸³ And we have our visions.

Is Lorde asking for perfection? No. In an article written for other Black women, she specifically says that to expect perfection of our selves or of one another is to buy into an age-old 'charade of isolation and anger and pain'.⁸⁴ She proposes instead that:

We can learn to mother ourselves.

What does that mean for Black women? It means we must establish authority over our own definition, provide an attentive concern and expectation of growth which is the beginning of that acceptance we came to expect only from our mothers. It means that I affirm my own worth by committing myself to my own survival, in my own self and in the self of other Black women. On the other hand, it means that as I learn my worth and genuine possibility, I refuse to settle for anything less than a rigorous pursuit of the possible in myself. It means being able to recognize my successes, and to be tender with myself, even when I fail.⁸⁵

The self-'mothering' that Lorde commends involves both rigor and tenderness, both acceptance and the 'pursuit of the possible'. Her readers are encouraged to be both self-defined, and aware of deep interconnectedness. Although the original intended audience for this message was Black women, we see elsewhere that she applies the

⁸⁰Ibid., p 42. My emphasis.

⁸¹Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 17; *Sister Outsider*, pp 84-5.

⁸²See Lorde, *Zami*, and 'An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich' and 'Open Letter to Mary Daly' in *Sister Outsider*.

⁸³Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 115-6.

⁸⁴Ibid., p 172.

⁸⁵Ibid., p 173.

same principles to everyone.⁸⁶ She asks not for perfection, but that our sights be set on greater wholeness, greater integrity, and what in *The Cancer Journals* she calls 'self-healing'.⁸⁷

Lorde's discussions of integrity raise and respond to at least four important issues, each of which we shall now consider briefly. The first is the concern that the search for integrity is the same as the search for perfection - a goal that is unrealistic or unrealisable and therefore demoralizing (in more than one sense⁸⁸). As we have just seen, however, Lorde uses the concept of integrity as an encouragement, a description of an aspect of our reaching for our best possibilities. Secondly, she writes of being expected by some fellow activists to 'eclipse or deny' certain parts of her identity. She counters:

But this [denial] is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definitions.⁸⁹

For Lorde, our own empowerment is bound up with our striving towards integrity, and it is this power that we use in our activism. Any attempt to 'eclipse' our constituent parts is likely to backfire, to weaken rather than strengthen us, and to diminish our efforts for social change. We make our most complete contribution when we are most wholly involved. Thirdly, in Lorde's cogent interview on sadomasochism, she points out that compartmentalizing and privatizing areas of our experience are practices that are incommensurate with our feminist belief that 'the personal is political'⁹⁰ and with our work toward making 'integrated life choices'.⁹¹ She says plainly:

⁸⁶See, for example, Cornwell, 'I am Black, Woman, and Poet', p 49.

⁸⁷Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, pp 10, 29.

⁸⁸See S. L. Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), pp 212-5.

⁸⁹Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 120-1.

⁹⁰S. Hoagland, in *Lesbian Ethics*, p 318, writes: 'To the best of my knowledge, Carol Hanisch introduced the phrase in her paper "The Personal is Political", in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 1970; reprinted in *Radical Therapist*, ed. The Radical Therapist Collective, produced by Jerome Agel (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), pp. 152-7.'

⁹¹Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 14.

You cannot corral any aspect within your life, divorce its implications, whether it's what you eat for breakfast or how you say goodbye. This is what *integrity* means.⁹²

And again:

As I become more of an integrated individual - as I become more my own human being - I *am* who I *am* in all the things I do. So, teaching, writing, making love - you know, they become less and less separate each day.⁹³

She commends the struggle for a kind of consistency, for the fabric of our lives to be of a piece. Fourthly, she is aware that some people misread what I have called her epistemology of the self, interpreting it as a reinforcement of the 'emotional dark female' as the *other* to the 'rational white male', the intuitive as opposed to the analytic.⁹⁴ She reiterates, however, that, although 'we have been taught to suspect what is deepest in ourselves', we can reclaim this, and reintegrate our feelings with our rational capabilities.⁹⁵ She explains:

I'm not saying that women don't think or analyse. Or that white does not feel. I'm saying that we must never close our eyes to the terror, to the chaos which is Black which is creative which is female which is dark which is rejected which is messy which is ... sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting...⁹⁶

We can, she says, 'learn the lessons of the Black mother in each of us'.⁹⁷ The 'Black mother', for Lorde, is the poet. She is our self taking the raw material of our experiences and transforming it into something that is useful and beautiful, something more whole than that which emotion or rationality alone could produce. The 'Black mother' is a fountainhead of integrity.

We have seen that Lorde's ethics involve the toppling of hierarchical dualism and its replacement with difference used as creative opportunity among equals. She favours such values as self-consciousness, vision, accountability, social change,

⁹²Ibid. Her emphasis.

⁹³Cornwell, 'I am Black, Woman, and Poet', p 46. Her emphasis.

⁹⁴Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 100.

⁹⁵Ibid., p 102.

⁹⁶Ibid., p 101. My elision.

⁹⁷Ibid.

growth and human possibility, and integrity. For her, integrity is about a process of reintegrating feeling, thinking, and acting; about 'moving toward completeness'.⁹⁸ Her discussion of 'mothering ourselves' can be linked with her praise for the 'Black mother' within, whom she sees as 'the poet', the orchestra and the orchestrator of our journey toward wholeness. It is with these thoughts of integrity and the 'Black mother' within that we turn to Lorde's consideration of Goddess.

In Lorde's thought we find a strong affirmation of spirituality. She critiques and dismisses the damaging and 'false' forms of religion and religiosity that she finds around her. She moves on to recognise, discover, and celebrate a spirituality identified with the increasing integrity of the 'physically and emotionally real' self; the 'Black mother' and selected African deities; the earth cycles and human community. I shall consider her constructive contributions after a brief discussion of her critiques.

Lorde writes little of the Roman Catholicism practiced by her Afro-Caribbean parents. What she does write indicates on the one hand her respect for the depth of her mother's beliefs and for the comfort that her mother felt when she prayed to the Virgin Mary for help in moments of crisis.⁹⁹ On the other hand, Mary's protection and God's help became increasingly remote and meaningless to the young Lorde, when her prayers for a baby sister remained unanswered, and when her best friend succeeded in committing suicide at the age of sixteen in spite of Lorde's petitionary prayers and promises of good behaviour. In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, a book that Lorde terms her 'biomythography', the teaching nuns, exemplified by her first grade teacher,¹⁰⁰ Sister Mary of Perpetual Help, not only seemed unhappy, but were rigid, authoritarian, and punitive, as well as being racist.¹⁰¹ Her mother performed practices intended to provide protection for her family from curses and evil spirits - whether this was strictly Catholic or a use of voodoo is not clear.¹⁰² Lorde herself adapts and adopts some of her mother's practices, calling on 'the Goddess' or specific Yoruban goddesses for comfort when

⁹⁸Cornwell, 'I am Black, Woman, and Poet', p 49.

⁹⁹Lorde, *Zami*, p 10.

¹⁰⁰First graders are generally 6 years old.

¹⁰¹Lorde, *Zami*, pp 27-31.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p 10.

in pain or despair, and invoking these deities with her request for 'woman's power' and partnership in making a new beginning (leaving evil behind at the crossroads).¹⁰³

We have already observed that Lorde contests the notion that difference must mean hierarchical dualism. Her position strikes at the heart of rigid and authoritarian structures both secular and religious. She quotes one of her students in a course on 'racism and the urban situation', a 'young white cop' who asked/told her: 'Everybody needs someone to look down on, don't they?'¹⁰⁴ Whether this dangerous attitude is enshrined and played out in policing or preaching from a pulpit, it is precisely the perspective that she worked to displace in favour of creative meetings among equals. Lorde is clearly anti-authoritarian, and she cannot support a 'spirituality [which] comes with rigid rules imposed from the outside'.¹⁰⁵ Such a spirituality is some of what she found when she went for treatment at a Rudolf Steiner cancer clinic - which was pioneering herbal and non-invasive treatments - in Switzerland. While accepting that some degree of organization was necessary, she felt almost unbearably stifled by the clinic's regulation that no-one should express any strong emotions (because of Steiner's belief that the expression is neither necessary nor therapeutic), and spiritually 'limited' by Steiner's 'insistence upon the basic rule of a Christian god'.¹⁰⁶ While comfortable with Steiner's central theory of 'the affirmation of self in living',¹⁰⁷ and not averse to disciplines of the kind involved in Tai Chi or Simonton visualization work, both of which she practiced at times,¹⁰⁸ Lorde could not agree with strict emotional or spiritual regimentation. She wrote: 'Most people [at the clinic] seem to feel that rigidity is a bona fide pathway to peace, and every fibre of me rebels against that.'¹⁰⁹ Equally unacceptable to her was what she termed 'false spirituality ... calling itself goddess-worship or "the way"'.¹¹⁰ Her objection here seemed to be against not only prescriptiveness but also 'cheap' superficiality.¹¹¹ It is 'a human need', she said, to both recognise and to share our deep feelings, but it is all too easy to 'misname' and 'distort' both the need and the sharing. One distortion that we have already mentioned is pornography. She also listed, among

¹⁰³Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 109; *Zami*, p 252.

¹⁰⁴Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 97, 98.

¹⁰⁵Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 83.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p 81.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. p 82; ref. in *The Cancer Journals*, p 14, is Carl Simonton's book *Getting Well Again*.

¹⁰⁹Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 90.

¹¹⁰Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 39. My elision.

¹¹¹Ibid.

others, 'mob violence', and 'religion'.¹¹² Similarly, the 'erotic' experience of deep satisfaction, empowerment, and joy 'does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*'.¹¹³ Lorde could not recommend practices involving manipulation, control, or 'power over'. And she was unwilling to reify or to idolise any aspect of spirituality or of woman's living and becoming. (Here she is indeed congruent with Mary Daly.)

We see the reason for Lorde's rebellion against a rigid and non-emotional spirituality when we consider her statements in the essay 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power':

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies deeply in a female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.¹¹⁴

It has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. 'What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a meditating gunrunner?' In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth.¹¹⁵

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false. The bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic - the sensual - those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.¹¹⁶

Now, I have tried to draw up these thoughts schematically, with a plane, and roots, and a bridge. But the diagram did not work, and I was left with a sense more of intertwining or interwoven strands, whether something quite meandering or something like intricate Celtic tracery, I wasn't sure. Perhaps with a third dimension, like interlocking spirals. Clearly, the main elements are feelings - deep, strong, and rich - and their being expressed and shared. Love, 'the erotic', the sensual, the political, the spiritual are all about our passion; our reintegration of body, mind, and

¹¹²Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp 58-9.

¹¹³Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 57. Her emphasis.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p 53.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p 56.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

spirit; our living interconnectedness. As isolating the rational from the emotional leaves one's humanity truncated, tearing the spiritual from the emotional shears the plant from its roots. Self-healing involves taking up and holding together the physical, the emotional, the mental, the spiritual. Furthermore, the process of self-actualization is to be characterised as in some way female; it is to a consideration of this assertion that I now turn.

A helpful discussion of a way in which a self-healing and self-actualizing process may be thought of as female is found in Annette Van Dyke's *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality*. Van Dyke equates Lorde's call for 'integration of that old mind/body split - speaking from intellect as well as emotion' with what Lorde names 'the Black mother within each of us'.¹¹⁷ She notes that by 'the Black mother within' Lorde means 'the power of the erotic'.¹¹⁸ She reminds us that one of Lorde's descriptions of the erotic is: 'an assertion of the life force of women'.¹¹⁹ Van Dyke herself uses the terms 'the female principle' and 'the Goddess'.¹²⁰ In *Zami*, the mythic retelling of her own early life, Lorde traces a journey of self-discovery. Through this journey she embraces her Caribbean matrilineage, remembers women she has loved as family, neighbours, friends, and lovers, and finds within herself a strength, a source of abundance and fruitfulness. She tells her readers that we 'must all become' Afrekete.¹²¹ Afrekete - an ancient African deity - she writes, is the 'youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved' of Yoruba deity 'Mawulisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all'.¹²² In *Zami*, Lorde finds her way to her own power, 'renames herself and becomes the Black goddess', as Ann Louise Keating has said.¹²³ Or, as Van Dyke would have it, Lorde becomes both one devoted to the Goddess (addressing thanks to her for a beautiful moonlit night, for example, as well as focussing on her when trying to come to terms with pain or other strong feelings) and 'one through whom the Goddess speaks - *a becoming of the Goddess*'.¹²⁴ She walks taller, moves more comfortably in her

¹¹⁷A. Van Dyke, *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality*, The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature Series, (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), p 46.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p 47.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., p 9.

¹²¹Lorde, *Zami*, p 255.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³A. Keating, 'Making "our shattered faces whole": The Black Goddess and Audre Lorde's Revision of Patriarchal Myth', in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* (1992; 13:1), p 29.

¹²⁴Van Dyke, *The Search*, p 50. My emphasis.

body, carries with her the generations of love and knowledge out of which she has been formed, and turns open-heartedly to her future. She is thankful, appreciative, radiant, though not unafraid. She takes up her place in life that is creative and continuing.

At the time of her last major prose work, *A Burst of Light* (1988), the holy names used by Lorde are primarily 'Goddess', 'the goddess', and the two named West African deities MawuLisa, and Afrekete. Of the West African deities, or *orisha*, Lorde writes:

[They] are divine, but not omnipotent. They are very powerful, but not always just. They are very involved in human affairs, and offerings must be made to maintain their good wishes.¹²⁵

The *orisha*, then, are part of a world where a great deal is possible, but where limitations apply even to sacred beings, injustice is real, and humans do need to consider how they relate to a bigger picture. For Lorde, MawuLisa, who has in addition to 'mother', aspects as 'father' and as 'mother-father', seems to be of help in times of confusion and despair: one epithet Lorde uses for her is 'saldragon of chaos'.¹²⁶ 'Chaotic', of course, is one of Lorde's descriptions of that rejected and fertile place within that is 'dark and female'. Chaos is the context in which we live, the matrix of our self-knowledge and our creativity. Afrekete, in later myth a son rather than a daughter, is full of laughter and life, playful in a creative sense, joyful. These *orisha*, among others that Lorde mainly writes of in her poetry, have been chosen by her not only to be elements in her own spiritual life, but also to make available namings of the divine that are Black and female. This is done as a corrective to Western religious imagery that is white and male. On one level, Lorde is drawing herself and all women of the African Diaspora into the divine, to boost a sense of pride, well-being, and great possibility. On another level, this boost is for everyone, as the 'Black mother' is for all of us a reintegrating energy - reintegrating emotion with reason, the physical with the spiritual, each self with the other, the human with the rest of nature, and indeed 'the love within and the love without'.¹²⁷

Lorde makes a bold commitment to the Goddess, to her own deepest knowledge and the poetry and vision that comes from it, to a kind of apotheosis. It is

¹²⁵A. Lorde, *The Black Unicorn: Poems* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1978), p 120.

¹²⁶Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 110.

¹²⁷Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 40.

as another Afro-American, Ntozake Shange, has written: 'i found god in myself/ & i loved her/ i loved her fiercely.'¹²⁸ And as Van Dyke has written: 'Becoming the Goddess and loving the Goddess, loving part of the self, is another version of finding the Goddess within the self.'¹²⁹ Asphodel Long, a British scholar, has observed that when women speak of the goddess or goddesses, what is meant is that 'we know our own bodies and minds and spirits are divine', and that 'we know ourselves to be part of ... the universal divine - however that divine is envisaged'.¹³⁰ In this way of thinking, to be gaining 'our own power', to be moving towards self-healing and self-actualization, is also to be seeing ourselves as more fully human and as Goddess. Lorde blurs the human with the divine by 'naming the Black goddess in herself' and 'empowering other women to do so as well',¹³¹ by reminding us of an African tradition of deities who like humans are not omnipotent, and by impressing on her readers that we too must 'jettison the myth of omnipotence ... along with any dangerous illusion of immortality'.¹³² In place of that myth and illusion, she writes of her own experience, that 'another kind of power is growing': 'An open-eyed assessment and appreciation of what I can do and accomplish, using who I am and who I most wish myself to be'.¹³³ We have limitations - even the deities do. The results of our honest self-scrutiny nourish and direct us, as we come to know the 'Black mother within'.

Lorde's blurring of the human and the divine can be seen as one element in an animistic outlook in which everything has spirit, whether the sea, a rock, you or me. In a traditional African animistic view, 'there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and material areas of life'.¹³⁴ Her conflation of the spiritual with 'the erotic', the emotional, and the political can be seen as an expression of this lack of 'formal distinction', as a reinstatement of spirit into our understanding of our selves, our surroundings, our life journeys. Here Goddess is profoundly immanent. And

¹²⁸From Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*. Quoted in D. Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, Signposts in Theology series, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p 111.

¹²⁹Van Dyke, *The Search*, p 64.

¹³⁰A. Long, 'The One or the Many: The Great Goddess Revisited', in *Feminist Theology* (1997; Number 15), p 25. My elision.

¹³¹Keating, 'Making "our shattered faces whole"', p 30.

¹³²Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 133. My elision. See also, *The Cancer Journals*.

¹³³Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, p 134.

¹³⁴From John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. Quoted in Van Dyke, *The Search*, p 43.

Lorde, while clearly reclaiming a certain polytheism, and while urging us all toward our own 'becoming' of Afrekete, sees spirit/goddess all around us.

Not only does Lorde have a special relationship with those orisha that she calls MawuLisa and Afrekete, but she also feels herself to be in communication with the Moon, through dreams, monthly cycles, and a tidal pushing and pulling that she feels in her body (one might say, in her waters).¹³⁵ Other parts of nature too - the sun, the sea, the earth, the sky - she says in the Swiss clinic, 'are helping me save my life'.¹³⁶ Festivals also matter, whether social (Christmas and New Year), Earth-based (solstices and equinoxes), or personal (birthdays). At these times she writes of her memories, her sadness and her hopes, noting that, 'Again, the goddess smiles upon me.'¹³⁷ It is with the recognition of this smile that Lorde observed her holidays, with a sense of living the present out of the past and into the future, with an attention to the changing seasons and the changeless pattern of their cycles.

From at least 1977, Lorde and her household celebrated Kwanza.¹³⁸ This holiday dates back to 1966 when it was developed by Black academic Maulana Karenga. Lorde explains:

The feast of Kwanza [is] the African-american festival of harvest which begins the day after Christmas and lasts for seven days. There are seven principles of Kwanza, one for each day.¹³⁹

Karenga adds:

Kwanzaa [sic] is organized around five fundamental activities common to other African first-fruit celebrations: (1) the ingathering of family, friends, and community; (2) reverence for the creator and creation (including thanksgiving and recommitment to respect the environment and heal the world); (3) commemoration of the past (honoring ancestors, learning lessons and emulating achievements of African history); (4) recommitment to the highest cultural ideals of the African community (for example, truth, justice, respect for people and nature, care for the vulnerable, and respect for elders); and (5) celebration of the "Good of Life" (for example, life, struggle, achievement, family, community, and culture).

¹³⁵Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, pp 91, 95.

¹³⁶Ibid., p 95.

¹³⁷Ibid., p 101.

¹³⁸Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 42.

¹³⁹Ibid.

Kwanzaa is celebrated through rituals, dialogue, narratives, poetry, dancing, singing, drumming and other music, and feasting. A central practice is the lighting of the *mishumaa* (seven candles) of Kwanzaa. A candle is lit each day for each of the *Nguzo Saba* (Seven Principles). These principles are *umoja* (unity); *kujichagulia* (self-determination); *ujima* (collective work and responsibility); *ujamaa* (cooperative economics); *nia* (purpose); *kuumba* (creativity); and *imani* (faith). Kwanzaa ends with a day of assessment on which celebrants raise and answer questions of cultural and moral grounding and consider their worthiness in family, community, and culture.¹⁴⁰

I quote this at length in order to give a sense of this relatively new African-American festival that is both secular and in some ways religious. It takes up the task of building community and culture, as well as encouraging ‘reverence for the creator’ and ecological responsibility. It takes in a broad spectrum of concerns, from appreciation for one’s forebears to self-determination and collectivity. There is an important ritual element, along with opportunities to be creative, and celebratory, and self-assessing. Perhaps here we see an example of the kind of involvement of ‘whole’ and ‘equal’ people that Lorde advocated - eating and dancing, analysing, debating the lessons of history, pondering questions of morality and faith, sharing visions and poetry.

To conclude this chapter, I shall draw together some of the elements of Lorde’s spiritual thought that I consider to be especially helpful. Firstly, Lorde’s spirituality is flexible. In her living of a self-considered life, it seems that spirituality must not be rigid, though it can be rigorous, considered and re-considered. She has moved away from a dogmatic Christian religion into an open space of spiritual fresh air.

Secondly, however, this is not an ahistoric or rootless progress, but one which takes seriously the reality of her/the body as well as emotions, experiences, and the work of the intellect. She claims and proclaims that she is a woman; Black, one-breasted, granddaughter, daughter and mother, Lesbian, poet, fat and half-blind. There is solidity and immediacy to this self-naming and affirmation. She claims, too, the roots and history of her African descent. Her very body is dark, even darker at

¹⁴⁰ ‘Kwanzaa’, *Microsoft® Encarta® 97 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1996 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Italicised words are Swahili.

the knees and elbows. This is not to be overlooked, but celebrated, as is the strength and survival of her black and brown forebears in Granada, and their people before them in Africa.

Thirdly, Lorde offers and reminds us of positive images and models of Black women, from the 'Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior women of Dan',¹⁴¹ to Harriet Tubman (c. 1820-1913), born into slavery in Maryland USA, most well-known as a guide on the Underground Railway, a clandestine route to freedom in the northern states and Canada prior to the Emancipation Proclamation; and 'the present-day Sisterhood of the Good Death, a community of old women in Brazil who, as escaped slaves, provided escape and refuge for other enslaved women, and who now care for each other'.¹⁴² These are models for everyone of the 'sharing of power' and of 'closeness, mutual care and support'.¹⁴³

Fourthly, the positive images extend also to archetypes and divinities. In *The Black Unicorn: Poems* she includes perhaps six orisha (out of a possible six hundred) - it is difficult to specify a number, as most have more than one name or tradition (or sex). They people her poems of both Africa and New York - together with human beings and aspects of the landscape such as pebbles, sand, huts, plants, snakes, skyscrapers, pavement. In later writing, she tells us more of her own chosen deities MawuLisa and Afrekete. She urges us all to 'become' Afrekete, lively daughter goddess who knows and embraces her own power, the 'Black mother within'. This is a gift not only for Black women, but for everyone. Furthermore, one might interpret Lorde as saying that each of us should be free to choose, as she has done, the goddess or god of our own becoming.

Fifthly, Lorde commends to us a life project that has grit and depth. She is not advising any surface or cosmetic adjustments. She describes the self-scrutiny through which we become self-directed - or autonomous as opposed to heteronomous - as *unsentimental*. This is an exercise in honesty, not in self-congratulation and easy complacency. We are encouraged to face up to our nightmares, pain, rage, frustration, confusion, angst, prejudices, needs, desires, hopes, not forgetting beauty and joy. We have limitations - even the population of her pantheon is not omnipotent - as well as marvellous possibilities. There are deities who personify persistence where there is poverty and disease, where maggots eat at rotting flesh, as well as

¹⁴¹Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 67.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, p 151.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*

those fragrant with flowers in their hair. Struggling is an ongoing part of living, and increasing wholeness is a wonderful and ongoing reward.

Sixthly, the notion of 'difference' that Lorde describes is very useful. This difference characterises our inner 'myriad selves', and it names the diversity and multiplicity that we see all around us, from multicultural societies to countless species to infinitely unique snowflakes. Difference, paradoxically, is something that everyone has in common. A task for the individual is to recognise and integrate her or his interior difference, to move from fragmentation and compartmentalisation toward integrity. A task for those who have a wish and/or a need to live or work together is to communicate their selves honestly, in order to identify what is shared and what is not, and from this point of clarity to devise paths toward a mutually held vision. Her analysis of difference generates suggested routes toward greater wholeness and toward communal activism. To say that difference is thoroughgoing is also to say that creative opportunity is everywhere. We do not need hierarchical dualism or heteronomy or revelation in order to move toward greater justice in the world - the materials are here with us now, if we have the will to spark and enact new combinations of what we already know.¹⁴⁴

Seventhly, it makes sense that Lorde, who sees diversity as fundamental to our experience and to what is, should adopt or return to a kind of polytheism. The sacred too is various. Also, polytheism and animism have often existed together. If the mountain and the waterbuffalo have spirits, it is not a big step toward giving the spirits names and personae. 'The *Orisha*', Lorde writes, 'are the goddesses and gods - divine personifications - of the Yoruba peoples of Western Nigeria.'¹⁴⁵ They are deities, and in human form. Perhaps when the holy and the mundane are not seen as mutually exclusive categories, it is not so difficult to think in terms of apotheosis. Perhaps this type of anthropomorphic theology can feed or support a drive toward perfection, healing, the best possible. There may be dangers of megalomania or self-aggrandizement, but Lorde's vision is based on nothing less than searing self-analysis teamed with a commitment to regarding others as 'equals-across-difference' and a passion for concerted activism. She knows that some people choose greed and domination, but hopes that many more are working toward greater integrity, 'growth and change'. Without these, she says, we have 'no future'.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴See *ibid.*, pp 38-9.

¹⁴⁵Lorde, *The Black Unicorn*, p 120.

¹⁴⁶Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, pp 15-6.

Eighthly, Lorde puts forward the idea that 'Africanness' has not yet been given the opportunity to be involved in 'the socio-political consciousness of the world'.¹⁴⁷ She asks her audience to begin to entertain this possibility, to think what such an involvement might mean. It might mean a renewal of interest in animism and its ecological ethos, or of polytheism and its celebration of diversity. And it might mean, as Lorde hoped, a taking up of 'the African way of perceiving life, as experience to be lived rather than as problem to be solved'.¹⁴⁸ We may wish to emulate the Amazon warriors in their strength, the Afro-Brazilians in their mutual caring, Harriet Tubman in her freedom-fighting - and we may learn to do any of these or other things like Lorde's archetypal Africans, open to life's experiences rather than aiming to 'have dominion' over everything we see.

And lastly, Lorde is a visionary. She says that we must pay attention to our dreams and our visions. For me to put together a toolkit that does not replicate 'the master's', it helps me to have an idea of what I am trying to build. And in order to work together for social change, she affirms, we have to be able to picture the kind of world in which we would like to live. Otherwise, we may find ourselves working at cross purposes. The visions, which come from deep within us and from the creative sparks across the interspaces of difference, will alter and develop. They will also encourage us and draw us toward a future, helping to shape our method and means along the way. Some critics dismiss what they call her 'utopianism' and mythmaking,¹⁴⁹ but for me it is a tonic.

Audre Lorde's worldview, then offers us belief in a self that is 'physically and emotionally real'.¹⁵⁰ She stresses the importance of self-consciousness, self-direction, and self-healing especially for the disenfranchised - women, Blacks, Lesbians, the poor - but also for everyone. Humanity has the opportunity to evolve

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p 37-8.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p 116.

¹⁴⁹See C. Clarke, 'Living the Texts Out: Lesbians and the Uses of Black Women's Traditions', in *Theorizing Black Feminism: the Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, S. M. James and A. P. A. Busia (Eds.), (London: Routledge, 1993); N. Hastie, 'Lesbian Bibliomythography', in *Outwrite: Lesbianism and Popular Culture*, Gabriele Griffin (Ed), (London: Pluto Press, 1993); B. Zimmerman, 'The Politics of Transliteration: Lesbian Personal Narratives', in *The Lesbian Issue: Essays From Signs*, E. B. Freedman, B. C. Gelpi, S. L. Johnson, and K. M. Weston (Eds), (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

¹⁵⁰Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p 57.

toward justice and integrity, if we recognise our interrelatedness with our surroundings and with one another, and if we can learn to touch our own power by listening to the 'Black mother' within and expressing our deep knowledge, whether of fear, anger, pain, or joy. As Nancy K. Bereano has written, 'Lorde asks no more of us than she does of herself: that we pay attention to those voices we have been taught to distrust, that we articulate what they teach us, [and] that we act upon what we know'.¹⁵¹ Lorde's understanding of difference tells us that some of those voices will be from our own internal 'myriad selves', and some from others with whom we share one or another aspect of living on this planet. We can lay claim to our experience of hope, love, completion, and wholeness, and use this 'feminist Eros'¹⁵² as our guide to spirituality, to our own 'becoming of the Goddess'.¹⁵³ MawuLisa, the Moon, Afrekete, and the Amazons gave comfort, meaning and inspiration to Lorde. She encourages us to envision and to name the divine in and for ourselves, remembering too our ancestors whose life we carry on, and our descendants for whom we aim to create life 'richer and more possible'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹'Introduction' to Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 11.

¹⁵²Trask, *Eros and Power*, pp 159-62.

¹⁵³Van Dyke, *The Search*, p 50.

¹⁵⁴Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 55.

Chapter 4

Sarah Lucia Hoagland

Sarah Lucia Hoagland is an ethicist. Unlike Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, she does not commend any kind of theism. She does, however, comment on spiritual matters, and incorporate into her thought a visionary and re-mythologising strand. In this chapter, I shall address primarily her work on 'Lesbian Ethics', the name she gives to her project of identifying and promoting those values which she has found among her fellow Lesbians and which she believes may encourage Lesbian wholeness and community. After noting brief biographical information, I shall discuss Hoagland's starting place, which is her Lesbianism and separatism. I shall then consider her work under the three categories of self, ethics, and 'Goddess'.

Sarah Lucia Hoagland is a white, middle-class US American who was born in 1945. She came out as a Lesbian in 1975. Based in Chicago, she has been teaching at Northeastern Illinois University since 1977. She has also lived in Chile, Panama, France, and England. As a philosopher, her interest is in epistemology as well as ethics. Her book, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value*, is a landmark in its field.¹ She has articles forthcoming on feminist rereadings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and is co-editing a volume on Mary Daly.

I turn now to a consideration of what Hoagland means when she speaks of Lesbianism. Marilyn Frye quotes an early paper by Hoagland:²

In the conceptual schemes of phallogracies there is no category of woman-identified-woman, woman-loving-woman or woman-centered-woman; that is, there is no such thing as a lesbian. This puts a lesbian in the interesting and peculiar position of being something that doesn't exist, and this position is a singular vantage point.

It affords her a certain freedom from constraints of the conceptual system.

Lesbians can therefore undertake kinds of criticism and description, and kinds of intellectual invention, hitherto unimagined.³

¹S. Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988).

²Hoagland's 1978 paper was 'Lesbian Epistemology'. Frye's essay is 'To Be and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality', in Frye's *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983).

³Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, p152.

For Hoagland, then, a Lesbian can be described as a 'woman-identified-woman, woman-loving-woman or woman-centered-woman'.

Frye notes that when she (Frye) looks for a dictionary definition that reflects this description, what she discovers instead is erasure, or a 'remarkable feat of silence'.⁴ I can follow the trail in my own *Collins Concise*:⁵ 'lesbians' are 'female homosexuals', 'homosexuals' are 'sexually attracted' to members of their own sex, 'sex' (as in 'sexually attracted') is 'coitus', 'coitus' is the insertion of 'the male's erect penis' into 'the female's vagina'. Ergo, to be a Lesbian you must be female and have a penis - a conclusion that generally would be considered to be nonsense, current queer theory notwithstanding. Furthermore, self-identity, loving, and centeredness are absent from the dictionary's 'lesbian', leaving Hoagland's 'woman-identified-woman, woman-loving-woman or woman-centered-woman' doubly non-existent, having neither body nor mind.

Frye wonders why it is that 'lesbians are outside the conceptual scheme'. She suggests that the purpose of this exclusion is 'the maintenance of phallographic reality'.⁶ In male-dominated culture, all women are to be invisible, supporting, and in the background. Men must hold the foreground.⁷ However, 'lesbians are woman-seers', and as such must be disallowed if women are to be neither perceived nor perceivers.⁸ Hoagland agrees with Frye's explanation and uses it to ground or anchor her own proposals for new conceptual schemes, new reality, Lesbian reality. Lesbians as outsiders can describe and critique the prevailing system, and, more importantly, imagine and invent that which has been closed out of it: Lesbians, Lesbianism and Lesbian values.

In *For Lesbians Only*, Hoagland states that 'perhaps the most important aspect of *separatism* for [her is] its focus on lesbians (or women) and a creation of lesbian meaning, lesbian reality'.⁹ Lesbian meaning and reality are created when

⁴Ibid., p 160.

⁵P. Hanks (Ed.), *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition, (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1990).

⁶Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, pp 172-173.

⁷'Background/foreground' terminology is used by Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978). Daly, p 2, attributes the terms to Denise Connors.

⁸Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, p 172-173.

⁹S. Hoagland and J. Penelope (Eds.), *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*

Lesbians 'withdraw their focus from the dominant culture's romance with men and their values',¹⁰ and refocus on ourselves and one another, woman-to-woman. Hoagland's separatism consists in such withdrawal and refocussing among 'lesbians (or women)'. Lesbianism is being created; it is a work in progress. Separatism is a way to move it forward, a repositioning which opens up a space in which it can begin and continue to flourish. This individual and mutual refocusing of attention toward and among the diverse like-minded, is precisely the project that Hoagland wishes to encourage in her writing on ethics.

At the heart of Hoagland's work is her separatist vision. While her critiques of 'male-stream' ethics and many of the details of the 'new value' that she wishes to commend will be familiar to those aware of developments over the past 20 years of feminist ethics, her separatism will sound a distinctive note.¹¹ It is not the case that she is alone in her separatism or separatist affinities, for they are shared by philosophers from Mary Daly to Joyce Trebilcot, Julia Penelope, and Marilyn Frye. However, it is the case that this vision sets her apart from Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and many other womanists and Lesbian feminists.

Many women find themselves puzzled by separatism. One such person is Lesbian theorist Annette Van Dyke, whose thought I have found helpful in my consideration of Hoagland's work. Van Dyke writes: 'It is difficult to imagine how [the] separateness of women can in itself change the world'.¹² She can only picture that it could be 'a step' toward change.¹³ However, because Lesbian separatism is important in the work of Sonia Johnson and Mary Daly, whose 'woman-centered spirituality' Van Dyke wishes to consider, she attempts to explain why these two (and other) white US Lesbians might choose separatism and why Lesbians of colour might not. She suggests five factors. One is that white Lesbians may have little desire to find common cause with white men because white men are generally seen

(London: Onlywomen Press, 1988), p 10. My emphasis. This comes from the book's introduction, written by Hoagland, dated '1984 and 1987'.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Regarding the term 'male-stream', see Mary O'Brien's *The Politics of Reproduction* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). Cited in Carter Heyward's 'Is a Self-Respecting Christian Woman an Oxymoron?' in A. Thatcher and E. Stuart (Eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), p 82.

¹²A. Van Dyke, *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality*, The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature Series, (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), p 141.

¹³Ibid.

as the worst offenders in creating and maintaining patriarchy. White Lesbians, wishing to disentangle themselves from male power and power-structures, see it as more important to unite with other Lesbians than with white men.¹⁴ A second factor in white Lesbians choosing separatism is that Euro-Americans cannot call on our own recent traditions of societies in which 'women's power was balanced with men's power'.¹⁵ Certainly this situation - the lack of remembered woman-centered traditions - is one that Hoagland addresses in her work, as we shall see when we discuss her concept 'amazoning'.

Thirdly, and in contrast, among women of colour, including Native Americans, women-centered and gender-balanced traditions are still within living memory and therefore more accessible.¹⁶ Fourth, Lesbians of colour are less likely to see 'all Lesbians' as a safe or empowering community because they have experienced racist oppression from white Lesbians.¹⁷ And fifth, Lesbians of colour have shared the experience of racist oppression with other people of colour and so may feel a connectedness to them that white Lesbians may not feel with any men.¹⁸ Audre Lorde is a notable example of this contrast. A Black Lesbian and not a separatist, she writes of the women-centered traditions of her mother's home island, Carriacou. She challenges the racism of white Lesbians by speaking of her pain, anger and disappointment. And she tells of the toll that racism took on both of her parents, on Native Americans and the Wurundjeri of Aboriginal Australia, and on her Afro-American and Afro-European students, among so many others. Her vision of a better life is quite inclusive, and as much for her son as her daughter.

As a separatist, Hoagland makes a clear choice to recognise and affirm Lesbians '(or women)' and Lesbian alternatives to living by patriarchal values. In 'An Invitation', a lyrical piece, she writes:

Let me walk here with you now. This can be our centre. We can fight here and love and plot and weave and risk and hurt and get it wrong and laugh. Here, among Lesbians. We need not abide by all that develops. But it is to this space we can refer. Here we can focus. As Lesbians.

¹⁴Ibid., p 160.

¹⁵Ibid., p 141.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p 141.

¹⁸Ibid., p 160.

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I walk here, focus my attention here, grow here. And I find that in choosing this my source opens, my power develops, a reality emerges.¹⁹

Hoagland is evoking not a utopian fortress with strict rules and requirements, but a living out of casting one's lot with the Lesbians. Neither is she taking pains to dismantle the old male supremacist stronghold stone by stone; she is engaged instead with living in and towards Lesbian reality. While saying no to what she calls (as I shall explain) 'heterosexuality', which must be recognised as an oppressive context and a paradigmatic limiting factor, this sort of yes-saying separatist puts her energy into finding and creating meaning with and among Lesbians. In this separatist space she can bring alive her desire for 'new value' as chosen and enacted by ordinary Lesbians including herself.

Does Hoagland's separatism mean that her 'Lesbian Ethics' are for no-one else besides Lesbians '(or women)'? And what does this phrase '(or women)' indicate? In answer to the first question, I note that Hoagland explains that her work draws on her own experiences as a Lesbian among Lesbians. Her intentions are to discuss her findings and her own wishes for 'new value', and to suggest to other Lesbians courses of action - specifically ethics - that may help them to develop agency and wholeness. She hopes to foster a worldview that is significantly different from that which holds sway in Western patriarchy. Regarding the genesis of her book, *Lesbian Ethics*, she writes:

I did not begin with traditional Anglo-European ethics, because I felt that if I started there, I would never get out of its conceptual framework. Instead, I focused on what was actually going on in lesbian communities. And I found that at this point in time, at least, lesbian existence creates certain conceptual possibilities that can effect conceptual shifts and transform consciousness.²⁰

Hoagland here uses a footnote to draw a parallel with the work of Christian ethicist Katie G. Cannon in *Black Womanist Ethics*.²¹ She quotes from Cannon:

¹⁹S. Hoagland, 'An Invitation' (1983), in Hoagland and Penelope (Eds.), *For Lesbians Only*, p 215.

²⁰S. Hoagland, 'Why Lesbian Ethics?' in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, Fall 1992, Volume 7, Number 4, p 195.

²¹K. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

The focus of this dissertation is to show how Black women live out a moral wisdom in their real-lived context that does not appeal to the fixed rules or absolute principles of the white-oriented, male-structured society. Black women's analysis and appraisal of what is right or wrong and good or bad develops out of the various coping mechanisms related to the conditions of their own cultural circumstances. In the face of this, Black women have justly regarded survival against tyrannical systems of triple oppression as a true sphere of moral life.²²

Hoagland completes the footnote:

One might note that Cannon's point is not about how Black women reason differently but about how different circumstances yield different contexts for the development and meaning of moral value.²³

One aspect of Cannon's project that is important to Hoagland is that she does not start from the traditional rules of the white male tradition, but from the life of her own particular community and the lives of its people, with regard for its and their culture and survival. One's specific circumstances and strategies for survival are key to understanding and developing morality. Another important aspect is that Cannon's work is about generating or at least naming a new framework, a new world view, and new value. Hoagland is pleased that a plurality of counter-hegemonic discourses are being developed from a range of sources, and she is excited that 'playful "world" travel'²⁴ is becoming increasingly accessible. The more people and communities who 'turn away from the meaning of the oppressor and enact new meaning' the more chance we have for better living and better worlds.²⁵ So, while she welcomes parallel projects, she makes no attempt to legislate or regulate the choices of those who are not Lesbians - or indeed of those who are. She describes a world as she sees it, and writes of her own desire with her book's repeated refrain, 'I want new value.'. She addresses a Lesbian audience, choosing to be part of what she sees as the creation of Lesbian meaning, but her separatism is not expressed through,

²²From Cannon, p 4. Quoted in Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 204.

²³Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 204.

²⁴María Lugones' concept, explained in the next section of this chapter. See also Lugones' 'Playfulness: World Travelling, and Loving Perception', in *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, Jeffner Allen (Ed.), (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

²⁵S. Hoagland, 'Existential Freedom and Political Change', in *Re-reading the Canon: Sartre*, Julian Murphy (Ed.), (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, forthcoming).

say, publishing privately for Lesbians only. Rather, her work is available for those who are interested, to apply or not to apply.²⁶ Hoagland is non-directive in her presentation and does not invoke the categorical imperative - which is, as my mother used to say, What if everybody did that? It may be that values which are enacted among and of benefit to Lesbians are already or could be enacted among and of benefit to others. It seems to me that her work holds up well to such scrutiny. Nonetheless, Hoagland's approach is non-inclusive, or, one might say, inclusive of and for those who choose to adopt it.

I turn now to the question of the meaning of Hoagland's phrase 'lesbians (or women)'. As reviewer Barbara Ruth has noted,²⁷ Hoagland's word usage is inconsistent, in that sometimes she includes Lesbians in the category of women, and at other times she takes great care to distinguish between Lesbians and women. In separating the two ideas, Hoagland is drawing on Monique Wittig, who asserts 'that lesbians are not women', of course 'following Simone de Beauvoir's perception that we are not born women'.²⁸ Further, Hoagland characterizes 'the category "woman"' as one that is so steeped in 'heterosexualist' norms of dominance and submission that it cannot be rescued or reclaimed -- unlike 'the category "lesbian"', which she sees as full of possibilities.²⁹ Evidently, a woman/Lesbian distinction is a grey area in her thought. This may be related to two things, one being her coming out as a Lesbian in the year that she turned 30, having lived as a feminist woman prior to making this change. Her experience (and that of so many others) tells her that those who identify as women may later identify as Lesbians. Another reason why her Lesbian/woman distinction may remain vague is her choice to write about what Lesbian living might bring into being; about existential choice and the creation of meaning. What has been called her 'refusal to define "lesbian" or to police the borders of lesbian community' gives us a porous boundary.³⁰ Her approach to questions of meaning,

²⁶Here I am purposely evoking two articles known to Hoagland: Joyce Trebilcot's 'Dyke Methods', available in her monograph, *Dyke Ideas: Process, Politics, Daily Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp 45-57, and in Jeffner Allen (Ed.), *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp 15-29; and an article mentioned at the end of 'Dyke Methods' by Trebilcot, which is Sally Miller Gearhart's 'The Womanization of Rhetoric', in *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979), pp 195-201.

²⁷B. Ruth, 'Taking our Lives Seriously (review of Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics*)', *Sinister Wisdom*, Volume 38, Summer/Fall 1989, p 125.

²⁸Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 61. See also her 'Why Lesbian Ethics?', p 196.

²⁹See *Lesbian Ethics*, pp 34-9, 68.

³⁰K. Martindale and M. Saunders, 'Realizing Love and Justice: Lesbian Ethics in the Upper and Lower Case', in *Hypatia*, Fall 1992, Volume 7, Number 4, p 156.

following Ludwig Wittgenstein, means that, for her, 'language and perceptual judgment are a matter of concensus' (and, in patriarchy, coercion).³¹ She writes that, 'the work of feminist epistemologists is to undermine hegemonic discourses by helping to establish counter discourses' and 'resistant logics'.³² Her quest, she says is 'to connect with women and lesbians and make meanings.'³³ Lesbians and feminist women can enact, separately and together and with overlapping, ways of speaking and being that do not feed and shore up 'heterosexualism'.

We must turn, then, to 'heterosexualism' and its definition. 'Heterosexualism' is one of the words that Hoagland has coined in order to speak more precisely about her ideas. It is her contribution to the group of words used by feminists to name the cultural inheritance to which we object. The specific term used depends largely on the user's theory of how the problem came about, how it is maintained, and how it may be eradicated. Thus some feminists speak of androcentrism, and wish to replace it with gynocentrism or 'gylandry'.³⁴ Others speak of phallogocentrism, phallogocentricity, phallogocentricism; or of male supremacy, the rule of the fathers, the rule of the brothers; again of heteropatriarchy; or finally of patriarchy. Hoagland writes that her word, heterosexualism, owes to Adrienne Rich's exposition of 'compulsory heterosexuality', Jan Raymond's 'hetero-reality' and 'hetero-relational society', and Julien S. Murphy's 'hetero-economics' (system of exchanging, bartering, buying and selling of women by men).³⁵ Her explanation is as follows:

Understanding heterosexualism involves analyzing the relationship between men and women in which both men and women have a part. Heterosexualism is men dominating and de-skilling women in any of a number of forms, from outright attack to paternalistic care, and women devaluing (of necessity) female bonding as well as finding inherent conflicts between commitment and autonomy and consequently valuing an ethics of dependence. *Heterosexualism is a way of living* (which actual practitioners exhibit to a greater or lesser degree) that normalizes the dominance of one person in a relationship

³¹Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 14.

³²S. Hoagland, 'Making Mistakes, Rendering Nonsense, and Moving Toward Uncertainty' in *Re-reading the Canon: Wittgenstein*, Naomi Scheman (Ed.), (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, forthcoming).

³³Ibid.

³⁴Coined by Riane Eisler in *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987).

³⁵Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 28-29.

and the subordination of another. As a result, it undermines female agency.

What I am calling 'heterosexualism' is not simply a matter of males having procreative sex with females. It is an entire way of living which involves a delicate, though at times indelicate, balance between masculine predation upon and masculine protection of a feminine object of masculine attention. Heterosexualism is a particular economic, political, and emotional relationship between men and women: men must dominate women and women must subordinate themselves to men in any number of ways. As a result, men presume access to women while women remain riveted on men and are unable to sustain a community of women.³⁶

This system and practice of men dominating women and women subordinating themselves to men, and the consequent normalizing of hierarchical dualism and a female 'ethics of dependence', is generally and more loosely referred to by many radical feminists as 'patriarchy'. The term 'patriarchy', however, invites the misapprehension that 'matriarchy' could be that which feminists seek to establish. Although many caricatures would have it so, most feminists including Hoagland do not wish for an inverted hierarchical dualism subordinating men to women. Instead, with Audre Lorde, we seek equality across difference. I am reminded of Jacqueline Zita's phrase, 'a consensus of community will and vision'.³⁷ Zita here refers to Hoagland's understanding of the way in which 'what it is to be "lesbian"' is being developed. 'Heterosexualism', Hoagland's new word for sex-linked institutionalised inequalities, is evidence of her desire to advance a *way of living* - Lesbianism - that she sees evolving consensually among Lesbians and that she thinks may hold benefits for those who choose it. Women may take part in this, and men, she writes in parentheses in a footnote, may learn to 'fit in'.³⁸

Having acquainted ourselves with Hoagland's separatist vision and her concepts of heterosexualism and Lesbianism, we turn now to her consideration of self, ethics, and Goddess - beginning with the self. For her comments on the self, she draws on many sources. Those that I shall highlight are Mary Daly, María Lugones,

³⁶Ibid., p 29. My emphasis.

³⁷J. Zita, 'Male Lesbians and the Postmodern Body', in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, Fall 1992, Volume 7, Number 4, p 119.

³⁸Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 95, footnote s.

and Audre Lorde. Hoagland suggests a concept, 'the self in community', for which she coins another new word, 'autokoenoeny', and I shall conclude my discussion of Hoagland and the self with an explanation of this.

First, in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Mary Daly proposes that a 'basic task' of a feminist is to 'pare away the layers of false selves from the Self' and to burn off 'all that is alienating and confining' or that 'cuts off the flow of the Self's original movement'.³⁹ Without analysing what Daly means by a phrase such as 'the Self's original movement', Hoagland makes reference to this passage, indicating her belief that when 'false Selves' are pared away, women find that we can be strong and capable, and that we are brimming over with possibilities.⁴⁰ Hoagland suggests that the 'inner strength' and 'sense of female agency' that we find draw women together and boost our capacities for imagining non-heterosexual living.⁴¹ She states plainly that 'self' does not imply something 'fixed or unchanging'.⁴² Rather, the paring away is a choice of action to be taken: we act in self-acknowledgement, and to develop our self-understanding and self-awareness. In this way our choices in life will become ever more firmly grounded. This self-awareness includes paying attention to the ways that we are perceived by others, and the ways that others respond to us. This self-acknowledgement embraces both self and context, action and interaction. We become increasingly well informed about which aspects of our selves to nurture, which to let go of, which to leave as they are, which to come back to later. So, from Daly, Hoagland uses the idea of a self that we can dis-cover from under patriarchy's smothering false selves. This self is not fixed or rigid but moving and changing.

Secondly, the work of the philosopher María Lugones has been increasingly important to Hoagland, especially Lugones' concepts of 'playful "world" travelling' and 'plurality of selves'.⁴³ The two ideas are linked in the following way. By 'world' Lugones means (the experience of) a culture, system, or community, such as Hispanic New Mexicans, or Anglo-Americans, or indeed Anglo-American Lesbians.⁴⁴ When someone is 'at home' in more than one such world, Lugones

³⁹M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p 381.

⁴⁰Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 61.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p 286.

⁴³Hoagland, e-mail to the author, 14 December 1997.

⁴⁴See Lugones' 'Playfulness: World Travelling, and Loving Perception'. Lugones explains as follows: 'The shift from being one person [in one 'world'] to being a

describes that person as having or being 'a plurality of selves', or 'a multiplicitious self'. Taking up Hoagland's work, Lugones writes that *each* of one's selves has choices to make based on self-acknowledgement, self-awareness, self-understanding, always taking into account one's context, which includes feedback from other people. At best, one's multiplicitious selves do not dissolve or disappear into each other, nor do they remain insulated, aloof, or split off from each other. They remember each other's memories, communicate and learn from each other.⁴⁵ Hoagland explains:

Lugones argues for [a] notion of multiplicity or plurality [that] concerns the subjectivity of she who enacts selves in different situations -- the maid on the job, the woman who comes home to tell her family about the absurdities she saw in rich people's houses and dispel the awe. This notion of multiplicity is distinct from postmodern fragmentation which results from dominant scripts constructed out of dominant agendas such that when one responds, one becomes fragmented -- as a woman, as a latina, as a worker -- when one is all three.⁴⁶

And on the topic of selves and contexts, selves and others:

Lugones argues [that] interdependency (not a Hegelian objectifying/agonistic dependency, but an interdependency of subjects), being with others, is necessary if we are to remake ourselves into active, creative selves, if we are to (re)construct our agency.⁴⁷

The '(re)construction of our agency', of our ability to act and to make ethical and other choices especially under oppression, the making of our selves as subjects not objects, is of prime importance to Hoagland. Lugones' work has been crucial to her

different person [in a different 'world'] is what I call "travel". [p 170]. She rejects what she calls the 'agonistic playfulness' of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, suggesting instead a creative, 'loving playfulness'. She writes: 'Positively, the playful attitude involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the "worlds" we inhabit playfully. Negatively, playfulness is characterized by uncertainty, lack of self-importance, absence of rules or not taking rules as sacred, a not worrying about competence and a lack of abandonment to a particular construction of oneself, others and one's relation to them.' [p 177] This essay is also in *Hypatia* 2:2 (Summer 1987).

⁴⁵See M. Lugones 'Hispaneando y Lesbiando: On Sarah Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics*', in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 1990, Volume 5, Number 3.

⁴⁶Hoagland, 'Existential Freedom and Political Change'.

⁴⁷Ibid.

development of a concept of self that has plurality built into it and thus has the breadth that is needed for the remaking of our agency.⁴⁸

Thirdly, Audre Lorde is a source for Hoagland's comments on the self. Hoagland refers to Lorde and her challenge to traditional male European philosophy's reason/emotion split. As I noted in the previous chapter, Lorde encourages us to feel our feelings and emotions, and to use our reason to understand these feelings so that they can be shared with others and inform our actions. For Lorde, we are most human and most creative when reason and emotion work together rather than one being puffed up at the expense of the other. Hoagland critiques this view. She praises Lorde's exhortations that we re-integrate our emotional and rational faculties, and her revaluing of the 'life-force of women' as power-from-within. However, Hoagland is totally committed to a concept of self that is relational and interactive, so that to the extent that Lorde speaks of deep feelings existing and finding meaning through *individual and interior* rational processes, she must disagree.⁴⁹ For Hoagland, meanings- even the meanings that we ascribe to our feelings - are always created and developed in community, in society, politically, never by a solitary thinker *ex nihilo*. She writes:

[In 1970s' consciousness-raising groups] we explored our lesbian desire, for example, and through lesbian interaction and political analysis, we changed the meaning of our desire from an illness and source of shame to a source of pride and joy.⁵⁰

This was done, she adds, 'through lesbian engagement and in consideration of our social and political context, not through private introspection'.⁵¹ For Hoagland, there can be no 'individual solution' that will create new meaning and value. Even our self-awareness takes shape communally, relationally.

Hoagland has further criticisms of Lorde's thought on the self. What I have called Lorde's 'epistemology of the self' involves the separating out of feeling and reason as discrete steps in the creation of understanding. This is problematic for Hoagland, who is looking for a more thorough integration of feeling and reason. Hoagland also rejects the use of the word 'erotic' as Lorde uses it to mean our

⁴⁸See M. Lugones, 'On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism' in *Feminist Ethics*, Claudia Card (Ed.), (Lawrence,KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

⁴⁹Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 164-6.

⁵⁰Ibid., p 164.

⁵¹Ibid.

deepest feelings, the well-spring of our life and love. The grounds for her rejection are that we have inherited our notion of *eros* (along with *agape*, *nomos*, and *philia*) from the 'greco-christian tradition' and that we would do better to find our own namings of love, particularly namings that do not have *eros*' strong associations with self-annihilation and death.⁵² Additionally, Hoagland sees not just two (reason and emotions) but many abilities and aspects to be 'healed' within the self.

Our emotions and reasoning as well as our dreams, intuitions, instincts, hesitations, nuestra facultad, observations, humour, psychic awareness, valuations, imaginings - judgements emerging in lesbian community against a background of racist, imperialist, heterosexual culture - are all we have to guide us on our lesbian journey.⁵³

'Wholeness', it seems, will have more scope and complexity than the duality of reason and emotion. Through an appreciation and critique of Lorde, Hoagland further broadens the meaning of the mutable multiplicitous self to include a range of capacities that are not usually brought into play when self is seen as a battleground between reason and emotion.

'Autokoenony' is the new word that Hoagland suggests and uses to name her concept of 'the self in community'.⁵⁴ It comes, she explains, from the Greek '*auto* (self) and *koinonia* (community, or any group whose members have something in common)'. Although she realises that many women are willing to reclaim the word 'autonomy', she rejects this because it means 'self-rule' and she does not want anyone to rule or to control anyone including themselves; because it suggests independence and self-sufficiency and she prefers to think in terms of interdependence and community as the 'ground of be-ing'; and because it suggests that 'connecting and engaging with others limits us' and is somehow about 'self-sacrifice', an idea which she does not want to promote. So she favours the use of her new word. She provides this explanation:

[Autokoenony] involves each of us having a self-conscious sense of ourselves as moral agents in a community of other self-conscious moral agents. An autokoenonous being is one who is aware of her self as one among others, one who makes her decisions in

⁵²Ibid., pp 165-6.

⁵³Ibid., p 196. 'Nuestra facultad' is from Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), pp 38-9.

⁵⁴Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, pp 143-6. This is the reference for the whole paragraph. Hoagland gives a guide to pronunciation: (ô to keen o nee).

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consideration of her limitations as well as in consideration of the agendas and perceptions of others. She does not merge with others, nor does she estrange herself; she *interacts* with others in situations. [emphasis in original]

It is not that we are ‘essentially *defined* in terms of another’, she says, but that we are ‘both separate and connected’. This concept that she calls autokoeny is not an unusual idea in feminist philosophy - see, for example, Daphne Hampson on the ‘centered self in relation’⁵⁵ - but Hoagland thinks that a new word is needed. She also stresses its ethical nature, and it is to ethics that we must now turn.

It is difficult to discuss how to conceive of the self without also discussing the self in some ideal sense, as whole or healthy or good, and thus discussing ethics. Hoagland never fails to mention a context, a situation, a community when speaking of the self. This sense of relationality, too, is the stuff of ethics. We have seen that for her the autokoenyous being develops both her own multiplicitous self-consciousness (self-acknowledgement, self-awareness, self-understanding) in all its abilities and aspects, and her community through her interacting, connecting, and engaging. Selves and communities, selves-in-community, grow or fail, stand or fall, together and interdependently. Hoagland’s ‘Lesbian Ethics’ catalogues and develops choices and meanings that Lesbians make in community. As this is her major project, this section on the category of ethics will be the most substantial of the chapter. In discussing her ethics, I shall consider first Lesbian resistance, then the importance of choice in Hoagland’s thought, and finally a lengthy list in which she summarises her proposals. These proposals culminate in a bid to re-value ‘amazons’, as I shall explain.

The question of how Lesbians and/in Lesbian communities may survive and flourish or live well and ethically is answered by Hoagland in terms of the ethics or values that are chosen and enacted. Resistance, it seems, comes first. I mean this in the sense that I have already mentioned as ‘counter-hegemonic discourses’, i.e. oppression under patriarchy is our common lot, and naming ourselves Lesbian is a fundamental - or as Hoagland says, from Daly, *elemental* - act of refusal or standing against heterosexualist erasure. When we do this we speak of a world that is

⁵⁵See D. Hampson, *After Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1996), pp 106-17.

different from that perpetuated by the 'ruling faction'⁵⁶ which holds 'dominance and submission as [its] norms of behaviour'.⁵⁷ Hoagland is necessarily careful in her claims about the difference of Lesbians. She writes:

I do not claim that lesbians haven't made many of the choices (heterosexual) women have made or that lesbians haven't participated in the consensus of straight thinking or that lesbians have withdrawn from the value of dominance and subordination and the security of established meaning we can find therein. I am not claiming that lesbians have lived under different conceptual or material conditions.⁵⁸

What she *is* claiming is that, by and after naming ourselves outsiders, Lesbians have opened up to and to some extent begun to live out a range of ethical possibilities suitable for our woman-to-woman living. Once we have made our initial choice to resist, 'it is a matter of further choice whether we go on to develop these possibilities'.⁵⁹

Choice itself is a crucial issue in Hoagland's thought. Influenced by the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir and of Jean-Paul Sartre, she stresses the importance of the choices made by each one of us. I shall highlight two of the ways in which Hoagland stresses this importance. First, there is the topic of choice and oppression. For Hoagland, the context of oppression is a material condition that we cannot deny. It is one that shapes our circumstances but does not rob us of the possibilities and responsibilities of choice. She writes that in the past she saw oppression as something that had to be vanquished. Or she saw it as some traditionalists do, as something that provided 'excuses' for people not acting ethically. She now believes that these points of view do not help us in developing our moral agency. Instead, she sees oppression as 'a dimension within which we make our choices, a dimension which involves constructed ignorance, coercion, exploitation, and at times, enslavement'.⁶⁰ Her concern, she writes, 'is with our going on and making choices within this dimension'.⁶¹ Our daily choices and challenges must be made and met, step by step, within this dimension, this framework. It provides some of the 'limits and boundaries' that make up the context

⁵⁶The literal meaning of 'hegemony' (Greek).

⁵⁷Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 68.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., p 212.

⁶¹Ibid.

in which we live. There are other limits and boundaries simply in being human, and in each of us being unique in our experiences, our interests and abilities. Oppression is certainly something that we want to change, but it does not stop us from using and developing our moral agency. We still make choices and these choices do have some kind of impact, some kind of effect. She is keen to encourage us not to be de-moralized by oppression.

Secondly, Hoagland stresses the importance of choice in the creation of Lesbian lives, Lesbian ethics, and Lesbian community. She is not, she says, setting out a new set of principles or 'a rule of right behaviour, but a way of approaching each other'.⁶² 'New value must be chosen, woven, developed, embraced - not enforced.'⁶³ Real change 'depends on us and our choices, not on some utopic [sic] social structure with strict rules we might set up'.⁶⁴ She is not, of course, telling us that it is futile to dream of a better world, but reminding us that if we try to coerce or regulate our way to it, it will not be better at all, just a new version of the old heterosexualism where dominance and submission are the norm. This outspoken separatist is one among many who have made this salient point. We remember too the words of non-separatist Audre Lorde: 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.' One way that Hoagland illustrates this point is to remind us of the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement, when, she says, progress was made not by women deciding what was morally right then taking action, but because - perhaps for the first time or in a new way - women made connections both with others and within themselves and were moved to act.⁶⁵

Another way that she illustrates the importance of change coming from choice rather than coercion or control is by giving an example from 'the modern tradition in anglo-european ethics', which starts, she says, with white male antagonistic 'egoistic strangers and then works to devise a set of values that will get them to "cooperate"'.⁶⁶ She is trying instead to start with people's lived experience and suggest or point out ways in which they might develop their moral agency, their ability to assess situations and take action. She states her intentions thus:

In developing a concept of Lesbian Ethics, my concern is to develop a way of thinking that helps us understand the parameters of our lives

⁶²Ibid., p 128.

⁶³Ibid., p 182.

⁶⁴Ibid., p 291.

⁶⁵Ibid., p 281.

⁶⁶Ibid., p 285.

[i.e. limits and boundaries, our abilities], that encourages us to heal ourselves [i.e. re-integration and integrity, which generate and release our power-from-within], that helps us move toward *new value*, and that keeps our rebellious spirit alive. My concern is with an ethics which functions, not as social control, but to help us develop our integrity, moral agency, and autokoenony.⁶⁷

In order to gain a more detailed picture of Hoagland's proposed 'new value' and what it entails, we turn now to a fuller statement of her 'Lesbian Ethics'. Much of this material is familiar from other philosophers, and some of it we have already explored. In the following passage I have emphasized those words which she uses in an unusual way or which seem to me to require further clarification. My explanation of these new, unusual or idiosyncratically deployed words will continue our discussion. She writes:

I am proposing an ethics

- which recognizes *separation or withdrawal* at any level as a moral option;
- one which has as its prerequisite, not altruism, but self-understanding, which regards *choice*, not as sacrifice, but *as creation*, and which encourages, not vulnerability, but *intimacy*;
- one which recognizes power, not as controlling, but as enabling, which enables neither merging nor estranging but interacting, and so which encourages, *not binding, but engaging*;
- one which integrates or politicizes reasoning and emotion as well as dreaming, psychic faculty, intuition, humor, and imagination;
- one which treats moral agency, not as rising above our boundaries nor as controlling situations, but as acting one among many and as making choices within situations;
- one which has as its central focus, not enforcing rules and social control, but enabling integrity and agency - one which has as its axis, not the antagonism of dominance and subordination, but a form of cooperation held in place by autokoenony.
- Through such an ethics, we can continue to develop self-awareness,
- *intimacy* (deep understanding with a few),
- our ability to *attend*,
- our ability to *withdraw*,
- the cooperation of *intelligibility*,
- our ability to make choices and go on in situations,
- our playful world travel,
- our ability to make *judgements*,
- our *responsiveness*,

⁶⁷Ibid., p 220. My emphasis.

- and our *caring* --
- in short, our lesbian integrity and moral agency.⁶⁸

First, 'separation or withdrawal as a moral option' is an affirmation of Hoagland's separatism, which was discussed at the outset of this chapter. Such a separatist refocusses her attention (away from men and heterosexuality, and) on woman-to-woman living. She withdraws from compliance with what is required of her under patriarchy. On another level, Hoagland suggests that withdrawal may sometimes be an option to be taken among Lesbians. For example, it may be necessary to withdraw from a person or pattern of relating that has become violent or otherwise damaging.⁶⁹ Hoagland distinguishes withdrawal from ostracism, which is about casting out a wrong-doer and is not recommended. In contrast, withdrawal is stepping back in order to increase our understanding, regain depleted energy, and look at other possible ways to proceed.

Secondly, Hoagland proposes that we 'regard choice as creation, not as sacrifice'. An example that she describes is that of two Lesbians who become involved in martial arts and decide to run classes for other Lesbians. These two will have limitations of time, energy and other resources such that they may leave 'opening a bookstore, writing a book, or building a house' to others or until another time.⁷⁰ Hoagland affirms that these two have made positive choices, and created a series of martial arts classes. 'There is an idea floating about', she writes, 'to the effect that if we cannot do everything, if we have to choose some and let other things go, then we are sacrificing something'.⁷¹ Instead, she encourages us to recognise both our limitations and our creative power in the world, generated and expressed through the choices that we make. The emphasis is on what we can and do achieve, not on what is lost, postponed, or left to someone else. For her, what Lesbians are achieving and creating is nothing less than Lesbian meaning, or Lesbianism itself. In pressing this home, she is opting for an ethic that is upbeat and mature - in the sense of owning, learning from, and taking pride in one's choices, decisions, and actions. What I am calling ethical maturity is closely associated with what she means by developing moral agency.

⁶⁸Ibid., p 297. Her punctuation; my heavy dots; my emphasis.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp 228, 268.

⁷⁰Ibid., p 92.

⁷¹Ibid.

Thirdly, 'intimacy, or deep understanding with a few' is favoured over 'vulnerability'. Vulnerability, Hoagland notes, is from the Latin for 'wound', and literally means 'able to be wounded'.⁷² It sets the scene for someone to hurt someone else. Thus, she says, it is tied in with the idea of power-as-control, and with the dynamic of dominance and submission. This is the very dynamic that she has labelled heterosexualist, and not one that she can advocate for Lesbians or as in any way 'new value'. She proposes instead intimacy. By this she means something that usually takes time to develop, and that is not going to happen in large groups or with dozens of people at once. It is usually developed one-to-one, and 'involves deep understanding of another, and another's deep understanding of us.'⁷³ It is built on the participants' self-awareness and self-understanding.

Fourthly, Hoagland wishes to encourage 'not binding, but engaging'. She characterises 'binding' as a kind of (sometimes desperate) clinging together or holding on to one another 'because of an outside threat or internalized fears.'⁷⁴ This is the kind of situation in which we try to control or manipulate one another to secure our own sense of safety - theirs and/or ours. We become dependent on one another instead of being dependable for one another. 'Engaging' is about the choice to interact, to behave as interconnected and interdependent beings, each enabled by her own power and by the feedback and input of her community. Hoagland recognises that there are times when someone is a helper and someone a helpee, but asserts that this need not involve duty, obligation, or anyone 'taking over' from anyone else. It can be about engaging, being mutually involved in developing greater understanding.

Fifthly, Hoagland explains 'attending' in this way.

When you attend me, our channels of communication are open and we are sending and receiving energy. When I attend you, I stretch toward you, I am present to you, I engage with you. I focus my energy on you, my rhythms. By attending one who is in pain, I can help steady her. When she is off center and in crisis, I can help stabilize her nerves and fluctuations, perhaps acting as a beacon or a magnet. When we attend each other, we can create between ourselves an enabling, adepting power.⁷⁵

⁷²Ibid., p 101.

⁷³Ibid., p 112-3.

⁷⁴Ibid., p 156.

⁷⁵Ibid., p 127.

She also points out that there are limits and dangers in attending, such as when someone wants or needs privacy rather than to be attended; when one attending cannot go along with the choices that the one being attended is making, for example, to continue to use alcohol in a certain way; or when one attending becomes swamped by the situation. Attending is an ability that we can practice and improve, though we must expect to make mistakes along the way. This attending is neither about impartiality nor a plan for taking control of messy circumstances. It is about engaging, and enabling or empowering the one whom we are attending so that she may be better able to make choices and take actions.⁷⁶ This is what Hoagland means by ‘an adepting power’: that in this engaging we can become increasingly able and skilled as moral agents. It is interesting to note that Hoagland does not comment on certain other writers, such as Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch, who have done important work on ‘attending’. She does, however, place attending in context with Mary Daly’s ‘be-friending’ and Janice Raymond’s ‘female friendship’.⁷⁷

Sixthly, ‘intelligibility’ is closely linked with ‘our ability to make judgements’. Hoagland claims that both ‘moral righteousness’ and ‘moral apathy’ are ‘infesting’ Lesbian communities.⁷⁸ This is a state of affairs that we can move away from by accepting that our judgement-making must be more complex, she suggests. To this end, she proposes - following, in part, Marilyn Frye - that we give up what she sees as the simplistic dichotomous notions of praise and blame, in favour of advancing ‘the cooperation of intelligibility’. People and situations are never as straightforward as right or wrong, good or bad, and we will benefit from making the effort to try to understand their complexities, thus developing our abilities to judge. By this she specifically does not mean that we all ought to learn to sit more sternly and staunchly in judgement over one another, praising and blaming. She does mean that we can hone our abilities to perceive and deepen our levels of understanding. ‘Intelligibility’ is rooted in understanding: our self-awareness and self-understanding can be nurtured so that we are better able to communicate our motives and our decisions, and, we can use our reason, intuition, and experience to better understand others. We can become more intelligible to ourselves, make ourselves more intelligible to others, and try to become increasingly tuned in to the perceptions of

⁷⁶Ibid., pp 127-34.

⁷⁷Ibid., p136-7. Refs. are M. Daly’s *Pure Lust:Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (London: The Women’s Press, 1984), and J. Raymond’s *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (London: The Women’s Press, 1986).

⁷⁸Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 221.

others and their efforts to be intelligible. The mutuality of these efforts are what Hoagland means by 'the *cooperation* of intelligibility'.

Intelligibility is a two-way process [which] involves both of us trying to reach each other, to connect, at some level. Thus it involves, minimally, a presumption of cooperation, not a presumption of antagonism.⁷⁹

We need not buy into the adversarial ethos. 'In connecting this way', she writes, 'though we may not like everyone, we take each other seriously [and] we acknowledge each other as moral agents'.⁸⁰

Barbara Houston offers a careful unravelling of Hoagland's position on intelligibility, praise and blame.⁸¹ Houston agrees with Hoagland in suggesting that certain types of blame, such as that associated with public humiliation, may not assist us in developing our moral agency. However, Houston maintains that other types, such as the self-blame associated with owning or owning up to violent or destructive actions, are helpful. She is cautious of dispensing with blame because she wants neither to excuse or sanction wrongdoing nor to appear to excuse or sanction it. She also wonders whether having moral agency is not constituted, in part, by the very willingness to own our actions and to accept blame and praise. For Hoagland, this critique is slightly off the track. Hoagland agrees with Houston that it is important for us to increase our self-understanding and recognise our part in a bad situation. This can help us to make choices for change. But Hoagland is concerned that someone apportioning and someone taking the blame is too often the end of the matter. This can happen when the blamer relaxes, self-absolved, and the blamed person becomes immobilised through guilt, her moral agency having been damaged rather than enhanced. Hoagland asks rather that all parties remain connected through their participation in 'the cooperation of intelligibility'.

Seventhly, Hoagland wishes to distinguish responsibility from responsiveness. For her, responsibility is connected with the notions of control and obligation or duty. As I commented in discussing autokoenony, she does not wish to promote the concept of controlling oneself or anyone else or a situation. She says that the idea of self-control relies on an idea of a non-integrated self, for example, a self in which

⁷⁹Ibid., p 227.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹See B. Houston, 'In Praise of Blame', in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, Fall 1992, Volume 7, Number 4, pp 128-147.

the capacities of reason and emotion are battling against each other rather than working together and together with the self's other capacities. She also says that 'control' utilises the domination/submission (controlling/under control) paradigm. She prefers to think in terms of participation or interaction. 'Responsiveness', she writes, 'is the energy and the ability to acknowledge each other, to listen to, argue with, criticize, play with, get angry at, joke with, befriend, celebrate - in short, to engage'.⁸² When this responsive energy is absent or waning, she avers, we fall back on talk of responsibility. The dutiful 'I ought to do x' replaces the interactive 'I am keen to do x'. We can, however, develop our ability to behave responsively, including our sense of celebratory connectedness, and this she wishes to encourage.

And eighthly, Hoagland tackles the subject of caring. Here, she refers to the wider feminist philosophical and social psychological discussion, most particularly addressing the work of ethicist Nel Noddings. Hoagland welcomes aspects of Noddings' approach, especially her assertion that rules and principles may be useful guidelines but cannot substitute for a weighing up of all known factors of any situation, her focus on interaction or relatedness as basic to human being and morality, and her idea that self-knowledge and self-nourishment come before caring for others. Further, Hoagland does wish to commend 'caring as a pivotal point for ethical theory', but she prefers a different 'portrayal' of caring.⁸³ She characterises Noddings' portrayal of caring as unidirectional, going from the 'one-caring' to the 'cared-for', who completes the caring by 'apprehending' or understanding or acknowledging the caring.⁸⁴ Hoagland sees this as insufficient, and favours instead a caring wherein the 'cared-for' is enabled also to become 'one-caring', where a fuller reciprocity or mutuality is part of the model. Thus Noddings uses mothering as a model, and for Hoagland this simply will not do. Mothering - the institution and practice that we know under patriarchy - is not an equal relationship. It is about embracing a 'femininity' that complements and shores up a 'masculinity' which, taken together, spell out the heterosexualism that Hoagland decries.

After detailing her objections to mothering as a model for an ethics of caring, Hoagland offers two suggestions. One suggestion, drawn from correspondence with Baba Copper, is that 'lesbian group-mothering' may be a way forward for raising

⁸²Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 288.

⁸³S. Hoagland, 'Some Thoughts about "Caring"', in *Feminist Ethics*, Claudia Card (Ed.), (Lawrence,KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991), p 249.

⁸⁴These terms are from Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

children.⁸⁵ By this Hoagland means that a number of Lesbians would look after, care for, teach and learn from a child or a number of children. In her own words, 'lesbian group-mothering' would involve 'pooling the children and having those lesbians who are drawn to this project participate in shifts.' Prior to this, we would 'acknowledge bearing and raising children as only one among the many things we might choose to do', and recognise that 'some lesbians just are good with kids and like them, while some don't'. I assume that the group would make decisions about the usual questions such as schooling, access to the media and other aspects of non-Lesbian culture, and appropriate toys. Lesbian group-mothering is a proposal to replace the institution of compulsory mothering and its requirement of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation with a revalued option to be one-among-many contributing to bearing and raising children. In this setting, the models of selfhood, relating and caring that children would see and experience would be those of autokoeny.

The second suggestion that Hoagland makes is for another portrayal of 'an ethics of caring'. She calls this portrayal 'amazoning', which is based on a concept of 'amazons' which she draws from legend, archaeology, and myth -- although, as with the word 'lesbian', she offers no definition as such. She does say that 'the caring of amazons' is 'a caring of those concerned with challenging the inequities resulting from the values of the fathers'.⁸⁶ So, again, resistance to the domination/subordination paradigm of heterosexualism and its replication in ageism, imperialism, etc. is a key factor.⁸⁷ It is one of the values which she ascribes to 'amazons', used by her as myth and symbol to encourage us in our developing Lesbian ethics.

Hoagland claims that Noddings' 'mothering' lacks an 'analysis of oppression' and a 'vision of change', and so 'isn't a caring that benefits us'.⁸⁸ Hoagland counters by citing a Lesbian 'myth of origins'⁸⁹ that is suggestive of both analysis and vision, and that points toward the comparison between mothers and Amazons which she wishes to make. She quotes from Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig as follows:

⁸⁵Ref. for this paragraph is Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 97.

⁸⁶Hoagland, 'Some Thoughts', p 261.

⁸⁷See above, p 90.

⁸⁸Hoagland, 'Some Thoughts', p 261.

⁸⁹Regarding Lesbian 'myths of origins', see B. Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1992). Zimmerman refers to Mircea Eliade.

During the Golden Age, everyone in the terrestrial garden was called amazon. Mothers were not distinct from daughters. They lived in harmony and shared pleasures. They enumerated every beautiful and pleasant place in the terrestrial garden and invited one another to visit them. They hunted together. They gathered together and they wandered together. They described their deeds and exploits in epics. There were no limits to their adventures and age had no meaning in their lives or in their poems. Everyone thought of herself as an amazon.

After the first settlements in the cities everything continued as before. The amazons lived far from, rather than inside, their cities. After hunting or gathering, the food was prepared out of doors and a festival was held. Very often the city was completely deserted and vacant for several days. Then came a time when some daughters and some mothers did not like wandering anymore in the terrestrial garden. They began to stay in the cities and most often they watched their abdomens grow. This activity brought them, it is said, great satisfaction. Things went so far in this direction that they refused to have any other interests. In vain, their friends asked them to join them in their travels. They always had a new abdomen to watch. Thus they called themselves mothers. And they found qualifications corresponding to this function of childbearing, for example, mother the plenary, mother the one who engenders. The first generation of static mothers who refused to leave their cities, began. From then on, they called the others 'eternal, immature daughters, amazons.' They did not welcome them cordially when they came back from their travels. They did not listen to their accounts of discoveries or explorations anymore. The joy of hunting, gathering, and wandering had disappeared. At that time the mothers stopped calling themselves amazons and the mothers and the amazons began to live separately (Julienne Bourge, *Comments on the Past, Gaul, Glorious Age*).⁹⁰

This is a 'myth of origins' with a difference. Here we have a beautiful garden, the earth, apparently peopled only with women and girls. (Bonnie Zimmerman calls the fact that 'men are completely absent here a tongue-in-cheek reversal of patriarchal myths in which women are the missing sex'.⁹¹) 'Amazon' describes everyone irrespective of age or whether or not they have born children. Life is harmonious, and shared activities include enjoying the beauty of nature, hunting, gathering, wandering, food preparation, story-telling (epic and poem), and festivals. When

⁹⁰Quoted in Hoagland, 'Some Thoughts', pp 259-60. From M. Wittig and S. Zeig, *Lesbian Peoples: Materials for a Dictionary* (New York: Avon, 1979), pp 108-9. The UK edition (London: Virago, 1980) has the same pagination. 'Julienne Bourge' and her *Comments* are part of the myth.

⁹¹Zimmerman, *Safe Sea of Women*, p 28.

some women separate themselves out and devote themselves to the pleasures of gestation only, they also recognise their achievements as mothers. But in addition they institutionalise motherhood, creating a hierarchy in which they are above the other Amazons whom they consider to be immature. The fall from paradise - the end of a 'Golden Age' - is attributed to women narrowing their focus to pregnancy alone, and giving this experience greater importance than any other. It is interesting to note that this is not a story about men becoming aware of their greater physical strength and consolidating it into heterosexuality - a story that we might have expected Hoagland to tell. Rather, it is about women choosing to elevate the use of one female faculty (child-bearing) over all others. Wittig and Zeig summarise the mythical mothers' project as a 'dream of absolute and totalitarian engendering, giving birth throughout the ages'.⁹² These mothers choose to separate themselves from the varied and harmonious life of amazoning. I suggest that, for Hoagland, one attraction of this myth is that it is centred on women's choice, women's agency: the mothers' choices have created problems of division, hierarchy, and insularity, and so perhaps a new series of women's choices could create solutions. Such an 'analysis of oppression' can strengthen the resolve of resisters, of aspiring Amazons, and give a boost in the development of moral agency under oppression.

As with other myths of origin and tales of a 'Golden Age', this myth of Amazons offers us 'a vision of change', encouraging its audience to believe that something different to and better than the status quo is possible. Once upon a time, it says, there was - or could have been - a different culture, society, and worldview. If we can picture something better having happened in the past, even a mythic past, perhaps we can picture it happening in the future, and be inspired to take action to create that future. Also, Lesbians, robbed of our history, sometimes have difficulties in feeling that others like us and even we ourselves actually exist. Our myths of origin go some way toward re-establishing us as real and providing opportunities to understand the present and to participate consciously in the future.

In this case, the vision is of an egalitarian life, harmonious with nature and within the group, and free from male power-over and divisiveness. Here women's agency - choices and actions - creates and effects our circumstances, for the better and for the worse. Hoagland uses this myth of 'amazons' and 'mothers', then, to warn us against self-absorption and an antagonistic stance that blocks our engaging and short-circuits our autokoenony. And she recounts it in the hope that we will be

⁹²Wittig and Zeig, *Lesbian Peoples*, p 36.

encouraged by the vision that it evokes of 'amazoning', an ethics of women's mutuality and pleasure, as well as resistance, empowerment and agency.

Hoagland says that Amazons have not been adopted whole-heartedly by feminists and Lesbians. She thinks that one reason for this has been the disparagement of Amazons in male-stream culture. Her response is to assert that Amazons are not only 'real' in mythic, legendary, archaeological, and historical senses - even though this reality has been erased or distorted - but might also serve symbolic purposes. Amazons could represent, at the very least, those who resist male violence against women. Hoagland writes:

There is little celebration of amazons (even though we are beginning to hear again of goddesses and witches). We do not acknowledge the amazons even as symbolic defenders of womanhood - and this at a time when male violence against women is blatant.⁹³

However, she is able to cite some thirteen published sources (from the late 1960s to the appearance of her *Lesbian Ethics* in 1988) in which Amazons *are* held in esteem by feminists and Lesbians. Prominent among the Amazon supporters - those who refer to Amazons affirmatively and symbolically - are Mary Daly in all of her books from *Gyn/Ecology* onward and Audre Lorde from *The Black Unicorn* onward. Reviewer Barbara Ruth notes: 'the lesbians I know still ... value resistance and speak positively of amazons'.⁹⁴ I too have observed that Lesbians I know who are informed about radical feminism of the 1970s and 1980s identify with Amazons as strong women together challenging what Hoagland calls heterosexualism. However, some younger Lesbians, unaware of this recent feminist history, think of Amazons only as violent and self-mutilating fighters belonging to ancient Mediterranean myth - an image from the dominant culture. Clearly there is a second reason for feminists and Lesbians not having adopted Amazons as symbol: feminist theory from the 1970s has been not only disparaged but also 'disappeared' and misrepresented. Nonetheless, Hoagland proposes that the use of Amazon as symbol could help to fill the gap left by patriarchy's denial that a 'woman who resists male violence, male advances, and male access' has a valid identity and substance, or in short, that she exists.⁹⁵

⁹³Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 36.

⁹⁴B. Ruth, 'Taking our Lives Seriously', p 123. My elision.

⁹⁵Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 37.

In summary of Hoagland's ethics it can be said that she proposes the development of certain approaches to situations. These are approaches that she has found helpful in augmenting both mutual and self-understanding, autokoenony, and moral agency. Resistance against heterosexuality and its power-over paradigm is of prime importance. Lesbians make up the community out of which and for the benefit of which she has grown her ethics, so it cannot be surprising that this resistance is twinned in the first instance with the choice to come out as a Lesbian. Hoagland suggests attitudes and activities including non-judgmentalism, responsiveness, the celebration of achievements, and 'lesbian group mothering'. She holds up 'amazons' as her preferred model of caring, and asks that her readers consider 'amazoning' as an ethical way forward.

It may be that Hoagland's 'amazon' and her 'lesbian' are congruent, in which case, she could have made 'lesbian' instead of 'amazon' into the verb form of her ethics. But it seems to me that whereas her 'lesbianism' is that which Lesbian living has been and is creating, her 'amazoning' provides a crucial visionary, symbolic, and re-mythologising dimension.

We turn now from the complex core of Hoagland's work which is her 'Lesbian Ethics' to a consideration of the ways in which her thought touches the topic which I have called 'Goddess'. She keeps her comments regarding 'Goddess' brief. For example, about her own religious background she has written only that she 'rejected heaven and hell at age six upon being told that her recently deceased best friend (a cat) was in neither place'.⁹⁶ She does, however, refer often to theologically trained philosophers Mary Daly and Janice Raymond, and acknowledges contributions to her thought from Billie Potts, who writes on Lesbian healing, and Nett Hart, author of several books on Lesbian spirituality.⁹⁷ Also, both 'the energy that moves us',⁹⁸ and the concepts of meaning and value are subjects with which Hoagland may be said to be preoccupied. She mentions that 'goddesses and witches'

⁹⁶Hoagland, 'Contributors' Notes', in Hoagland and Penelope (Eds.), *For Lesbians Only*, p 594.

⁹⁷Acknowledgements in *Lesbian Ethics*, p xv. See B. Potts, *Witches Heal: Lesbian Herbal Self-Sufficiency* (Bearsville, New York: Hecuba's Daughters, Inc., 1981), and, for example, N. Hart, *'Spirited' Lesbians: Lesbian Desire As Social Action* (Minneapolis: Word Weavers, 1989).

⁹⁸Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 157.

are being used in some quarters as myth and symbol. And, as we have noted, she suggests and practices the use of Amazons as myth and symbol to encourage us in our developing Lesbian ethics.

I shall proceed, then, to consider how Hoagland distances herself from traditional religion so that she can focus on choice and meaning; her comments on goddesses, witches, and Lesbian cosmology; her critiques and proposals regarding spirituality and religion; and the space that I believe she leaves for a dimension to living that one could call spiritual.

Hoagland does not make any declaration about her own religious beliefs. Neither does she argue against a religious or theistic view. Instead she focusses her attention on the process of healing and reintegration and a renewed awareness of what we as moral agents are choosing to create. If one of the functions of a 'god' is to give a name to an overarching plan, pattern, or purpose to what is, Hoagland suggests that to imagine that such a god *does not* exist may assist us in concentrating on our own contributions to creating what is. She writes:

What if there is no larger purpose? Perhaps our living is open ended and in flux with no higher being and no higher purpose to hold it. Perhaps it is all simply a matter of energy, the energy that comes from each one of us as we make choices as moral agents, energy that mingles with the energy of all things around us and in the universe. Perhaps it is a matter of energies interacting with no overall plan, only the variety of plans which emerge from the context in which we make our choices. Perhaps purpose emerges from our interacting; perhaps we create it by engaging in this living.⁹⁹

By posing this question she is inviting her readers to take up a certain moral maturity, to embrace the adventures of agency and a self-directed life one-among-many. Whether or not there exists that which we would call God or Goddess or a deity or the holy or the numinous seems to be a side issue for her. However, she is clear that what is to be will be shaped, at least to an extent, by us humans, by our choices and our actions. There is no room for complacency. What is, is unfolding and we all play our part in creating it. Hoagland posits an everyday matrix of be-ing and purpose, and puts her hope into those contributions which she and her Lesbian community are making.

⁹⁹Ibid., p 300.

Another definition of a 'god' is that which attracts our devotion and energy.¹⁰⁰ Hoagland is devoted to Lesbian survival and the development of Lesbian moral agency. She wishes to obviate or show to be obsolete the heterosexualist ways of dominance and subordination, and to promote a 'world' of Lesbians, aglow with power-from-within, in enabling communities. This is the focus that she has chosen, the set of tasks to which she commits her energy and by which in turn she is revived. There is no suggestion in her work that any more systematised theology or god-talk is needed or desired by her.

A third definition of a 'god' involves a locus of 'ultimate meaning and value'.¹⁰¹ It is in considering this definition that we see most clearly the influence of the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's epistemology. From existentialism comes Hoagland's belief in the importance of choice in the creation of value, and from Wittgenstein the belief or working hypothesis that meaning and language 'are a matter of consensus'.¹⁰² In other words - and Hoagland is here drawing on de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* - we are the creators of meaning and value, through our choices, actions, and infusions of energy. We inherit our contexts and the results or consequences of the choices of those who have gone before us, and as children we either obey or rebel. As we mature, we find that our situation as moral beings is more complex and requires more of us. Hoagland writes:

Simone de Beauvoir argues that the value we create through our choices is the value that exists, there is no [outside or ultimate] value against which we can justify what we choose. What we choose, is, simply, the value that will emerge. (This is obvious in terms of lesbian community: the values that are emerging among lesbians are a result of what we enact.) The ambiguity of this state of affairs, in part, is that the value we create is not eternal. We will die, and others' choices can transform what we have created (just as we can transform what others have created). Nevertheless, to be authentic, we must engage in this living, embrace our finiteness, and make our choices as

¹⁰⁰For an interesting development of this idea, see C. Myss, *Anatomy of the Spirit: The Seven Stages of Power and Healing* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1996).

¹⁰¹This phrase was brought home to me when I read Mary Hunt's *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1991). See pp 7, 9, 10, 12, 17.

¹⁰²Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 14.

if what we create were eternal - with that degree of emotion, energy, and commitment.¹⁰³

To dislodge the hegemonic discourses of heterosexualism, we can put our energies into Lesbianism, into 'playful world travel', into striking forth into the unknown where we are bound to make not only mistakes but also fresh paradigms and new friends - like Mary Daly's 'cow who Jumped over the moon' and found all sorts of Amazons who were already there.¹⁰⁴ Without declaring herself either atheist or agnostic as Sartre and other existentialists do, Hoagland puts her faith in our moral agency as human beings. 'Our everyday actions add up to the values we choose', she writes.¹⁰⁵

Choice is a source of enabling power: where I focus my attention and put my energy, there I create meaning. Making meaning, sense, is crucial for survival, and occurs when, sometimes spontaneously, many turn away from the meaning of the oppressor and enact new meaning. In my life, I choose women and lesbians.¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, our predecessors bequeath to us a context, and our choices reshape what holds meaning and value, which again our heirs will transform.¹⁰⁷ Our 'everyday actions' and the kind of people that we are becoming - interacting selves in community - may well be determining factors for social and political change. So for Hoagland our moral development and movement toward wholeness are integral to the evolutions and revolutions of meaning and value that Lesbians and many feminists seek. Again, there is no suggestion that there is a rôle for a deity to play.

We have noted Hoagland's comment that, whereas Amazons have not had the appreciation that she would have liked from other Lesbians, goddesses and witches have been celebrated for their symbolic value. Although she imparts to her readers no presuppositions about a deity of her own, she recognises that one element in the successful destruction of a culture involves taking away, conquering, or co-opting its deities.¹⁰⁸ She alludes to the destruction of pre-monotheistic cultures in which

¹⁰³Ibid., pp 204-5.

¹⁰⁴M. Daly, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (London: Women's Press, 1993), pp 342-3. (Daly writes of 'Sisters' rather than Amazons in this instance.)

¹⁰⁵Hoagland, 'Existential Freedom and Political Change'.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷In saying this, I do not mean to give time or history any special rôle.

¹⁰⁸Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 35 refers to Pat Robinson (historian). On p 309,

people worshipped goddesses of fertility, the hunt, weaving, wisdom, change, winter, the forest, the land, the dead, justice, love, food, the sun, fire, writing, the dawn, revenge, menarche, the moon, the sea, volcanoes -- among others. She and many other feminists¹⁰⁹ believe that the crushing of these goddesses and the substitution of a single (if also triune) male god has been tied in with the limiting of the meaning of the concept 'woman' in Western societies. In this view, anthropomorphic deities are the reflections or projections of a people's self-awareness, ideals, and sense of power, so that to distort or erase them achieves a result that is damaging at a very deep level. Hoagland seems here to be making a case against both male-only deities and Western traditional monotheism. While she seems not to be advocating any new or reclaimed pantheon, she does assert that 'amazoning' autokoenoous women will be developing what she sees as the stuff of deities: self-awareness, ideals, and a sense of power.

Witches, too, have fared badly under Western monotheism. Hoagland writes that 'much of what is called "women's spirituality" comes from the craft of Europe and went underground during the burning times', and adds that this 'tradition has a history of oppression and persecution'.¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that her dedication of the book *Lesbian Ethics* cites water, air, fire, and earth - the elements used in the spells or rituals of those who call themselves witches. She says that the torture and slaughter of European women as witches was part of an appropriation by men of 'women's healing skills, birthing skills, and teaching skills' and men's 'attempt to destroy women's psychic skills'.¹¹¹ Hoagland is aware of the importance of goddesses and witches to many women. She does not reclaim or promote them as symbol, however, the way that she does Amazons.

In the context of her discussion of mothering and amazoning as models of caring, Hoagland quotes Baba Copper, who 'suggests that lesbians can develop a cosmology which can explain to a female child how she can learn to differentiate from and identify with others without dominance and subordination'.¹¹² Cosmology is the story of the cosmos; the origins of everything; the nature, structure and processes of it all; what everything is really like. Copper and Hoagland want an end

footnotes 35 and 36 refer to Merlin Stone. These are the refs. for this paragraph.

¹⁰⁹This goes back at least to Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

¹¹⁰Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 96.

¹¹¹Ibid. p 33.

¹¹²Ibid., pp 97-8.

to the heterosexualist story of hierarchical and antagonistic dualisms - a story of winning or losing, masters or slaves, Hobbes' 'nature red in tooth and claw'. They wish instead to propagate what they call a 'lesbian' story of beginnings, of meanings, of what things are really like. Wittig and Zeig do not provide a cosmology as such, but they do provide one myth of origins, one that Hoagland welcomes as an introduction and an invitation to 'amazoning'. In such a world, Lesbian agency - the agency of visible and bodied women-in-community (neither helpmeets nor subordinates to men) - is key to cosmology, to what things are really like. Whereas the values of the old dominant ideology justify and validate oppression, when certain 'new values' and 'new' stories are being developed and enacted, selves and/in community are being enabled and empowered. Instead of a world of vicious rivalries and antagonisms, what Hoagland envisions is a world where the pattern of caring that we choose involves participating in connections of mutual respect, and where we can assume that those around us mean us well and that our differences are fascinating and fun rather than ingredients in a recipe for competition and conflict. She recognises that survival under heterosexualism requires a more cautious approach, and even wonders whether the processes of building meanings inevitably entail the heterosexualist binary approach of dominance and subordination.¹¹³ She is willing to risk that she may be in error, however, and, with Copper, Wittig, Zeig, and many cronies and companions, is committed to living out and promoting the contrasting Lesbian cosmology and worldview.

Hoagland critiques some aspects of traditional Western religion, 'women's spirituality', and what she calls 'lesbian spirituality'. By 'lesbian spirituality' she seems to mean the kind of 'womon-centered [sic] tradition' that certain writers, especially in the 1970s, were working to create.¹¹⁴ She mentions in this regard Jean and Ruth Mountaingrove, who were editors of the magazine *Womanspirit, Z.* Budapest, and Billie Potts. One can see that if 'lesbian' is taken to mean 'womon-centered', there will be a difficulty in differentiating 'lesbian spirituality' from 'women's spirituality' (even if 'women's spirituality' is understood to refer mainly to modern-day witches). This is a grey area that I have pointed out already, in discussion of Hoagland's own inconsistency in distinguishing between 'lesbians' and 'women'. She recognises the lack of clarity as problematic in the context of efforts to develop distinct traditions of spirituality - efforts which she commends.

¹¹³Ibid., p 298.

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp 95-6, footnote *t*.

I turn now to a consideration of Hoagland's critiques and suggested remedies. First, her work on ethics characterizes Western religion as detrimental to ethical maturity. She sees Western religious ethics as requiring unquestioning obedience to a set of rules, put together by and for the benefit of a patriarchal hierarchy with a father/god at the top, and backed by promises of heaven and threats of hell. She thinks that the 'Lesbian Ethics' that she proposes is very different from this. The practices or qualities of, for example, attending, self-conscious awareness, and responsiveness are a cluster of values around the concept of autokoenoyny - a far cry from unquestioning obedience. Western religion has functioned to promote heteronomy, antagonism, hierarchy, patriarchy. It is time to leave these behind.

Second, Hoagland says that some adherents to both 'women's spirituality' and 'lesbian spirituality' embrace a 'feminine principle' that they envision balancing 'masculinism'.¹¹⁵ Other adherents are proponents of a kind of androgyny. She reckons that in either case, the male will gain in value from these minor alterations and become more firmly entrenched. On the one hand 'the feminine' will function to define 'the masculine' more potently, and on the other hand androgyny offers only a sort of wedding in which the two become the one which is the male. A similar problem involves women's and Lesbians' willing acceptance of 'the light/dark dualism' into their spirituality.¹¹⁶ For Hoagland the masculine/feminine and light/dark hierarchical dualisms are part of the problem, not part of a solution. What is needed is more attention to and appreciation of non-dualistic complexities and differences.

Third, Hoagland objects to Lesbians and women 'accepting a christian influence and setting up churches and highly structured institutions'. In the matter of 'highly structured institutions', Hoagland rejects this type of structure because of its tendencies toward hierarchy and other imbalances of power, and because she prefers small groups such as collectives in which tasks are rotated or shared as equally as possible. As Carol Anne Douglas has noted, the small group collective structure is a way of working which feminism shares with anarchism and to which 'many, if not most radical and lesbian feminists have a strong commitment'.¹¹⁷ I assume that

¹¹⁵Ibid., p 85-6.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp 95-6, footnote *t*.

¹¹⁷Carol Anne Douglas, *Love and Politics: Radical Feminist and Lesbian Theories* (San Francisco: ism press, 1990), p 289.

groups or movements such as 'women-church' and WATER¹¹⁸ are not acceptable to her because of their Christianity.

A fourth unacceptable factor listed by Hoagland 'involves letting go of a political analysis of the context we live in when pursuing the idea that we choose what happens to us'.¹¹⁹ Although she stresses the importance of choice and agency, she does not agree with the idea that poverty or illness or oppression are chosen states - chosen, for example, as some Hindus and certain New Age exponents such as Shirley MacLaine would have it,¹²⁰ so that lessons may be learned prior to subsequent reincarnations. Such an idea sometimes serves to depoliticise the contexts in which we live, and so can contribute to either complacent attitudes or feelings of powerlessness. Hoagland does not want to promote depoliticisation, complacency, or feelings of powerlessness, rather she hopes that we may be encouraged and empowered to make sometimes difficult choices because, against, and in spite of our contexts of oppression.

Fifth, Hoagland states that 'women's spirituality embraces a mothering metaphor of creativity, as if the goal of this living is or could be all-nurturing and all-embracing'.¹²¹ We have seen that Hoagland rejects the idea that 'mothering' could be a desirable portrayal of an ethics of caring. Here she tells us that it is also an inadequate 'metaphor of creativity'. Again, she prefers to think in terms of 'amazoning'.¹²² She also adopts 'weaving' as a metaphor for 'lesbian creativity', partly 'because of the centrality of the concept of choice'.¹²³ She writes:

Weaving involves understanding and creating patterns, and it includes, among other things, the choice of which threads to select, which to leave behind, which colors and thicknesses to use, what to unravel and discard, what to do over again, where to repeat, and when to end.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸An important figure in the egalitarian 'women-church' movement is Roman Catholic theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. WATER is the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual, based in Maryland, U.S.A., in which theo-ethicist Mary E. Hunt is involved.

¹¹⁹Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 96, footnote t.

¹²⁰On Shirley MacLaine, see M. York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements* (Lanham, Maryland and London: Powman & Littlefield, 1995) pp 74-81.

¹²¹Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 96, footnote t.

¹²²Ibid., pp 91-7.

¹²³Ibid., p 302.

¹²⁴Ibid.

Many other feminists favour the weaving metaphor. Mary Daly is one. Greenham women chose to weave nappies and colourful ribbons into the mesh of the nuclear missile base's perimeter fence. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ's 1989 anthology, *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, is well-known.¹²⁵ And Nelle Morton's spider visitor is unforgettable - spiders, of course, being sister websters/weavers, and in this case identified as a metaphoric image of the Goddess, who, Morton writes, 'cleared [Morton's] brain so [she] could come into the power that was [hers], that was [her] all along'.¹²⁶ Morton's experiences with the Goddess affirm for her that she and all women are 'rooted in creation itself'.¹²⁷

Sixth, Hoagland laments the 'dissolving' of 'lesbian spirituality' into 'women's spirituality', and claims with dismay that 'women's spirituality itself is dissolving into humanism'.¹²⁸ She dismisses humanism because she perceives it as paternalistic, arrogant, and based on the presumption that one group of people is equipped with the knowledge of what is best for everyone.¹²⁹ Such 'humanistic' presuming lacks attention to particularity, and can be used to make arguments of this sort: since we are all human beings it is wrong to single out women or Blacks to encourage their involvement in (and re-thinking of) science or government or religion. Again, Hoagland recommends different choices, including attending, responsiveness, and 'playful world travel'¹³⁰ - not forgetting Lesbianism as a way of living.

Seventh, Hoagland remains wary of group rituals, 'even within spirituality circles', because, she writes, 'I believe we're still too caught up with power as control'.¹³¹ However, when more has been learned of power-from-within, she avers, 'attending' may 'be empowering as a community function'.¹³² There is, then, ('eventually') the possibility of group rituals among those who wish to 'attend', interact with, and celebrate one another as autokoenuous selves in community. Most

¹²⁵Plaskow and Christ, *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989).

¹²⁶Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp 162-4, 167.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p 170.

¹²⁸Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 96, footnote *t*.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, p 140. Hoagland is drawing on, among others, Marilyn Frye.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, pp 139-143.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, p 143.

¹³²*Ibid.*

feminists understand ourselves to be involved in such a re-valuing of power.¹³³ Hoagland wishes us to develop further this re-valuing before we attempt group rituals that could otherwise go sour. She is consistent in her prioritising of our increasing integrity/wholeness and moral agency over other considerations, and also in always looking to interrelational or community aspects of individual development. Any religious or spiritual practices that she could endorse in the future would have to be commensurate with her 'Lesbian Ethics'.

Hoagland makes one additional point that falls into my category of 'Goddess'. It is based not on a criticism of anyone's current practices, but on her understanding of the self. Drawing on Billie Potts, she writes that 'what we are involved with in the community we've created is massive healing at many levels - an integrating of the parts of our selves which is crucial to surviving and developing our moral agency'.¹³⁴ Potts, as I have mentioned, writes about Lesbian healing - with the aim of 'contributing to the renewal and repossession of our healing powers'.¹³⁵ When naming aspects of ourselves that may be reintegrated, reconnected, or 'healed' and made whole Hoagland includes our 'psychic awareness' or 'psychic faculty'. By these phrases I think she means an openness to information and communication, a kind of sense or knowledge that Daphne Hampson calls, for lack of more precise terms, 'intuition' or 'clairvoyance'.¹³⁶ Whereas Hampson casts healing (both mental and physical, and of self or another), intuition and clairvoyance in a theistic light, and Hoagland does not, Hoagland is certainly allowing for a widening of the way that we think about human capabilities: we can develop and tap into energies that are creative and nourishing for us as one-among-many. This inclusion by Hoagland of the psychic capabilities of the self indicates, I think, her belief in what I would call a spiritual side to our experience - a spiritual side that, when acknowledged and strengthened, contributes to the self's greater wholeness.

To conclude this chapter, I shall draw together some of the elements of Hoagland's spiritual thought that I consider to be especially helpful. First, I think

¹³³ See, for example, D. Hampson, 'On Power and Gender', in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, A. Thatcher and E. Stuart (Eds.), (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996).

¹³⁴ Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, p 196.

¹³⁵ Potts, *Witches Heal*, 'Preface' (page without a number).

¹³⁶ Hampson, *After Christianity*, pp 226-7.

that the great strength of Hoagland's work is its determined particularity. Lesbians - among whom she counts herself one - are the norm, those in whom she is interested, those who comprise and create the context in which she develops her ideas, those on whose lives she focuses her attention. She recognises that complexity and diversity characterise this Lesbian norm, and she builds this further level of particularity into her theorising. I think that this lack of pretense to universality or disinterest gives her work more rather than less authority.

Secondly, however, Hoagland does not hold up her Lesbian community as perfect or 'good' while claiming that everyone else is 'bad'. Lesbians do not live in enclaves defined by ideal behaviour. One of the reasons to talk about 'Lesbian Ethics' is to help Lesbians to think about and improve our interactions. She tries to describe and promote the Lesbian ways that she thinks exhibit 'new values' - especially autokoenoxy, self-conscious awareness, responsiveness, playfulness, and amazoning. And these are not presented as a set of rules to be followed in or on the way to anybody's utopia, but suggestions about ways to enhance our non-heterosexualist living.

Thirdly, Hoagland is very clear that any Lesbian spiritual practices will have to be thought through afresh. Patriarchal hierarchical models have held sway for so long that nothing less than a radical approach can bring something different to light. Hoagland makes no reference that I can find to Lesbian Christian writers such as Mary Hunt and Carter Heyward - Christianity is a patriarchal hierarchical model *par excellence*.

Fourthly, although Hoagland is farther toward the secular end of a secular-religious spectrum than either Audre Lorde or Alice Walker, she does not turn her back on a 'psychic' or spiritual dimension to life. It is my impression that she would very much like a Lesbian spirituality to succeed, and that she has left room for it in her thought. She thinks that we can understand or know or connect with much more than we generally do, and that mind/spirit/energy is absolutely basic to what is.

Fifthly, Hoagland's is an affirming and an empowering view: our choices and actions do make a contribution. In this sense, we are all creating and changing the world, and its values. We can and do make a difference. Hoagland chooses is this optimistic outlook. She commends a positive approach to living and an appreciative (though not uncritical) attitude toward what we have chosen and are choosing to

create. Bemoaning what we did not choose does not help us, whereas reassessing our circumstances and recognising opportunities for new choices may help us.

Sixthly, even though Hoagland offers us no chance of falling back into or 'leaning on the everlasting arms',¹³⁷ she makes living an adventure, a celebration, something in which we are utterly involved. There is no hint that we might get any divine assistance, but the picture is not bleak - partly because we are one-among-many. We are interconnected, giving and receiving all the time. And, we have our own life's energy to use, to increase, to transform. 'Energy' is what we all are - what everything is - and she suggests that we recognise it, take it up, enjoy it whenever possible, weave our connections. We can grow, heal, develop our moral agency - and rest and try something else when things go wrong. 'Playfulness' for Hoagland is not about scheming and winning or losing, but about being open to life, to other communities, other people and their 'worlds'; being willing to accept that sometimes we will be confused; being able to laugh with other people and at ourselves.

Seventhly, I like Hoagland's remythologising project. There is no pantheon, no anthropomorphic deity at all. But there is something more personal than just exchanges of energy. We can look to the Amazons. Hoagland un-covers and re-members groups of real and mythological women throughout history who have been fit and fierce and strong, self-directed, courageous and committed. An Amazon is someone with whom to identify, to feel solidarity and shared purpose: 'someone who persisted in these conditions [of oppression], even resisted'.¹³⁸ We know that we have a struggle on our hands, trying to leave behind the deeply ingrained dynamics of heterosexualism. The strong warrior woman of the past, choosing to resist patriarchal oppression with her companions, plays a role akin to that of the Goddess for some of us, providing us with imagery of our own power, strength and courage, as well as a portrayal of mutual and enabling caring.

¹³⁷From a hymn that I learned as a child in Sunday School.

¹³⁸Hoagland, 'Existential Freedom and Political Change'.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

When I turn to a fuller comparison of Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and Sarah Lucia Hoagland across my three categories, I find both similarities and disparities. In the Introduction, I noted clusters of questions that were in my mind as I approached the topics of self, ethics, and 'Goddess'. It is by returning to and reviewing these questions that I shall draw out the comparisons of the thought of Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland.

First, in considering the category of self, I asked, 'What does it mean to be a human being?'. This is an ambitious starting place, where it can already be seen that each writer has a distinct area of concern. Walker tells us that human beings, born good, are 'beloved expressions of the Universe', each one of us here to become more of our own unique self. Moreover, she believes, as do Native Americans, that animals, plants, the earth, and the sky are, with our species, members of the same extended family. Thus she says that 'everything is a human being'. Everything in existence has its own kind of life, its own ways, and its own place in 'All Creation'. In contrast, Lorde's emphasis is more strongly on people and the constant struggle for self-knowledge, understanding, and expression. For her, our moment of life is between the ancestors and the children - a continuity of blood, flesh, language, and life stories. Hoagland approaches the question from quite another angle, suggesting that meaning is created by human beings through our living. We can become increasingly aware of our part in this, choosing more consciously, carefully, and caringly. It must be noted, however, that the category of 'human beings' is sometimes an awkward one for separatists such as Hoagland who believe that differences in behaviour, choices, and priorities often loom larger than shared 'human' characteristics. Her work on 'Lesbian Ethics' is not addressed to humanity but to a Lesbian community of her peers.

Moving to my next question, 'What is to be said of human nature?', I find answers that are less divergent. Lorde sees people as limited by our circumstances, yet full of bright possibilities. Hoagland speaks of her people, Lesbians, in very much the same way. Walker agrees, adding that people, although perhaps inevitably damaged, are 'naturally' good and can change whatever may be our evil and destructive ways again toward the good, toward creation.

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'What', I asked, 'are the dimensions of personhood, and in what ways do these writers define, describe, and demarcate a person's individuality, uniqueness, and identity?'. Here again, I see similarities. For all three writers, the self is fluid and changing, yet people remain unique and individual. Each of us is unique in our bodies, experiences, and lives. There is a 'natural' self (Walker) in each of us, that which is 'deepest and strongest and richest within' (Lorde). We can uncover it as we rid ourselves of the 'false selves' (Hoagland) that we have been taught. We change, learn, grow, and develop, so that, over our lifetimes, we are many selves. And, more than this, an individual person at any time is both singular and many: multiplicitous, plural, myriad, diverse, moving or able to move between 'worlds'.¹

In terms of the demarcation of a person's identity, these writers agree that individuals are profoundly interrelated with our human, social, cultural, and physical surroundings and contexts. Walker says, through Shug, that 'if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed'.² Lorde maintains that you can never be completely non-me, nor I non-you.³ And Hoagland writes of 'autokoeny', the self in community. She rarely refers to an individual Lesbian without referring also to those around her with whom she interacts or 'exchanges energy'. It is notable, however, that again the emphasis is different among the three writers, with Walker telling us of our connectedness within nature, Lorde evoking a sameness that connects each person across difference with every other, and Hoagland firmly locating her discussion in a specified community.

My last question under the heading of 'self' was, 'How does one know one's self?'. I find that the three writers are in complete agreement on the importance of efforts to develop self-awareness and self-understanding. Walker writes of the need for self-acceptance, saying that it is the key to growth and to loving behaviour toward others. Lorde writes of what I have called an 'epistemology of the self', which involves a deepening self-knowledge that begins with feelings, gains in understanding through the

¹'Worlds' in the sense that philosopher María Lugones uses the term. See 'Chapter 4: Sarah Lucia Hoagland'. See also M. Lugones, 'Playfulness: World Travelling, and Loving Perception', in J. Allen (Ed.), *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

²A. Walker, *The Color Purple* (London: The Women's Press, 1983), p 167.

³See A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series, (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984), p 147.

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application of intellect, then moves outward with language, communication, and action. Not only does it move outward, but it also strengthens us as we struggle to live self-considered and self-directed lives. Hoagland commends a process of self-awareness and self-acknowledgement, through which we become increasingly intelligible to ourselves and better able to participate in 'the cooperation of intelligibility', and without which our moral agency cannot grow.

While all agree about the importance of self-knowledge, these writers differ in their approaches to the gathering of such knowledge. Walker counsels quietness, silence, meditation. This way we may 'center' ourselves, and find or allow our own peacefulness and the peacefulness of which we are a part. By becoming more aware of 'Mother Earth' and 'All That Is' - by listening to our 'inner voice' or perhaps by contemplating a landscape or a single sunflower - we may learn to believe in our own unique beauty (as also the beauty of the sunflower), to accept ourselves, and to act for our own good and the benefit of others (who are equal to us in uniqueness and beauty). Lorde, on the other hand, asks us first of all to feel our feelings, including our anger, pain, fear, and love. Our seething rage and our consuming joy, our scraped knees and aching backs, the tastes and smells of sweet spices and yeasty buns, our nightmares and our delights: the more we know and come to grips with these, taking the time to understand what we know, the more able we will be to make available our knowledge to other human beings who may be in need of some aspect of it. While agreeing that quietness can be a part of this process, Lorde calls herself a 'warrior poet', and makes the battle for self-knowledge and honest self-expression paramount - and the basis of her work for social justice. Hoagland remains non-directive on this issue, leaving Lesbians to find our own paths to knowing our selves. Her values of 'withdrawal' and 'attending' have quiet aspects, and the 'caring of amazons' has an active trailblazing 'warrior' element. Both can contribute to our self-understanding and self-healing. What matters to her is that we take notice of not only our limitations and our talents but also the choices that we make and whatever follows (from) these choices. For her, we must learn as we go along, watching for responses from others and taking into account their feedback - which continually informs our self-knowledge.

Following on from my questions about 'self', I asked questions about ethics. 'What are the routes to choosing right action?' 'What does it mean to be a good person?' 'How ought one to treat other people - and indeed anyone or anything animate or inanimate with which one may come into direct or indirect contact?' As I have said,

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Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland agree that knowledge, acceptance, and understanding of the self are important groundwork for right action. The more we know of our boundaries and abilities, the more sound may be our moral choices. Further, both interior and exterior circumstances are involved here; our individual experiences, interests and disinterests, as well as the resources and constraints of our communities and wider cultures. Self-understanding helps us to assess what part we have played in a situation, what we can contribute to improving it, and what we might want to do differently another time. It strengthens our moral agency, that is, our sense of ourselves as persons who take actions that have effects. More than this, self-consciousness teaches us about other selves, and this information assists us in choosing right action. Walker says that the rediscovery of our own goodness puts us in mind of the goodness of 'All Creation', which includes those who suffer under harsh oppression and even severely damaged and distorted evil-doers. The lesson that we ourselves are uniquely beautiful and deserving of love and life spills over into the lesson that this is also true of 'All That Is', and directs us toward actions that will promote greater life, love, and beauty.

Lorde and Hoagland, like Walker, believe in the interconnectedness of everything, and think that this has a bearing on ethics. Most feminists and womanists agree with them that interconnectedness - this fundamental relationality and inter-relatedness of diverse beings - exposes the power-over paradigm of dominance and subordination as inappropriate and destructive to not only individuals but also the woven fabric of life. Thus Walker expands her ethics so that animals and plants and the very Earth are recognised as deserving of love and the conditions in which they can flourish. Lorde also looks to a non-exploitative ethic, favouring what she calls an African sensibility of openness to life and experience rather than mastery and abuse, whether of other people or of nature's abundance. For her, my 'finding your part in me' and your finding my part in you⁴ is how we build the bridge that names our sameness across our difference, and denotes our interconnectedness. She tells us that justice is indivisible: to harm anyone is to harm everyone, including oneself. Hoagland alludes to the continual interacting of energy in the universe - a kind of cosmic interconnectedness. However, she focusses mainly on the interdependence of Lesbians in community, wishing to encourage us to develop our dependability for one another and our skills of engaging and attending. Her name for the dominance/subordination paradigm is heterosexuality. She

⁴See A. Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand, 1988), p 70.

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hopes that her community will turn its back on it and instead strengthen in mutuality and conscious interrelating.

Other ethical issues discussed by these thinkers are good and evil, praise and blame, punishment, and justice. There is general agreement among Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland about the importance of a non-condemnatory ethos, whereby a commitment to information-gathering and a deepening of understanding of people and situations is favoured over a punitive attitude. Hoagland immediately qualifies this, however, because she writes about the workings of a community of people who have chosen to cast their lots with one another. She thinks that other approaches may be necessary when one is outside of this community. Walker, on the other hand, wishes for this ethos to be spread as widely as possible. I find it interesting that Walker makes use of the concepts 'good' and 'evil', finding them helpful and apt, and Hoagland dismisses them along with praise/blame and 'justice', finding them to be tools of social control and hierarchy that are disabling and wasteful of energy. Yet both share with Lorde the conviction that the more you know about a person and their circumstances, the better able you will be to engage with them and contribute to change. Along with this conviction comes a lack of faith in duty or rule based morality.

A consideration of two further points regarding ethics will serve as preface to my conclusions about 'Goddess'. The first is that, for all of these writers, not only are self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love at the heart of ethics, so too is self-healing. Our striving towards wholeness is what they mean when they write of integrity. We can struggle to re-integrate our feelings and our rational faculties, and to be more consistently and recognisably ourselves in everything that we do, Lorde says. We are most useful, says Walker, to others and to ourselves, when we are being our unique and beloved selves. Lesbians are involved with healing at many levels, Hoagland says, as we re-integrate our fragmented lives and faculties not only of emotion and reason but also humour and 'psychic awareness', among others. The ideas of wholeness, integrity, and healing infuse all three of my categories of self, ethics, and 'Goddess'.

The second point that I see connecting ethics with 'Goddess' is another on which Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland agree. It is a belief in the importance of myth and vision. Walker's fiction includes many stories that I read as myth, especially in *Possessing the*

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Secret of Joy and *The Temple of My Familiar*.⁵ In one series of episodes, she writes of help given to a troubled woman by Carl Jung, the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who of course did such influential work on myth, archetypes and spirituality.⁶ Walker says that the community of people that she sees emerging world-wide and of which she feels a part is 'a family of people who are not related by colour, blood, sex or whatever, but by vision'.⁷ Lorde urges us to use our dreams and visions as aids in creating a better future, saying that without shared visions, our efforts will be haphazard and ineffective rather than concerted and potent. She coins the word 'biomythography' to describe *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, her book about her youth and early adulthood. With this new word she is telling us that our very lives and life stories are, as Jewelle Gomez has noted, 'both ordinary and mythic'.⁸ Both Walker and Lorde use elements and characters from African myth - indeed, for them as for many African-Americans, the meaning of 'Africa' itself has overtones of a mythic longed-for 'life without bondage or prejudice'⁹ in addition to its historic and geographic dimensions.¹⁰ Hoagland too is a visionary, inviting her readers to join her in a 'world' where 'we can fight and love and plot and weave and risk and hurt and get it wrong and laugh ... among Lesbians ... as Lesbians'.¹¹ She asks us to consider 'amazoning' as an ethical mode or activity that harks back to the Amazons who 'once lived in north africa, in china, in anatolia (turkey), and between the black and the caspian seas'.¹² For her, Amazons embody historical and

⁵*The Temple of My Familiar* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (London: Vintage, 1993).

⁶Parts Two through Four of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.

⁷'A Wind Through the Heart: A Conversation with Alice Walker and Sharon Salzberg on Loving Kindness in a Painful World', in *Shambhala Sun Magazine* (5 March 1997). Archives on line at <http://www.shambhalasun.com/alice.html> on 5 June 1997.

⁸J. Gomez, 'Introduction' to Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (London: Pandora: Harper Collins, 1996), p vi.

⁹*Ibid.*, p vii.

¹⁰See L. Krumholz, 'Book Review: *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora*, by Gay Wilentz', in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Autumn 1996, 22:1, pp 246-7.

¹¹S. Hoagland, 'An Invitation' (1983), in S. Hoagland and J. Penelope (Eds.), *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1988), p 215. My elisions.

¹²S. Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), p 36. Lower case place names are in the original.

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mythological 'memory of female resistance to male domination'¹³ as well as of collective and harmonious woman-centred living.

I turn, then, to my conclusions about 'Goddess'. I asked, 'What is to be said of a mythic dimension to our lives and spirituality?'. I find that, as I have just written, Walker, Lorde, and Hoagland count visionary and mythical strands as important elements in their thought. All are involved to some extent in re-mythologising. Walker suggests that we look within to find archetypes that will help us. Most people, she states, decide that the Greek pantheon, for example, does not fit this purpose for them. However, our own thoughts and dreams, our own creative selves, contain and generate images that strengthen us and from which we can learn. The myths and legends that Walker puts in her novels often come from her dreams. 'It's important', she says, 'that we start thinking about ancient future ways, because this way [i.e. patriarchy] is not working'.¹⁴ Our visions can be both encouragement to increase our mindful participation in 'All Creation' and the fruit of our search for creative responses to destructive actions. Throughout her work, Lorde stresses the value of language, poetry, and vision. Especially in her 'biomythography' we see her connecting with, rewriting, and re-living or embodying the stories and archetypes that she has inherited from the USA, the Caribbean, and Africa. She urges her readers to embrace and express their own power, the 'Black mother within', equating this with a kind of apotheosis - for her, a becoming of the goddess Afrekete. She also identifies herself as an Amazon. Again, Hoagland re-tells Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's Lesbian 'myth of origins', inviting her readers to join with her in 'amazoning' as of old. Hoagland's concept of the 'autokoenoous' self, Lorde's of becoming Afrekete, and Walker's of 'entering into the creation' are ways to describe a process of profound healing of the shattered self - a process that is somehow associated with a mythic dimension of 'All That Is', of 'Goddess'.

'What is to be said', then, 'of a deity or deities?' Or to put this key question another way: 'Who or what is divine, holy?'. Alice Walker writes of a non-anthropomorphic deity with many images and many names, including 'the Cosmos' and 'Life'. She refers to this deity as an 'It' or perhaps, she says, an 'us'. For Walker, a pantheist, the divine and the holy are everyone and everything. 'The Spirit' is in every

¹³Ibid., p 37.

¹⁴E. White, 'Alice Walker on Finding Your Bliss', *Ms*, October 1998, p 46.

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tree and rock and human. We feel 'It' within, between, and among us. We speak of 'It' in anthropomorphic terms because we feel 'Its' love and comfort, and we need to picture the source of these feelings.

Audre Lorde is, like Walker, an animist who believes that 'spirit' is in everything. She holds to no strict boundaries between nature, the human, and the divine. Walker converses with trees and animals, Lorde with the sea and the moon -- and certain goddesses and gods that she has chosen from Yoruban polytheism. In this West African tradition, the many deities are neither omnipotent nor perfect. More like humans with 'super' powers like Wonder Woman or Batman than the biblical Almighty God, they make mistakes, their attention wanders, they do not always act with justice, and people can take steps to gain their favour but they may not notice. They are diverse and disunited. In these deities the uncertainties of human living are personified along with human ideals and strengths. Thus apotheosis is not a matter of reaching perfection, but about one's own power-from-within, and the drive to live fully, to blossom and flourish, to speak in our own voices, to contribute our special knowledge towards a richer future.

Sarah Hoagland concurs with Walker and Lorde about the cultural functions that deities fulfill, in that they are reflections or projections of people's self-awareness (including our awareness of being loved and of neediness), ideals, and sense of power. She decries patriarchy's doing away with or demoting the earlier Great Goddess and various goddesses. But she does not join in with womanist and feminist reclaiming of 'Mother Earth' (Walker) and MawuLisa (Lorde). She prefers instead to envision that it is within and among ourselves - in tune with the needs of this planet and its other inhabitants - that we can find and develop our potentials, without reference or deference to a greater reality.

The so called theodicy question is the question as to how it can be that God is good, perfect, loving, etc. and also omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, etc., when there is so much evil in the world. Clearly, this defence is obviated in Hoagland's worldview, because no deity, especially not one with those attributes, is posited. For Lorde, too, the difficulties are removed due to there being many gods and goddesses, none of whom are believed to either perfect or all-powerful. Walker, however, could be said to be a sort of monotheist whose god is good, loving, and omnipresent. Yet her worldview recognises that there is terrible evil being done. What she offers is, first, the conviction that people are born good and that if each of us could believe in our own

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goodness we would be empowered to make great changes which would allow (or at least take a step nearer to allowing) not only us but everyone and everything to grow and thrive. Second, 'clearseeing' both the good and the evil and shortcomings around us and in us, and accepting the truth of what we see with compassion, will give us the information that we need in order for us to contribute toward change for the better. Third, her pantheism includes the idea that what I have called 'underlying reality' is good. We can work in concert with 'Creation', trying to use our own creativity to augment the good, and trying through the practice of harmlessness not to add to the evil. And fourth, she counsels us to include rest and quietness in our living, and to embrace the joy that can come with every step toward the increase of love and life.

With regard to the theological question of transcendence and immanence, I find that it is considered - if it is even considered - to be a 'pseudodichotomy'. Because of Walker's pantheism and animism, transcendence and immanence seem to collapse together. 'The Spirit' is very much in the here-and-now. 'Its' goodness is both underlying and overarching. There is a greater 'Life' to which we can attune ourselves and it is as near as our own stillness, or the love that is shared among Civil Rights marchers or activists for an end to female genital mutilation. For Lorde too, spirit is present in everything, according to traditional African animism. Her deities people a mythic dimension which is inseparable from our minds and bodies and the lives that we live in the ordinary world. Hoagland proposes that we try to behave as if there is no transcendent larger purpose or higher being. We can make progress toward greater wholeness by developing our 'autokoeny' and our moral agency, taking courage from our own hopes and visions rather than any outside power.

All three authors write of spiritual experience. Hoagland, I think, does not close the door to spirituality. She includes 'psychic awareness' as one of the faculties that Lesbians can re-integrate into our selves and our living. The capacity to know of something happening at a distance may be an example of this awareness. It could come to be a rediscovered part of mundane reality in a community that has an understanding of the interconnectedness of all that is. She appreciates the work being done by those trying to develop 'Lesbian spirituality', although her own priority is the development of 'new value'. Audre Lorde tells us that spiritual experience is at home in that deep place where we touch our own power, where we actualize the 'Black mother within' who is the poet giving voice to our deepest knowledge and love. Whether we are listening to what the full moon has to relate to us, feeling overwhelmed by the beauty of birdsong, making

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love, crafting a poem, or hearing gospel music when no one else on the bus can, our spiritual experience is in, and of, all that we are and wish ourselves to be. It is also in the healing power that we give to and receive from others. Lorde affirms that 'to describe the complexities of interaction between the love within and the love without is a lifetime vocation'.¹⁵ The spiritual experience of which Alice Walker writes is not as tumultuous as Lorde's, but it is equally pervasive in her life. Walker speaks of experiencing spirits - ancestral, guardian, and nature (especially tree) spirits, as well as the spirits of characters in her novels. The spirits are honest and plain-spoken, well-meaning and supportive. She does not rule out the idea that her imagination may play a part in both sides of these interactions, and is not troubled by this possibility, as she understands the creative imagination to be not only an individual expression but also part of 'All Creation' or an expression of 'the Universe'. The creativity that we express as we 'come into our own' is a kind of spiritual experience, as are the exhilarating feelings of connection, completeness, and empowerment when we join in political action for social justice. One way or another, she says, 'the Universe responds'.

In setting out my category of 'Goddess' I asked, 'What is to be said of religious cultural heritage, and of ritual?'. So much of religion has been destructive! About this all three authors agree. Hoagland has turned away from traditional religions. She recognises that some Jewish Lesbians and those who call themselves witches, for example, wish to carry forward elements from their religious backgrounds or reclaimed heritage, but the more urgent project for her is the ethical one. When we have become more adept in our 'new value', she thinks, new rituals may emerge to express a spirituality commensurate with our ethics. Walker and Lorde are willing to assess religious traditions, and to adapt and adopt beliefs and practices that they find are meaningful and nourishing. Walker utterly rejected the Christianity of her parents when she was still a young person living with them. It was perhaps 30 years before she reconsidered this rejection and began reading biblical and other Christian materials to pick out the helpful strands from all the ugliness. In the interim she grounded herself as a pagan, centered herself using meditations derived from Eastern thought, expressed herself as a political activist and a writer. She thinks that people have tried all sorts of ways to share their spiritual feelings, and that there may be something useful in any of the religious systems that have been devised. Strong in her paganism, she participates -

¹⁵A. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1980), p 40.

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with others who are interested - in rituals for special events and for nature's cycles such as the Winter Solstice. The love and worship of 'Nature' she believes to be the heritage of everyone on Earth. She encourages people to remember this. Lorde takes a significantly different path in assessing and adopting religious traditions. Although she practiced visualization exercises¹⁶ and read *The I Ching*,¹⁷ it was West African polytheistic tradition that sparked her religious imagination. Mawu and SebouLisa, Afrekete and Eshu, Shango, and Yemanjá are among the deities referred to in her work - variously She Who Created the Universe and her son or brother, the Mother of us all, the mischievous messenger and beloved daughter, deities of sun, sky, thunder, war, politics, the rivers and oceans.¹⁸ She celebrated the African-American community festival of Kwanza, which incorporates harvest thanksgiving and ecological awareness, the passing down of history, building a sense of community, and celebration of culture. She also marked the changing of the seasons and the lunar cycles. She believed that dogmatic rigidity in spiritual teaching and practice ought to be replaced with openness to the lessons of life and love.

My final question about 'Goddess' asked about ultimate meaning, value, reality, truth, and good. This brings us full circle, as my first question was also about meaning - what it means to be a human being. I find that Alice Walker says that underlying reality, 'All That Is', is good, and, in some way, people 'are really on this Earth, and we're here for the duration'.¹⁹ Sarah Hoagland asks her people to take hold of life as if there were no 'ultimate' in the sense of my question, only the sum of our contexts, us, and our choices. And Audre Lorde maintained that there is no omnipotence, no immortality, no perfect diety, but there are generations of human beings - bodies, hearts, minds - with all of our limitations and our brilliance, here 'to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible'.²⁰

In considering the thought of Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and Sarah Lucia Hoagland I have found both solid ground and shifting sands. Among these writers there

¹⁶See her essay 'A Burst of Light: Living With Cancer', in *A Burst of Light*.

¹⁷See her 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger', in *Sister Outsider*.

¹⁸See her *The Black Unicorn: Poems* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1978); also *Zami*.

¹⁹A. Walker, *My Life as Myself: An Intimate Conversation* [Audio Cassette], (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True, 1995).

²⁰A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p 55.

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is solid agreement on the central importance of self-knowledge, self-healing, and the living of what Lorde calls 'a self-directed life'. Further, the self is not conceived of as an embattled monad, however fearful or lonely one might be, but as interrelational, interconnecting, and interdependent. Morality embraces our struggles toward wholeness and our efforts to develop what some call 'right relation', as well as what feminists and womanists believe to be the inescapable interweaving of these struggles and efforts. When speaking of the divine, Walker, Lorde and Hoagland show their diversity. Is goodness and love at the core of everything, as Walker would have it? Or are we to be inspired, with Lorde, by life's opportunities for apotheosis when dieties - while radiant and superb - are many and imperfect? Or perhaps Hoagland's Amazons are beckoning to us, encouraging us to behave as if our own choices and interactions constitute our parts in creating meanings and worlds. I think that these are still early days for feminist theology. As we continue to listen, hear, appreciate, contemplate, and conjecture, the shifting sands and the sea without signposts may themselves come to feel increasingly familiar and comfortable.

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