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**Published**

2021

**Journal Title**

Continental Thought & Theory: A journal of intellectual freedom

**Version**

Version of Record (VoR)

**DOI**

[10.26021/10682](https://doi.org/10.26021/10682)

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Volume 3 | Issue 1: Thinking Sin  
87-104 | ISSN: 2463-333X

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# Sin as the Abandonment of physis & the Serpent- Mother Goddess

Larelle Bossi

## 1. Introduction

The genealogy of sin will always begin with Eve in what has become known as the Western narrative. In communion with the wicked serpent, Eve betrayed humanity when she ate the forbidden fruit from the Sycamore Tree.<sup>1</sup> Since, women have been burdened with painful labours and sovereign husbands, and men have been sentenced to a life of toil for being influenced by a woman. What precisely constituted the original sin was never particularly clear to me. Was it listening to the serpent, eating the fruit, defying God's instruction, consuming the knowledge of good and evil, or sexual consciousness? If the latter, how did the fruit beget the power of the orgasm, even if the shape and sweet nectar of the fig is suggestive of the woman's vagina? It is no wonder that the creation story in Genesis is either disregarded as myth, or a misbelief outgrown by education and science. Yet, notwithstanding its discordance with the contemporary narrative, myths are stories that bring order and meaning to our existence. If understood as serving as a valuable probe into the worldview and values of a particular culture, the deep history of a myth tends to suggest that the fatuous character of its current interpretation is at best superficial, and ignorant at worst. It has been argued by feminist writers (Stone 1976, Sjöö and Mor 1987, Collard and Contrucci 1989, Merchant 1989) that our Ancestress caused the expulsion of all humankind from the original home of bliss in Eden for nothing more than celebrating life. In her own biblical rediscovery titled "When God was a Woman" (1976), Merlin Stone says that Eve was accused by the temple fathers of dreaming dreams and using her own mind. She was perceived as the embodiment of feminine evil and was found guilty of communing with the powers of the universe, and for knowing

herself to be one with the universe. Whilst this will be further taken up in the discussion, for now I am most interested in Eve, the first sinner, and her deportation from the unspoiled Paradise. Whilst such biblical stories, fables and myths may be seemingly distant from the cultivated mind of the twenty first century, I cannot help think about our current global Environmental crisis and the legacy of her descendants.

The journey to these places we occupy in our urban centers of technocracy and syntax appears inimical to both the image and the spirit of Eve's Eden. Yet in my mind, Eve is the image of sin which plays out within a paradise which has shaped our equally Western notions of nature, wilderness, and conservation. I aim to decipher this pilgrimage to the genesis of sin which has all too often been overlooked within secular Academic environmental discourse. This is not surprising since sin by definition is an immoral act against divine law, and thus mostly confined to discourses in theology. Conversely, it is worthy of mention that the question of environmental sin has more recently been raised by the pontiff, along with his accusations of mankind turning the planet into a "polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth" (McKenna 2016). It is noteworthy because in this discussion I explicitly consider the way in which the notion of *physis* – nature – can be construed as a resource to be manipulated and exploited by the patriarchal narrative ushered in by the Abrahamic god, and how *physis* may contribute to the way in which we may perceive sin. This essay meditates on the way in which *physis* is still relevant to our understanding not of sin, but of our very experience in the world – our relationship with nature. Within the environmental context I conclude that sin is thus not so much a moral transgression as it is an abandonment of nature understood as both the place and the mood we occupy.

## 2. Our Misconception of Nature so Far

We don't have to try very hard to identify the many ways we have destroyed the environment since Eve's banishment from Paradise. Even Pope Francis has decreed the state of our natural world as an indecent act of environmental sin. Here is a quick list of environmental disasters that Greta Thunberg's generation could recite: genetic modification of crops, waste production, water pollution, deforestation, urban sprawl, overfishing, acidification of oceans, air pollution and acid rain, lowering of biodiversity, habitat loss for wild animals through population expansion, mass extinctions, the carbon and nitrogen cycle, increased resource exploitation, sea level rise, and melting ice caps. The effects of anthropogenic climate change are not really up for debate anymore, but we would also be mistaken in thinking that this is a problem located by the scientific community. Whilst science has been at the forefront of the contemporary discourse with its data and model projections, Indigenous communities all over the world have warned of the effects of our 'progress' on nature for centuries, and their cries continue to be largely ignored by us. Whilst this opens up opportunities for discussions concerning structural or cultural sin through colonization in western culture, especially in white settler societies, it is beyond the scope of my aims here. Their warnings have not traditionally come to us with the numbers from science but with stories pregnant with meanings intimately bound to the pan-psychism we like to think we have outgrown. We would therefore be mistaken in thinking that the human environmental discourse around

nature began with Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, or even earlier with Leopold's 1948 *Almanac*. By the mid twentieth century we had well recognized and began confronting our segregation from the environment which had also reduced nature to the stark modern contrast between the natural and the artificial or human. We had successfully plucked ourselves out from the bosom of Gaia and considered nature in its parts as something to be observed and monitored, as if we were independent from the process of life itself. Physics had reduced us to mere chance within an expanding soup of chaos that we increasingly make sense of through laws and equations that better approximate our reality so long as we don't reduce our view of the universe to quantum particles, or expand it out to galaxies. Whilst we have walked on the moon and sent rockets out to even further orbits, we have by and large lost all connection to the celestial orbs in our day to day experience of life. It has become as though our planet, our environment, and our nature are abstracted and disconnected from the gravitational forces and expansion of the universe unto which all things are intimately bound. The stories of our skies (and the tides they control), that had guided us for aeons on journeys and through seasons, and which helped regulate food security and our connection to nature on Earth (Marean 2010, Packer, Swanson et al. 2011), have all been deemed childish, nonsense, pseudo-sciences unworthy of any real attention. Without the stories connecting us to Nature, we instead manipulate, dominate and consume her with only science left to make any sense of what is left of our disconnection. This modern, environmental notion of Nature as an orderly system with its own laws owes more to the Greek notion of a *kosmos* than it does to *physis* in any of its various meanings. However, it is not the world (*kosmos*) but nature (*physis*) that I am most interested in finding within our contemporary discourse and so am going to take a leap of faith in returning to the 'Western' myth of Paradise from which we were banished out of Western Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Genesis 3 tells a second creation story about the advisory serpent and the woman who accepted its counsel and ate of the tree of what "only the gods knew" – the secret of creating life.<sup>3</sup> In her exploration into the ancient worship of the Goddess and the eventual suppression of women's rites, Stone interprets knowledge of the gods not in moral terms, but in the proficiency for creation which for humans, translates as carnal knowledge. We know that God banished the first couple from Paradise and the priesthood has ever since deemed the very act of being born the "original sin". However, it has been argued by many feminist writers (Stone 1976, Sjöö and Mor 1987, Merchant 1989), and supported by the evidence uncovered by anthropologists and archaeologists that this was a re-written tale of creation by the Levite priesthood, after the shrines of the female goddess were destroyed by the advocates of Yahweh. This is not the desperate "cry wolf" from an oppressed group of women, but rather a more prodigious creation story that gives us perspective of the place we have awoken in – the nature from which we have both been banished and the one we have striven to destroy.

### 3. Our Serpent Mother Goddess

In the beginning was a black mother goddess. Northern Kenya is endowed with the rich pre-historic fossil heritage which marks the cradle of the human story around 3.5 million years ago. Anthropologists agree that with the advent of our contemporary humanity during the Upper Palaeolithic, before knowing the mystery of fecundity, and when coitus was not yet associated with childbirth, paternity would not have been well

understood, and life in the form of a baby always came from the mother.<sup>4</sup> “Only women could produce their own kind, and man’s part in this process was not as yet recognised”<sup>5</sup>. Woman, and more specifically in Northern Kenya at the cradle of our human story, a black woman was revered as the giver of life. As the sole parent of the family, ancestress worship was believed to be the genesis of sacred ritual. Over time and over the expansion of humanity across various locations of nature, the Great Goddess or Queen of Heaven became known as Inanna in Mesopotamia, Astarte in Canaan, Ishtar in Babylon, Hatmehit and later Isis in Egypt, Lady of the Waters in Malta, Parvati in India, Aphrodite in Greece, Venus in Rome, Mysterious Lady in China, Yemaya in Caribbean-Cuba, and Nidaba in Sumer. Many of these and other Goddesses were associated with snakes, since serpents traditionally symbolised fertility or the creative life force. In *When God Was A Woman* (1976) Stone recounts the many serpent associations immortalised in the paintings, carvings and statues of these Goddesses all over the world. The use of the cobra in the religion of the Goddess in Egypt for example was so ancient that the sign that preceded the name of Goddess was the Cobra.<sup>6</sup> This is also reflected in the totemic creation story of the oldest living culture in the world today.

During the *dreaming* for over eighty thousand years many Indigenous Australian cultures share in the narrative of a gargantuan snake who is believed to be the source of all life. Named by anthropologists, “the Rainbow Serpent” emerged from beneath the land, bringing water, and awakening humans, animals and plants while forging the physical features of the country – its hills, gorges, rivers, and lakes from a once featureless terrain. Whilst the snake could have been depicted male, female or genderless by any one culture, the Rainbow Serpent is often depicted as a vagina in paintings because of its life creative symbolism.<sup>7</sup> With the emergence of our symbolic mind and thus capacity for religious belief about 120,000 years ago,<sup>8</sup> the creative meaning of the symbolic snake also evolved beyond biological fecundity. Just as with the skin-sloughing process, snakes became symbols of rebirth, transformation, immortality, sexual consciousness, and also healing. Whilst the ancient practice of medicine was rather different to the biomedical one today, this relationship to healing carries through to the contemporary use of the ancient symbol for medicine depicting the entwined snakes of Hermes’ Staff. During the time of the Goddess, medicine was much more holistic and the image of the snake as symbolic of healing developed to be inclusive of a more transcendental quality. Symbolic of new beginnings and rejuvenation which is so often associated with healing, the Goddess’s character to rebirth was depicted in the image of rebirth in the Ouroboros throughout the Mediterranean. The notion of *sexual healing* was not just a Marvin Gaye (1982) hit in the eighties, but lives within the methodologies of healing through the carnal knowledge of the goddess. Healing was performed when the Goddess was evoked by a ritualised practice to sexual consciousness and pleasure or sensuality by the Kundalini of India, and many others. Stone (1976) explains that at oracular Goddess shrines dispersed throughout the lands, ‘healing’ snakes quite literally became the mediums of divine revelations, and conjoining what we perceive as two worlds today, by licking at the ears of her Priestesses. Reflected still in the beliefs shared by the oldest cultures of our world today, it is our separation from the World Soul that is the illness which is in need of healing.

When not lethal, the effects of snake venom have often been likened to the mind altering and dream-like effects of mescaline (peyote cactus) or psilocybin (some

mushrooms) which have historically been used for healing the spirit within Indigenous and/or pan-psychedelic cultures. Its healing character meant that the serpent thus also became the symbol of wisdom and insight into the workings of the universe and the meaning of all things, for which the Goddess was subsequently revered. This wisdom was not bound to the *kosmos* but was of *physis* or of the nature of things and it is in this way, that in some cultures the snake symbolised the umbilical cord, joining all humans to Mother Earth, Gaia, or what the Orphics called *Protogenia*, meaning “the first born”.

By 3rd B.C.E to c.2nd B.C.E the Black Mother Goddess had slithered her way into becoming the primordial goddess of the origin and arrangement of nature. She was in the Stoic sense, equated with the World Soul – the unified cause of all processes of growth, change and disappearance. She was commonly referred to by the Greeks as *Physis*, and in the *Hymns of Orpheus* we can appreciate the way in which Nature was not simply a wilderness, or a garden, flora and fauna, but something much more all-encompassing in defining life, she was the “poem of the universe” (Hadot 2006). *Physis* is wise, she is nurturing, she is immortal, and abundant; she is beauty, she is finite, she is just, and caring as set out in the Orphic Hymn IX:

...Physis, all-parent, ancient and divine, o much mechanic mother, art is thine; heavenly abundant, venerable queen, in every part of thus dominions seen. Untamed, all taming, ever splendid light, all ruling, honoured, and supremely bright. Immortal, Protogenia, ever still the same, nocturnal, starry, shining, powerful dame. Pure ornament of all the powers divine, finite and infinite alike you shine; to all things common, and in all things known, yet incommunicable and alone. Without a father of thy wondrous frame, thyself the father whence thy essence came; mingling, all-flourishing, supremely wise, and bond connective of the earth and skies. Leader, life-bearing queen, all various named, and for commanding grace and beauty famed. Justice, supreme in might, whose general sway the waters of the restless deep obey. Ethereal, earthly for the pious glad, sweet to the good, but bitter to the bad: all-wise, all-bounteous, provident, divine, a rich increase of nutriment is thine; and to maturity whatever may spring, you to decay and dissolution bring Father of all, great nurse, and mother kind, abundant, blessed, all-spermatic mind: mature, impetuous, from whose fertile seeds and plastic hand this changing scene proceeds. All-parent power, in vital impulse seen, eternal moving, all-sagacious queen. By thee the world, whose parts in rapid flow, like swift descending streams, no respite know, on an eternal hinge, with steady course, is whirled with matchless, unremitting force. Throned on a circling car, thy mighty hands hold and directs the reins of wide command: various thy essence, honoured, and the beset, of judgement too, the general end and test. Intrepid, fatal, all-subduing dame, life everlasting, fate (*aisa*), breathing flame. Immortal providence, the world is thine, and though art all things, architect divine. O, blessed Goddess, hear thy suppliants' prayer, and make their future life thy constant care; give plenteous seasons and sufficient wealth, and crown our days with lasting peace and health.<sup>9</sup>

For the Greeks, *physis* was less about the material world as it was related to growth as a process. She was not other than human, nor inferior to us, she did not exist for our

manipulation or domination, but rather she was intimately bound to us, because even within their concrete civic centres, the human being was not yet entirely separated from the natural order of things, as they were not superior to nature and were still dependent upon Her to survive – Her seasons, harvests, rains, draughts, fires, etc. In Plato and Aristotle *physis* was humanised in some sense and was understood as more a character of things, where nature was to be understood as a disposition, or a mood, behaviours, or the idiosyncrasies of an individual person, god, animal, or season. That individual however, did not ever arrive individuated, but rather, the human artifice was a mirror of nature's action. We see this idea further explored by the Neoplatonic notion of *physis* in which this immanent but incorporeal Nature hides itself in the 'gross vestments' of bodies. Pierre Hadot (2006), philosopher in the history of ideas, in his last translated publication-begins his quest in understanding our evolving western idea of nature precisely from this Neoplatonic account of *physis*, which he reads into Heraclitus' aphorism, *physis kruptesthai philei*, translated as "nature loves to hide". He also centres his inquiry into our evolving perception of nature around the veiled Isis, and thus also rather explicitly, our relationship with the Goddess.

#### 4. Our Priesthood hides *physis* in the Idol of a Forgotten Goddess

Across the cities through which the Goddess was known and revered, She was worshipped not only as the prophetess of great wisdom, closely identified with the serpent, but as the original Mother, and the patroness of sexual consciousness. Stone says "the domination of male over female was written into the Bible as one of the major acts and proclamations of the male creator"<sup>10</sup>. Eve was banished from the garden as the last of the Serpent-Mother Priestesses, but also as the first sinner under God. Stone and others have argued that she was banished by a new male Deity, and the life-giving power bequeathed exclusively unto women was now judged immoral. The attack on the Serpent-Mother-Goddess went viral: the sun-worshipping pharaohs of later Egypt slay the dragon Apophis, Apollos slays Gaia's Python, the Greek hero Perseus slays the Amazonina Medusa with snakes for hair, St. Goerge slays the dragon of England, and even St. Patrick was tasked to drive out the snake from a snake-less Ireland.<sup>11</sup> Christian prophesy details the final extinction of the dragon in Revelation 12-21:1, which promises a king-messiah to kill the watery cosmic snake, and then takes over the world throne unchallenged. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor claim they rediscovered the religion of the Earth in their own almost biblical manual they titled "The Great Cosmic Mother" from which I will be vigilantly guided in this section of the discussion. Theirs is an almanac of the original religion of humanity in our story through time, and migratory routes. From the millennia-old matristic religion with a pre-eminent understanding of the human experience, Sjöö and Mor present an equally vivid picture of the tragic consequences caused by the savage priests of the patriarchy. To the Ancient world, explains Sjöö and Mor, the Serpent-Mother or cosmic serpent was everywhere known as "the energy source of life: of healing and oracular power, fertility and maternal blessing"<sup>12</sup>.

With the emerging patriarchy under God, the Serpent-Mother was defiled and destroyed. Chaos was ordered and replaced with slave labour, military force, the rule of the fist, threats of punishment and coercion, by what Sjöö and Mor theatrically refer to as "fire breathing, guilt mongering male priesthoods, in service to the God of War and Wealth".<sup>13</sup> Whilst they make Yahweh sound more like Ares or Mars than the God of

forgiveness, it is relevant to consider how the “original sin” as presented within this feminist exploration was a turning point in a gender war that played out over centuries and which altered the course of our human story. It marked an ontological shift away from a life affirming experience of the nature of things and its celebration of birth and rebirth, and toward a necrophilic one<sup>14</sup>, plagued by the shame of being born human. On the first page of the introduction to their own record of man’s violence against nature, Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci (1988) explicitly claim that “in patriarchy ...being is rape”. This is not to be reduced to yet another ‘war of the sexes’ we dismiss as hiccups in heterosexual relationship therapy, or even isolated as a mere footnote within theological discourse for the religiously inclined. Rather we ought to be seriously considering this as a significant cultural gestalt shift that has forged our very relationship with nature and the current place we occupy.

The Goddess shrines in groves and caves, by sacred wells, and on mountaintops were eventually destroyed, forgotten, overgrown, and overshadowed by vast, rigid monuments to the god-kings in urban centres where excess grain and other products extracted from the countryside in taxes were piled up to the greater power and glory of the ruling priesthood.<sup>15</sup> No longer sensitive to the earth’s spiritual energies, these priesthoods were no longer channels of real cosmic and terrestrial power. Instead, they resorted to conscious, deliberate manipulations of human fears, mass-sacrifices and all that war brings.<sup>16</sup> *Physis* and the entire ancient relation between the cosmos and the human mind, mediated by the dream process, was thus interfered with and distorted by patriarchal dogma.

Sjöö and Mor explicitly state that “the effort to displace the feminine seems to be the archetypal foundation for civilisation,”<sup>17</sup> as we know it. Whether he is challenging Mother Nature by flying away from her in rockets, or in changing her DNA on earth, man has not given up on his commitment to removing the mystery of life from the Great Mother but through domination and manipulation, he aims only to redefine it and make it his own.

Ever since, *physis* went into hiding in the form of a veiled Isis like a succubus that was aiming only to lure men away from their reverence to domination and toward the knowledge of all things. We already know that *physis* was not interpreted as synonymous with flora and fauna or biological ecosystems, as it is invariably used today. Rather, by the Ancients, nature was debated to be construed as either the World Soul or goddess, the way of the cosmos, or the character of things.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the character of *physis* is one of an interconnectivity between divinity and humanity as loosely understood through pantheism.<sup>19</sup> Hadot’s endeavor to decipher Heraclitus’ aphorism *physis kruptesthai philei*, through the metaphor of the veiled Isis directly speaks to the priesthood’s rise to supremacy over the Serpent-Mother. Whilst he does not explicitly claim this much in simple terms, he traces successive interpretations of the three cryptic words which, over time, have come to mean that all that lives tends to die and that nature wraps herself in myths.<sup>20</sup>

In his book *The Veil of Isis* Hadot (2006) reveals man’s many attempts at re-discovering *physis* through the misinterpretations of ancient myths, the mechanics and magic from the middle ages, experimental science and the mechanisation of the natural world, through poetry and through the conjectural character of physics. Already prior to the Christian era, the Stoic’s interpretation of ‘hiding’ as ‘veiling’ separated the power of



divinity from human mortality. After the patriarchal oppression of the Middle Ages, the pagan myths were reborn through the artistic materialization of renaissance Europe. Botticelli raised a naked feminine deity from the sea in his *The Birth of Venus* and Raphael's *Philosophy* depicted a robed Artemis which ultimately became the symbol of nature. By the scientific revolution, the veiled Isis featured in the frontispieces of scientific handbooks and as the symbol of nature, also became the subject of a veritable cult in pursuit of the mysteries and secrets privy only to learned men.<sup>21</sup> Hadot then considered and distinguished the methods of unveiling Isis in our learning about nature by either the Promethean and/or Orphic methods. Respectively, we can either unveil her by force through the scientific torture of experimentation or through the aesthetic experience of remembering the Greek *poieses* or the poetic unveiling of nature.<sup>22</sup> If Hadot was writing this within the feminist context, you could imagine how his Promethean method of inquiry would be consistent with the priesthood and the Orphic *poiesis* consistent with the Priestesses. These dichotomous characters however are by no means exclusive for in Leonardo da Vinci as both inventor and artist, Hadot paints a prime candidate for dancing the Promethean and Orphic tango.<sup>23</sup> Either way, it definitely does seem that with the death of the Serpent-Mother, *physis* has lost all of its meaning within the masculinised environmental notion of Nature.

Stripped back from a cosmic and inter-relational ontology, no matter how hard we try to unveil her or keep her spirit alive, *physis* remains in hiding. In his chapter "Isis has no veil", Hadot explicitly considers the Romantic poet Goethe's ode to Isis which vehemently criticises man's pretention of tearing her veil from Nature. In the second quatrain, Goethe explicitly claims "Isis shows herself without a veil, But, mankind has cataracts".<sup>24</sup> Within the feminist discourse I have unapologetically configured, Goethe would diagnose the priesthood and his descendants as suffering from such cataracts. In some sense, Goethe is claiming that today, *physis* is the mystery of nature in broad daylight, but she has been erased from our knowing her and thus we have lost the capacity to even see her. The mystery of nature to be seen is not coded in universal equations, or the economised syntax of language, but is the unfathomable mystery of existence itself which we can but admire, venerate and perhaps even grieve. The shroud of the priesthood thus veils our eyes, even when we think we are secularised.

## 5. Our Original Sin against Nature Realised

In our contemporary world, people no longer speak of the secrets of nature, nor the myth of Isis or the symbolic meaning of her veil. Heraclitus' *physis kruptesthai philei* and Hadot's genealogical reflection of it has even become considered too audacious a topic to pursue in its vastness and uncertainty. But then the contemporary pressure to specialise and atomise is itself a product of the priesthood committed to slaughtering the World Soul symbolised by the Serpent-Mother. In their own historical account of the fall of the Great Cosmic-Mother, Sjöo and Mor (1987) claim that the classical Greeks practiced platonic love in an attempt by the male intellect to free itself spiritually from the goddess, and to make himself cosmically self-sufficient. This is in a time where fertility rituals like *heiros gamos* were part of temple life in a not too distant past. Even by this stage in historical context, the time of the Serpent-Mother was already remembered as legend and myth of a 'golden age' with rituals practiced in secret cults by women and pastoral peasants. It was nonetheless believed that if the physical world in

which females were thus assigned could be reduced to meaningless materiality, then the idealizing male mind was justified in manipulating, exploiting, and even destroying it. This was in some sense the first steps of extracting Western mankind from nature. Thereafter, the male mind was defined by its ability to organize the natural world into rational categories, for “objective” study, and use.

In the company of beautiful boys, Socrates was known to lose his senses, and was a proponent of ideal homosexuality. In pursuit of platonic love and independent from the Goddess, Socrates was contemptuous too of mythic and poetic thought processes. Sjöö and Mor argue that he turned away from ancient mysteries in pursuit of critical thinking in philosophical dialogues where he turned multidimensional, multisensual life processes into a linear discourse between aristocratic male minds.<sup>25</sup> This was the father of Western philosophy and the methods which have continued to inspire the progress of the priesthood’s vision. Thinking and language is often one and the same, and so with the Socratic methodology, we see the priesthood’s instruction for “rational poetic language and thought”<sup>26</sup> to replace the inspired poetic language of the Goddess. Poetry, once the language of divination, was reduced to mere rhetoric. Socrates spoke about “life” but became increasingly removed from the myths and rituals of lore, those focussed on seasonal observations of life in the fields, on the body’s direct and rhythmic relation to nature’s rhythms, which has today been criticised as mere coincidence. Life says Sjöö and Mor, was more and more the working of the human mind and “culture” in the Western world has since meant male urban elitism, based on an intellectual contempt for the revelations and customs of pastoral and provincial life.<sup>27</sup>

Whilst we witness the cultural foundations considerably shifting within the priesthood’s takeover of Antiquity, through language, thought, sexual practice, justice and politics, we see it take an even more robust form during the modern period, when developments in mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, and chemistry transformed the views of society about nature, and then later again with the mechanisation of this information. In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant (1989) demonstrates how the scientific revolution commencing in the sixteenth century and then ultimately the Industrial revolution, securely fixed the patriarchal nails into the Cosmic Mother’s coffin. Man’s domination over nature was an integral element of the Baconian program, writes Merchant.<sup>28</sup> As the relic of Isis continues to persist into the recesses of learned men, Francis Bacon aimed at disrobing nature of her secrets through experimentation. Seventeenth century scientists reinforced aggressive attitudes toward nature and spoke out in favour of “mastering” and “managing” the earth. Descartes similarly wrote in his *Discourse on Method* (1668) that through knowing the crafts of the artisans and the forces of bodies we could “render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature”. This was the aim of science, and the industrialisation manifested it on a grand scale. This new image of nature as consistently female but merely material, to be controlled and dissected through experimentation, legitimated the exploitation of natural resources. And although the image of the nurturing Earth revived in the Renaissance did not vanish, it was superseded by a more powerful image of control. Fast forward a few hundred years and today we awaken to a very real existential crisis within a *kosmos* plagued by environmental devastation across all lands and waters with *physis* nowhere to be found.

Merchant finds hope in the ecosystem movement, as a pursuit to restore the balance of nature disrupted by industrialisation and overpopulation. Whilst I agree with

Merchant that the interconnected web of ecosystem biology and satellite technologies providing scientific understanding of the interconnected systems of our planet shows promise in gesturing toward our need to live within the cycles of nature, as opposed to the exploitative, linear mentality of teleological progress, its potential reveals only at best, the cold corpse of an abandoned Goddess. And we are left not knowing how to commune with her. I think Friedrich Nietzsche best demonstrates our mere contemplation of *physis* as an experience of life both in its interiority and exteriority, but also in the psychosis of trying to flip outside of the vision of the priesthood we have been conditioned to believe is true.

“We are buds on a single tree – what do we know about what can become of us from the interests of the tree! But we have a consciousness as though we would and should be everything, a phantasy of ‘I’ and all ‘not I.’ Stop feeling oneself as this phantastic ego! Learn gradually to discard the supposed individual! Discover the fallacies of the ego! Recognize egoism as fallacy! The opposite is not to be understood as altruism! This would be love of other supposed individuals! No! Get beyond ‘myself’ and ‘yourself’! Experience cosmically!”<sup>29</sup>

As though *gestalting* between personalities, any attempt at reclaiming a possible communion with Isis or at refocusing our ocular orbs through a different lens is a pursuit toward what we have diagnosed to be utterly crazy. Our original sin is not the sins of our Mother, but rather, that of our God. Our ‘original sin’ is not in the eating of the fruit of the Sycamore tree, nor in the communion with the Mother-Serpent. Our original sin conferred unto Eve ought not even be a moral issue confined to priestly justice, although perhaps Pope Francis is right to assert environmental sin upon the aggressive and negligent actions of the descendants of his priesthood – for we are all those descendants. The only sin Eve is culpable for is that of a faithful Priestess to the Serpent-Mother and honouring the mystery of *physis*. Our original sin therefore is bound to the abandonment of our Serpent-Mother, in forgetting *physis* and in our impaired vision of Isis. This is also to say, in the abandonment of ourselves as a constitutive part of the mystery of *physis*. Simone Weil echoes precisely this when she writes “One should identify oneself with the universe itself. Everything that is less than the universe is subjected to suffering”.<sup>30</sup>

Weil’s identification with nature is not in scientific terms, but rather in becoming intensely aware of the fact that we are a part of nature, and that in this sense we ourselves are this infinite, ineffable nature that completely surrounds us. If we were to reach out our arms to longingly reconnect with the Mother we never knew we had, I suspect our embrace would be painful. I suspect that at once our intense awareness that we were never orphaned, and that she was always there would be overwhelmingly comforting as also enraging. And what of our rage for the priesthood that fed us the lie, and the realisation that we at once are also him.

Like no other academic work I have studied, Susan Griffin (1978) shoots beyond the syntax propagated by the reigning patriarchy and transcends prose into the realm of the poetic, and grasps onto our Serpent-Mother with both her hands when she writes:

I feel her pain and my own pain comes into me, and my own pain grows large and I grasp this pain with my hands, and I open my mouth to this pain, I taste, I know, and I know why she goes on, under great weight, with this

great thirst, in drought, in starvation, with intelligence in every act does she survive disaster.<sup>31</sup>

### Concluding statement & call to action...

*Many have recently been encouraged to share in their environmental grief from the most devastating fires in recorded history experienced by so many Australians this past year. Perhaps it is time for others to also face the pain and free themselves from the lie of what is safe and stable within the confines of our civic apartments and be reborn within the flux of physis. To reconnect with our willingness to dance with nature, to move with her storms and her fires, and adapt to her changing climate, seems an impossible task, even if it sounds right. Within the very real existential and environmental crises we find ourselves in, I am left only to wonder whether we can yet find the courage to walk free from the crypt of the priesthood and commune with the healing snakes en route back to Mother-Goddess.*

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<sup>1</sup> Even though it has been assumed by the English-speaking world that Eve ate an apple from the tree of good and evil, in Latin, *pomum*, is translated as fruit, possibly from *\*po-emo-* meaning, "picked" or "taken off". Therefore *pomum* has equally been argued to be a persimmon or fig which are picked from the Sycamore Fig Tree, which was often planted by Goddess alters and the

serpents that lived there. This becomes increasingly relevant in the narrative of Eve I continue to discuss, as espoused by Stone, M. (1976). When God Was A Woman. New York, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Inc.

<sup>2</sup> It has been accepted amongst scholars that Eve was located at the head of the Persian Gulf in southern Mesopotamia where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers run into the Sea. This is modern day Iraq, located in Western Asia also known as the middle east or even Arabian peninsula. Thesiger, W. (1967). The Marsh Arabs : With 110 plates, Penguin Books, Hamblin, D. J. (1987). Has the Garden of Eden been located at last? Smithsonian Magazine. USA. **18**, (2002). The Iraqi Marshlands: A Human and Environmental Study. London, Politico's, Curtis J, R. and H. Najah A (2006). "Restoring the Garden of Eden: An Ecological Assessment of the Marshes of Iraq." BioScience **56**(6): 477, Al-Ansari, N. (2020). "Can We Restore the Marches in Iraq (Garden of Eden)?" Engineering **12**(7): 466-486.

<sup>3</sup> Stone, M. (1976). When God Was A Woman. New York, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Inc. p 217

<sup>4</sup> Brandon, S. G. F. (1963). Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East. London, Hodder & Stoughton, Hawkes, J. (1963). The World of the Past. London, Random House.

<sup>5</sup> Cottrell in Stone, M. (1976). When God Was A Woman. New York, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Inc. p 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Forrest, I. (2014). "Isis, Lady of the Holy Cobra." 2020, from <https://isiopolis.com/2014/08/17/isis-lady-of-the-holy-cobra/>. Author of M. Isidora, F. (2001). Isis Magic: Cultivating a Relationship with the Goddess of 10,000 Names, Llewellyn Worldwide. Stone, M. (1976). When God Was A Woman. New York, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Inc.

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<sup>11</sup> Sjöö, M. and B. Mor (1987). The Great Cosmic Mother: rediscovering the religion of the Earth. New York, HarperCollins. pp 250-251.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p 251.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Daly, M. (1979). Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. London, The Women's Press Ltd.

<sup>15</sup> Sjöö, M. and B. Mor (1987). The Great Cosmic Mother: rediscovering the religion of the Earth. New York, HarperCollins. p 252.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>22</sup> Hadot, P. (2006). The Veil Of Isis: an essay on the history of the idea of nature. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press in Harvard University Press. p 92

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p 155.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p 249

<sup>25</sup> Sjöö, M. and B. Mor (1987). The Great Cosmic Mother: rediscovering the religion of the Earth. New York, HarperCollins. p 279.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p 280.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche's "Kritische Studienausgabe" in Parkes, G. (1994). Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press. p 300.

<sup>30</sup> Simone Weil, La pesanteur et la grâce [Gravity and Grace]. 1947, p 19

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