

On vibrancy, religion, & economics

This week I am reflecting on our discussion from reading group, specifically my question about whether or not humans provide matter with agency by being aware. Working through the answer to that question, I quite liked the idea that matter demands our attention and it led me to think more about the question our group did not get a chance to discuss regarding vital materialism and its tension with religion. Because we did not get a chance to talk about this, the following are my thoughts as it relates to religion and environmentalism.

First, looking back at the passages from *Vibrant Matter*, the very rough main point I think Jane Bennet makes is that this idea of vibrancy and agency of matter through assemblages allows one to look at the world from a different perspective. A deeper, more thoughtful perspective, which should remove the person from the center of the observation and instill more empathy for all life and matter. One element of analyzing this work that I cannot quite figure out is who the audience is, but I can assuredly say that it is not religious folks en masse. While the question from our reading group precipitated my thoughts on the soul/religion, it was her question, "...what is the relationship between environmental protection and capitalist markets..." that began to connect economic and religious threads (Bennet 2010, 111).

As mentioned before, I come from a very capitalistic society and one where all aspect of American "values" are heavily tied to religion. As early as *Manifest Destiny*, religion has been the justification of our (white people) exploitation of non-white people. Bringing these ideas into the modern era and speaking as someone raised in a fundamentalist christian household, America's prosperity is tied to our relationship

with God. This is completely nuts but it did make me wonder a while back why, if our economic prosperity is tied to God and he gave people the earth, would we want to continue our destructive ways. Wouldn't God be upset with us for destroying the planet and thus punish us? Christians are notorious for not believing in most science but climate change is one that they actively rail against. So I've questioned this for a while because I thought if I could figure it out, maybe there would be an "in" for an argument for environmental stewardship within a religious framework that might spur them to action. This long-standing question was answered a couple of years ago after hearing a religious leader's thoughts on climate change and his justification for not taking action based on "dominion" in Genesis 1:26-28.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Basically, God gave man dominion over the animals and the earth so he can do whatever he wants, including destroying the planet. The real issue is that the Bible can be interpreted in so many ways but the most common interpretation is one that confirms the reader's bias. Combine that with their belief that there is an afterlife and there is absolutely no motivation for action. While Bennet's work is full of interesting ideas that I will utilize, the idea that matter can have agency, perhaps even a soul, will consistently be at odds with religion's views on the subject. My worry is that environmental stewardship requires buy-in from the United States of which the religious faction make up a large part. While we apply Bennet's theories, a large population of people will continue to hinder progress until a new argument can be made which supersedes their interpretation. While this seems impossible, I am still hoping to uncover one.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of*

Things. Durham: Duke University Press.

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