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A painting of a landscape with green plants and a red net. The scene is set in a dry, brown, rocky terrain. Two tall green plants with large leaves stand prominently. A red net is draped over the plants and the ground. The background shows a hazy, brownish landscape with more plants and a small figure in the distance.

EDITORS:

IGNACE HAAZ | AMÉLÉ ADAMAVI-AHO ÉKUÉ

WALKING WITH THE EARTH

INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES
ON ETHICS OF ECOLOGICAL CARING

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Walking with the Earth
Intercultural Perspectives
on Ethics of Ecological Caring

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on Ethics of Ecological Caring

Ignace Haaz / Amélie Adamavi-Aho Ekué (Editors)

Globethics.net Co-Publications & Other

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The general scope and the initial impetus and description of the project

It is commonly believed that considering nature different from us, human beings (qua rational, cultural, religious and social actors), is detrimental to our engagement for the preservation of nature. An obvious example is animal rights, a deep concern for all living beings, including non-human living creatures, which is understandable only if we approach nature, without fearing it, as something which should remain outside of our true home. “Walking with the earth” aims at questioning any similar preconceptions in the wide sense, including allegoric-poetic texts as with Toyomi Iwawaki-Riebel and the noble prose of the Haiku Travelogue.

We invited all sorts of ways of saying why caring is so important, why togetherness, being-with each other, as a spiritual but also embodied ethics is important in a divided world. All sorts of immersive experiences bring the idea to our mind that there is no fundamental difference between us as living beings and the world in which we live –given we practice with passion some activity which helps us to learn something about the world. Bertrand Russell captured well the tension between first social cohesion, necessary for security, which includes care for the common good and a proper attention given to our environment, and second some wild state of the human nature. Human

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nature is seen as an adventurous or even a bellicose instinct, inherited after millions of years of evolution and yet not fully pacified by civilization and models of untroubled collective organisation and progress.

“The unadventurous existence of a well-behaved citizen, engaged in earning a moderate living in a humble capacity, leaves completely unsatisfied all that part of his nature which, if he had lived 400,000 years ago, would have found ample scope in the search for food, in cutting off the heads of enemies, and in escaping the attentions of tigers. When war comes the bank clerk may escape and become a commando, and then at last he feels that he is living as nature intended him to live. But, unfortunately, science has put into our hands such enormously powerful means of satisfying our destructive instincts, that to allow them free play no longer serves any evolutionary purpose, as it did while men were divided into petty tribes. The problem of making peace with our anarchic impulses is one which has been too little studied, but one which becomes more and more imperative as scientific technique advances¹.”

Peaceful but vigorous ways of debating on ideas, dynamic and competitive inter-relations across learning institutions, management of work focusing on development and overcoming of risks, political well-regulated *agon*, social ethics (which needs to balance collective and individual aspects of human action): all show creative ways of mastering our anarchic impulses. But we are not yet there, we have technically

¹ Russell, Bertrand. *Reith Lectures 1948*: “Authority and the Individual. Lecture 1: Social Cohesion and Human Nature”, Trans.: 24 December 1948, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00hgk62> Transcript: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/the-reith-lectures/transcripts/1948/>

made immense progress, which seems to not have corresponding qualities on the social level. If it would be the case, we would not be gathered reflecting on the issue of our problematic relation to nature.

Learning technics aimed at the overcoming of natural obstacles show that learning and playing may be seen as related to similar fundamental dispositions, a human natural tendency for adventure and danger. Ignace Haaz, in his article, was inspired by Russell's realism on human nature, which gives a philosophical legitimacy to consider playful activities seriously. Dr. Haaz claims, based on his personal experience, that uphill skiing should be conceived as a new artistic gesture, not very different from getting inspired by dance or finding personal harmony in martial arts. Walking uphill, slowly and immersed in a deep connection with a transcendental connection with the beyond, as in mountain ascents, is a way of practicing a shared passion. It is blowing on the barely perceptible embers of adventurous instincts, in order to rekindle the fire of courage and a new determination in existence.

Other contributors in this book take a similar path and smoothen the rigid difference between walking as a physical exercise and the fact that, as pilgrims, walking is a quest for meaning that follows the call of the pilgrim, a living path of faith, with Emmanuel Tagnard and Maurice Salib. Everyone should enter in various forms of religious or social ethics, instead of basing values on purely individualistic grounds. It would be as worshipping "false gods" and becoming slaves of circumstances and social inequalities. It is important to not exaggerate the natural tendencies; "energetic men have worshipped power rather than simple happiness and friendliness; men of less energy have acquiesced, or have been deceived by a wrong diagnosis of the sources of sorrow" as Russell rightly sees, who despite being agnostic thought

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that worshipping God instead of power or the human beings is important, as it serves humanity as a whole².

Earth considered as Husserl traditionally conceived a lifeworld, as a collective and intersubjective pool of experience, enlarging the question of the constitution of the transcendental self to a Being-with (a “Mit-Sein”, as Heidegger will put it), turned a chapter of History and left behind the poetic heroism of the Ancients. Should our home be built on firm ground as brick-and-mortar, because it is and should remain a common place where we find a shelter against hardships, epidemics, new possible cold wars, etc.? Should we not also perceive from time to time our life not as a stone carved object but as a fluid circumnavigation, as Patrick Michel shows? In order to tackle different aspects of this same philosophical interrogation about being home in/with nature, we have divided the project between different parts. First, looking closer into the *value of doing*, we have seen some key activities as *walking* and *sailing*, and with Chukwudi Johnpaul Okolo we will see *ancestral Igbo rituals*, basing the interconnectedness of some traditional religious beliefs with ecology. Closing the first part and introducing the second, where we focus on the *value of sharing*, Jes Colding claims that the Beatles got it right, as the wild hairy guys sang “the World will be as one” (Imagine), as they early saw that we inevitably would need to see the planet as a common place, which we would need to learn to share. Sharing and caring are closely connected attitudes.

The second part of the book dives deep at the heart of our project, which is meant to be an invitation to reflect on the ethical underpinnings of *being related with the earth* and all living beings from the standpoint of diverse experiences, disciplines and schools of thought in all regions of the world. This intercultural endeavour will offer insights and responses beyond a comparative anthropological project on values; it

² Russell, B. “Lecture 6: Individual and Social Ethics”, Transmission 30 January 1949, transcription, *ibid.*

will constitute a way to define and ground a genuine framework for ecological caring across cultures.

If the nature/culture divide is fallacious, as we believe, then other related divides should be as well questioned, such as the perception that law and ethics are two systems of organisation of life as a cultural system, one focusing on life as an external phenomenon, in legal texts, rites, customs, etc., the other as cultural life including inner experiences (values, norms, ethics, spirituality, etc.). Ecological caring sets a more precise focus on a non-relativistic ground for engaging with cultures, networks of relationships and systems of values. This is right on the paper, but when we question the challenges related to migration as a fundamental right with Christian Jäggi, we are facing the difficulties of drawing the boundaries of a new spirituality, of a new perspective from an absolute, which could be the ground for transcending worldviews. By contrast to the notion of Anthropocene, which relates the Age of the Human Being with the ecological crisis, the paradigm shift should be rather seen as a Capitalocene, because the pervasive human influence over non-humans has to be understood as not related to human or technically engineered issues and solutions, but as political and economical in a Neo-Marxist perspective, and the solution can only come from a collective attitude of altruistic solidarity, as Leonel Iván Jiménez Jiménez will show. There is also the question whether there is a point of return at all, with John Mohan Razu, who shows the responsibility of those who misrepresent the message of the Gospel and convey irresponsible messages. “The world of nature shall never be silenced and ruthlessly exploited”.

Ecological caring poses the question of interrelation in times of disruption afresh. Beyond a knowledge-oriented concern for the urgency of the ecological crisis, it addresses the symbolic and imaginary resources needed in order to reconnect with the other and the earth at all levels. It constitutes a way of (re)thinking a new revolutionary

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pilgrimage as we discover that nature is *walking in us*, as much as we are walking in the nature. Literally and axiologically, a trans-valuation of all values is operating in our minds and bodies. This is the reason why, in the *third part* entitled *the value of values*, we would come to question the semantic of *Oikophilia* with Jakob Bühlmann Quero, who develops with the conservative philosopher Scruton a critical analysis of the so-called foundation of the institutional approach. From this side, it is to be emphasised that if we blur the political agenda relevant for addressing challenges related to life in society, and consequently key interactions between the States on the environment, we lose considerable normative precision. It is not to say that acting with the civil society and the international organisations entails to live in the dream, disconnected from reality, but economy and religion need, in order to help to solve problems, related political values to act in more decisive ways, as the environment is not only related to economy, civil society and religion. Ryan C. Urbano elaborates on the virtue of ecological caring, and shows that virtue ethics should come as background on environmental issues, as the political enlargement of our commitment is ultimately grounded on the value of selflessness in our personal practice of education and character formation.

The radical and life-threatening acceleration of the ecological crisis shows more and more the urgency of a new systemic conversion to values different from blind economic expansion and destruction of the natural environment, –this is unquestionably true. The project of a mutual understanding of the human reality becomes as urgent as a deeper reflection on and commitment to the foundations of values and knowledge conducive to developing alternative models of living together, different from the dominant and predatory paradigm of production and consumption. Questioning the value of values thus aims at different propositions and attitudes, which we will only list as we lack space in an introduction for a more detailed commentary:

- Cultivating a space for intellectual co-creation as intercultural project;
- Contributing to interdisciplinary exchange on one of the most challenging ethical themes of contemporary times;
- Advancing the intercultural discourse on ecological caring and ethics of care in theory and practice,
- Encouraging comparative perspectives (e.g. comparative religious, comparative value systems/axiology, reasoning on values, hermeneutics), comparative law and soft law and governance;
- Inviting the description and analysis of ecological caring from the perspectives of religions and worldviews ('from-within', i.e. eco-theological, eco-religious, eco-philosophical views in one tradition, or comparative, or traditional religions and indigenous worldviews) and the cognitive and practical re-arrangements they provoke;
- Deepening the cross-cultural understanding of the nexus between life-styles, (ascetic practices, dietetic recipes and cognitive and bodily exercises and experiences of the Self, etc.) with the leading question: what does the spiritual return to nature mean?
- Fostering the debate on ethics in an intercultural perspective with particular attention to cultural frameworks for ethical reasoning in diverse fields in which ecological care comes to application, such as: education, social work, agriculture, nutrition, economy, global migration, meteorology and public health.

Highlights: caring about ethics – ethics of caring

In traditional schools of ethical thought the ideas of justice, righteousness and appropriateness are central. Approaches of an ethics of care have brought to our attention the necessity to qualify ethical

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discernment not only in terms of (general and universally applicable) standards, but also with regard to responses to individual situations, to vulnerability, relationships and interdependence. The editors endeavour to describe an ethics of ecological caring as a valid framework for an intercultural ethical conversation.

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Geneva, January 2022

PART 1:
THE VALUE OF DOING

WALK WITH OR AGAINST THE EARTH?

Maurice Salib

Walk at the Right Pace

I am part of this community, of these men and women, sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes deeply discouraged, but always on the way, in research, in becoming. I naturally started walking one day in November 2020, in the midst of Covid, with the swimming pools closed (problem for swimmers), and running requiring training that I no longer had. Walking daily has done me good: in 10 months I have walked more than 3000 kilometers, but above all I have regained a physical, psychic, and spiritual balance. Walking regulates our thoughts and movements at a human pace. Life is like a long walk, a long pilgrimage. The image is common and we like to use it because walking means movement, it implies a standing position, it implies physical fatigue and therefore the will to move. It is physical and psychic displacement and if it dislodges us, in the long run, it puts us back. No wonder all the spiritual masters practiced it, Jesus Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, and so many others, as if walking and praying, praying and walking, were inseparable.

There's a story told about walking at the right pace: a group of mountaineers were preparing to climb a summit, and after hiring and

loading Sherpas with their luggage, they advanced at a steady pace for 3 days. Realizing that the Sherpas were no longer following them, they retraced their steps until finding the luggage and those who carried it, sitting on the ground. The mountaineers asked the Sherpas why they had not followed them and why were they sitting instead of walking. "We have walked too fast, so now we are waiting for our souls to join us to continue walking" they replied. There would therefore be for them a necessary balance to walk in harmony with oneself, body, soul, and spirit. This is all the more interesting because in order to move forward, while walking, you have to be in constant imbalance between the previous position and the next. From there to say that when we walk our body, our soul, and our spirit are in interaction with the earth which surrounds us, there is only one step that I invite you to take so that the physical displacement also becomes a spiritual experience. Pilgrimages of all kinds arouse, in these times of search for meaning, a new craze, starting with this collective book whose title, "Walking with the earth", evokes the idea that without paying attention, we could walk not with but against the earth.

The question is, where are we heading? Does it make sense to overcome all these hardships, add new steps to already tired ones? We are walking, of course, but towards what are we walking? Some want to walk towards wealth or fame, some think they are walking towards death, still others want to walk towards paradise.

And us? What are we walking towards? Are we walking towards a future compromised by fate, by pollution, by the judgment of others or by overconsumption? Are we walking towards our own pride and our own loss or are we walking towards full reconciliation of ourselves with God and therefore with others and with the earth?

The Bible is the Story of the March of a People

Originally, the word "pilgrim" was the exact synonym of the words "foreigner" and "traveller". Later on, it designated the traveller walking for a spiritual purpose to a distant sanctuary. How are we Christians also pilgrims? What are the connections between walking per se, inner adventure and travel, introspection, and action? What is more important: the way, the walk, or the goal? When did we arrive? Can we settle down?

Have you seen "Saint-Jacques, La Mecque" (2004) by Coline Serrault? It shows with humor and relevance the happiness of walking, an authentic landscape, the simplicity of nature, the striking, the superficial, and these invisible barriers erected between us. Nine very different characters, all looking a little like us, will travel together towards Santiago de Compostela. You have to suffer, leave your comfort, accept restrictive living conditions and deprive yourself. Along the way, they will gradually shed their heavy baggage, put down their prejudices, get to know each other, discover themselves, share, help, reconcile, and even love each other. All pilgrims on the way, walking in the same adventure: it may seem naïve, but to see how walking also moves us internally towards the best of ourselves, and therefore also towards the other, really does us good!

On the move, the bipeds that we are less different from each other than in a sedentary lifestyle, as if a convergence was emerging as we walked together. Certain passages of the Bible, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, seem to indicate that one of the very old names that the Christian faith originally received was precisely the Way, the Way signifying the Christian community. Thus, the early Christians were aware of having found a way: a way that is no longer a law, but a person, Jesus Christ. Following him, they begin to walk. How is Jesus Christ a way? The Way for me? Knowing Jesus Christ, for it to be true and real, as for knowing any person, requires a process, a meeting.

Through continued Bible reading and prayer we learn to "walk-with" Him one step at a time. To ruminate on the Word is to walk for the Christian.

The Path Goes through the *Road to Damascus*

The ancestors of Israel were nomads, men on the move. The Christian journey is linked to different types of walk mentioned in the Bible: Abraham leaving his house to answer the call of God, the forty years of wandering in the desert of the Hebrews awaiting the return to Israel, the peregrinations of Jesus during his public life, the road to Gaza, the road to Golgotha, the road to Emmaus. And then there are all the journeys of the apostle Paul after his "road to Damascus". This is the story of a young man, one of the most important figures in the New Testament for a good reason: beside Jesus' example himself, Paul's experience of Christian faith is impressive. More accurately, he is the author of more than half of the New Testament. Paul is certainly one of the most fascinating figures of this early Church. We can go so far as to say that without him we certainly wouldn't be here. Indeed, it was he, and he alone who, from the beginning of his ministry, was convinced of the need to spread the gospel throughout the world. He had to fight against all those within the community of Christ who believed that Jesus had only come to call the Jews to repentance. The first time Paul is mentioned is at the time of Stephen's martyrdom: Saul (later Paul) is present but he is on the other side of the fence, on the side of those who throw stones and who in fact organize the repression against the heretics that are the Christians. We are told that he kept the coats of those who murdered Stephen so to say he was one of those in charge. And here he was, not long after, asking his superiors for permission to go to Damascus to see the Jews living in Syria to put things in order. Already the taste for travel... but this time it was to suppress this teaching, completely blasphemous in his eyes.

So, he left with a whole team of undoubtedly determined and armed men in case the Jews of Damascus didn't agree to hand over the disciples of Jesus. We would then know how to convince them... but things were going to turn out very differently. On this road, an extraordinary apparition: a light, and in that light a voice that speaks to him, that of this Jesus. And there, in a moment of extreme lucidity, Saul hears the truth about himself and about this man, Jesus, crucified. In a flash, in an instant, Saul has it all figured out, to the point of being immersed in silence and blindness for a few days. He, who was in charge of others, must now let himself be led by the hand. When he arrives in Damascus, it is the Christians who will come to find him and he will become what we know: the last of the apostles, but nevertheless the one who will carry the news of the Gospel to the ends of the known world.

This episode has caught on to us to the point where the expression "Damascus Road" still designates today a kind of spiritual journey towards the elevation of consciousness. We thus designate any situation of reversal, of radical change: each time we realize our error for essential things, like when, for example, one has extremely strong convictions to the point where, like Saul, one believes oneself authorized to force the other to think similarly. What he describes to us is actually the mechanism that always repeats itself when faced with difference of opinion. The difference and the divergence is always perceived as a threat, a danger for social cohesion or for the unity and identity of the group. To survive this, one cannot tolerate divergence or, contradiction. The spiral of violence is always repeating itself. Yesterday like today. It is always in the name of law, of order, of the purity of faith... that we believe ourselves authorized here or elsewhere to coerce, to oppress, to exclude, and even to kill sometimes.

Those who think they are right are sometimes ready to prove it, not to sit around a table to discuss, but to use all the excesses, innuendos,

verbal, or physical violence or even slander or conspiracy. Like Saul, they believe they are fair, right, and good. But now the truth comes to him. He wanted to impose his truth, and now it is truth what traps him and leaves him no choice. No one could have convinced Saul, deafened as he was by his conscience as a guardian of the law. Deaf, he will lose his sight for a few days in order to be able to listen better. Many people, convinced to serve God, no longer realize that they are acting in hatred and religious fanaticism. They are ready to assassinate those who do not like them.

The religions which persecute the disciples of the Lord, persecute Jesus himself. Serving the cause of a religion will never help serve God himself. Saul of Tarsus was transformed on the road to Damascus. He went from death to life, from evil to good. His name became Paul, another man with a heart filled with the love of God to serve others, proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus, liberate all who were possessed of evil spirits, and heal the sick in Jesus' name. This is proof that the Lord can radically transform the hardest and most blinded hearts to serve him in peace, justice, and love.

Everyone lives their own road to Damascus at one time or another, which is not necessarily a terrible and lightning conversion like that of Paul, but a moment when one realizes the truth of his life, when things become clear. A moment where on the marked roads, a new future is emerging. This is the moment when we understand where we are going. In the immensity of the possibilities, the choices that are offered to us in life, we grope, we search... because we don't know what we want and we don't know who we really are. And the time comes, either early in life or late, when we understand things. Where everything is ordered in a coherent and harmonious design. Where we find our truth.

Love Kindness and Walk Humbly with God

Life with Christ is a walk. Among the various surprises that travel always holds, among the unforeseen events that life creates, there are trials to overcome... which prevent us from settling down, which always put us back on the road, as if we were still nomads.

So once again we need to situate ourselves. Where are we on the path of faith? Don't too anchored certainties close us to God and to the others? Is our whole life the expression of a lack, of a desire, perhaps the desire to "know Jesus" and, in the encounter with him, to open ourselves to God and to others?

Nomads and travellers, the prophet Micah had one day to answer someone who asked him what to do to please God. Are rich offerings needed, or rather sacrifices in large numbers? Micah's response is a magnificent summary of the teaching of the prophets: "You have been made known, oh man, what is good and what the Lord demands of you: nothing other than to perform righteousness, love goodness and walk humbly with your God", Micah 6, 8.

Walk with God. Isn't that a way of talking about faith? To walk means to progress, but also to seek. The believer is a pilgrim, a pilgrim who is never alone, even if he often feels a stranger and a traveller in this world and its values. We never reach our true final stage in our lifetime. The inner journeys never end. Perhaps the end of our road is nothing more than the road itself. Perhaps the desire that keeps us going is our unique identity. Maybe we too are the origin of the nomads. Perhaps we constantly have to give up settling down. Maybe we are strangers and travellers on earth?

Faith leads us to take the place of travellers in this world. Despite all the difficulties, faith makes its way because it relies on God. We find this path in the peregrinations of Jesus, in the experience that his disciples had with him, during his earthly life and after his resurrection. The Son of God, who came to the Father to bring us back to the Father:

he is The Way. Jesus himself said "I am the way." To follow Christ is to take the road until the day when we will be "caught up" in this house of the Father where there are so many dwellings. For the moment, we are strangers on earth, pilgrims, and people of passage. "Foxes have dens, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" Matthew 8:21.

Christians are not settled down, they are on the road, and anything that could make them sedentary is dangerous. It is about living the modesty of the present, accepting to lose what we have, which could satisfy us, reassure us, prevent us from walking on the road, in view of what we expect.

We easily understand that the "Way" has come to refer in the Bible to the very experience of God's people and that of every man ultimately. Life is an itinerary, which sometimes brings us closer to God, sometimes takes us away from it. Choices arise for or against life and a question emerges: can we walk with the earth, created, without walking with the Creator of earth and sky?

THE CALL OF THE PILGRIM'S WAY

Emmanuel Tagnard

100,000 pilgrims arrived on foot at Santiago de Compostela in 2010. Nine years later, 350,000 pilgrims reached the legendary destination following the Camino. In 2016, more than 40,000 people walked the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome. Every year, thousands of walkers take the «Grande Traversée des Alpes» (GR5), whose altitude difference is almost four times the height of Mount Everest. What are the ever-increasing number of people looking for in these historic and cultural routes that criss-cross Europe?

Introduction

Mandatory mask wearing, barrier gestures, social distancing... These constraints push us to reclaim an inner freedom. The strange period of Covid that we are going through gives us the impression of going round in circles, of standing still or even of being in a cul-de-sac. Once the sanitary measures are lifted and springtime arrives, picking up a pilgrim's staff and walking on the roads can be an answer to this need.

Vidy, the Crossroads

On the shores of Lake Geneva, next to Lausanne, the town of Vidy symbolises the crossroads of the Paths. A sign indicates the Via Jacobi (the Swiss Way of St. James) which leads to Compostela and the Via Francigena which leads to Rome from England. These are the two oldest European pilgrimage routes. The landing stage of the boat that crosses the lake to reach Saint-Gingolph is located a little further on. The GR5, which runs from Lake Geneva through the Alps to the Mediterranean sea, starts opposite Vidy on the other shore. Two pilgrimages and a Grande Randonnée : three mythical paths, jewels of European culture.

The Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela

Also known as the « Milky Way » or « The Camino », the Way of St. James has deep roots in the imagination, religion and history of Europe. Around the year 800, the hermit Pelagius is said to have discovered the tomb of Saint James the Greater, apostle of Christ and evangeliser of Spain, following a miraculous revelation : he saw in a dream a shower of stars falling from the sky in a field. « Campus Stellae » or « Field of stars » is said to be the origin of the name « Compostela ». In the year 1000, the pilgrimage started at the time of the Reconquista. It quickly became the third most important Christian pilgrimage after Rome and Jerusalem. At the time of May 68, it was almost forgotten. In 1972, 67 certificates were issued on arrival. Almost 50 years later, 350,000 certificates are issued annually. There are many departures: Prague, Brussels, Paris, Vézelay... The human rivers lead to the ocean in Galicia (Spain). Austrian and German pilgrims take the Via Jacobi and cross Switzerland from Lake Constance to Lake Geneva and then to Le Puy-en-Velay, another essential hub of the Camino de Compostela. The stream of pilgrims follows the current through France to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port before crossing the Pyrenees and the whole of northern Spain via Burgos and Leon to arrive in Compostela and

finish at Fisterra, «the end of the earth». As much a fashion phenomenon as a personal endeavour, the roads to Compostela can be crowded and the hostels overcrowded but the spiritual experience is worthwhile. In 1987, the Council of Europe granted them the title of «European Cultural Route». In 2018, the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Via Francigena

Away from the big crowds, it joins England to Rome in 2,000 km. This route is still little used, although it has been walked since the Neolithic period. Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury took it in 990 to receive his pallium from Pope John XV. He wrote a diary documenting his return in 80 stages. In 2004, the Council of Europe certified this medieval pilgrimage as a «major cultural route». The Channel crossing is made between Dover and Calais on one of the daily ferries. The journey through northern France takes in the battlefields of the First World War and then through Champagne and the Jura. The exact halfway point is the monastery of St-Maurice in Switzerland. The crossing of the Great St Bernard Pass - the Mont Jovis of the ancients - allows a stop at the highest inhabited monastery in Europe (2,473 m). The route then descends into Italy via the Aosta Valley, the Po Plain and its rice fields before crossing the Apennines to the Mediterranean and Tuscany before reaching Rome. The Gothic cathedrals of Canterbury, Laon, Rheims, Lausanne and Siena stand as sentinels of a time when Europe was called Christendom. Today, the European Association of the Via Francigena (AEVF), based in Fidenza (Italy), is mainly responsible for promoting this path, whose current route celebrated the 20th anniversary of its opening in 2021.

GR5

The entire GR5 starts at the North Sea and runs to the Mediterranean at Nice, a total distance of 2,600 km. It was marked as a Grande Randonnée (GR) in the late 1940s by what was to become the French Hiking Federation. It is the classic alpine hiking route par excellence for thousands of walkers every year: more than 650 km through two national parks (Vanoise and Mercantour), four regional parks (Bauges, Chartreuse, Queyras and Préalpes d'Azur) and six nature reserves. The hardy legs absorb, in twenty-five to forty days of walking, some thirty thousand metres of positive difference in altitude spread over forty passes, that is to say around three times the height of Everest. This route does not present any major difficulties. It is well signposted and has gites and refuges, making for relatively comfortable stages. « The GR5 is the backbone of the Alpine trails »³.

Quest for Meaning

« You can't enslave the man who walks! »⁴ This freedom is the result of a quest for meaning guided by three criteria. Firstly, « direction »: the journey starts towards a clearly defined destination which acts as a magnet, a beacon or a landmark in the distance. Secondly, all the « senses » are called upon through the perceptions of the body in contact with nature and encounters. These perceptions act on the walkers as revelations which, by mirror effect, can contribute to solving a difficulty or provide keys of understanding on the paths. And finally, « significance »: the emergence of a challenge or the resolution of a difficulty can influence the inner evolution of the walkers along the Way by increasing their understanding of themselves and others.

³ Antoine de Baecque, *La traversée des Alpes, Essai d'histoire marchée*, NRF, Ed. Gallimard, Paris, 2014, 10.

⁴ Henri Vincenot, *Les étoiles de Compostelle*, Ed. Denoël, Paris, 1982, 316.

Encounters, Salt of the Path : some Pilgrims' Memories

-Joyce: a 61-year-old Dutch woman who left Rotterdam for Rome after a separation from her husband, crossed the Alps without a map and nearly got lost in a snowstorm : « It's now or never », she told me with a determined smile.

-Bikram: originally from Nepal, he made the bet to live on the generosity of those he met. In the Spanish churches, he was fascinated by the meaning of the communion in which he tried to participate, even though he was a Buddhist.

-Unno: Japanese Shinto pilgrim, Unno had shared a pizza with me while talking about Aikido, a martial art I was practising at the time. The next morning, just before leaving at dawn, he woke me up in the gite where we were staying to offer me a Kimono. I never saw him again but his gesture remains forever inscribed in my memory.

-Romain-Nicolas: choirmaster in Luxembourg, he sang an « Ave Maria » in the churches at each Spanish stage to support his wife in her fight against cancer.

-Jacobus: Austrian lawyer, he made the pilgrimage to give thanks for the family patrimony of which his family-in-law had been robbed by the Nazis and then the Communists, and which he had finally recovered by suing the Romanian government.

-Juan-Roberto: he went to the end of the Camino to delete from his mobile phone a number which belonged to his pregnant girlfriend. She was run over by young drunken drivers on a Saturday night while waiting at a bus stop.

-François: devastated by the death of his daughter, this man from the Jura was on his 7th trip to Compostela. He liked to repeat that Saint James had saved his life.

-Petr: he left Prague on foot for Compostela and was now going upstream like a fish in a river to return home. He had been walking for over a year and a half.

-Norbert: a shepherd in his sixties, who I met somewhere in the Alps, while he was looking after 700 sheep with the help of two large patous which were used to fighting wolves. He confided to me that « wolves don't attack humans but one day there will be an accident... ».

In Contact with Nature

The roads to Santiago, like the Via Francigena, are paths with a spiritual history that combine a sense of the sacred with the beauty of the landscape. As I set off towards Compostela at the beginning of May, I witnessed the gradual awakening of nature. In contact with it, I had the sensation that my own nature was also waking up by osmosis, like the leaves that gradually appear on the trees. I was touched by the Appenzell landscape with its green hills. I was struck with pride at the sight of the Mythen, the two mythical mountains that dominate Lake Lucerne, the historical cradle and geographical centre of Switzerland. The wild beauty of the Aubrac plateau and its racy cows seduced me. I felt a strong emotion when crossing the arid Spanish Meseta. On the GR5, nature also changes as you go south. As you walk along, you will notice the incredible diversity of the flora, fauna and landscapes: from green alpine pastures to snowy peaks, from mountain refuges to small stone sheepfolds, from perched villages to the Mediterranean coast... It is not a religious route, but some panoramas give the impression of being able to reach the sky. Several forests made me think of cathedrals. Each sunset

is a thanksgiving to the Creator. After the Croix Bonhomme refuge at the foot of Mt-Blanc, I remember observing a couple of marmots on a ridge path. To walk is to empty oneself inwardly to fill oneself with the fullness of the outside world and to feel « that appeasement that comes to us in the friendship of a mountain ».⁵

Conscious Work

Walking is as natural as breathing. Our status as a sedentary biped is very recent. The path reconciles us with our nomadic nature. We are only passing through a land that is a place of transition. After a week of walking with the weight of the bag on our shoulders, the body readjusts: the pelvis and hips find their proper alignment. The work is above all postural. Moving forward physically allows one to move forward internally, each at his own pace. The being is well attuned, well anchored, well incarnated. Taking care of oneself through the path can be a therapy as delicate as it is rigorous. Walking allows us to rediscover our verticality, as Sylvain Tesson explains in his book « Sur les chemins noirs »⁶. Another great walker, Jean-Louis Etienne, a doctor and explorer, writes in *Pèlerin Magazine*: « Walking creates endorphins, which have an analgesic and euphoric effect. It affects serotonin, the serenity hormone, the absence of which leads to depression. It leads to the production of tryptophan, an amino acid that enables the synthesis of serotonin, and prevents our hippocampus - a part of the brain that plays an important role in memory and which diminishes with age - from ageing too quickly. Scientific tests have been carried out on hikers, showing that walking maintains the volume of the hippocampus compared to non-walkers. Walking therefore stimulates brain

⁵ Jean Giono, *Solitude de la pitié*, Ed. Gallimard, Paris, 1932, 148.

⁶ Sylvain Tesson, *Sur les chemins noirs*, Ed. Gallimard, Paris, 2016.

regeneration! »⁷ For the Jesuit Jean-Bernard Livio, a great walker in the Sinai desert, « walking allows spirituality to enter through the feet »⁸. A day of walking is a continuous massage of our soles, which have 7,000 nerve endings.

Unconscious Work

Walking on pilgrimage routes also mobilises the imagination of medieval pilgrims, by tapping into the great unconscious of Compostela. Millions of footsteps have gone before us. The route is a place of memory anchored in the present. When you walk along Lake Zurich on the Via Jacobi, you pass by the Bollingen Tower, the property of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl-Gustav Jung (1875-1961), which is hidden by tall trees. Jung is the father of the concept of synchronicity, the collective unconscious and archetypes. The film « Saint-Jacques...La Mecque »⁹ illustrates quite well the transformation of the characters by showing their inner evolution through their dreams while sleeping. Walking for a long time can help to digest heavy thoughts. It allows a meeting with oneself: the old being must die so that the new being can be born, not without pain in the feet and stiffness in the shoulders. This is the price of giving birth. A singular alchemy occurs between what is cogitating in the mind and the immediate perception of the environment. Walking induces a change of scenery far from routine. It is a kind of active and happy body to body relationship with the world that gives the impression of never being alone in the middle of nature. A walk of several months develops a powerful inner strength, but the return can also lead to « Camino blues » for a while: a sort of mini-

⁷ www.lepelerin.com/dans-lhebdo/rencontre/jean-louis-etienne-marcher-est-aussi-naturel-que-de-respirer/

⁸ Emmanuel Tagnard, *Via Jacobi, sur le chemin suisse de Compostelle*, Ed. Saint-Augustin, 2020, 90.

⁹ Coline Serreau, *Saint-Jacques... La Mecque*. Film, 2005.

depression after all the senses have been awakened. In this case, it is necessary to accept this period of physical and psychological decantation, knowing that the following spring a strong desire to move forward is usually felt.

Limits and Fears

A long walk also gives you the measure of your own limits. I remember very clearly that I suddenly realised under the shower of a covert in the French Gers region that my body was nothing else but an envelope - a suit of skin, that the earth was only a simple hostel and that the human beings were only travellers. Humility and acceptance of one's limits are part of the revelations of the Way. Sometimes a wrongly marked path leads the walker to the wrong summit, forcing him to retrace his steps or to confront brambles or, worse, cliffs. If you are sensitive to vertigo, you may feel scared to death, sometimes forcing you to continue on your hands and knees. A particularly striking experience imposed itself on me while I was walking exhausted in the Mercantour the day before my arrival in Nice. After 23 days of walking and crossing some 36 passes, I could feel the accumulation of fatigue in my body and I just wanted to sleep. Twilight was covering the path with its shadow and the path itself was getting narrower. I decided to pitch my tent on a small open area of land in front of a thicket of vegetation on the edge of the ridge path. Too tired to have dinner, I slipped straight into my duvet and quickly fell asleep. Around 11pm, I woke up with a pressing need. The scenery was bathed in the milky light of a full moon. With the help of my headlamp, I illuminated the surroundings and when the beam of my lamp arrived on the grove located just behind my tent, a growl amplified by an imposing rib cage tore the silence of the night. A beast was standing only five metres away from me. It signalled its presence to me with a very specific frequency of sounds that petrified me. Overwhelmed by fatigue, unable to flee, I returned to my tent to fall

back into sleep. After a short prayer, I heard the exact same sequence of growls again, meaning that the beast had not moved. The next morning I was awakened by the footsteps of a hiker walking past my tent. Stowing my belongings, I noticed a sign saying « Pass of Gratte-loup: 1,500 meters ». On arrival at the GR5 final destination, a phone call to the Mercantour animal park confirmed that I had indeed slept next to a wolf.

Trust in Providence

The astonishing chances of Providence occur in the blink of an eye along the road: I remember asking a friend where Julia had gone. She had disappeared from my radar for a week... I turned around and saw her arriving a few metres away from me. Another time, climbing up a hill, I wondered where Romain-Nicolas could be, who I hadn't seen for several days. Well, when I reached the top of the hill, I bumped into him walking in the other direction. Meanwhile, Jean-Robert, who I saw from afar in the public phone booth in the port of Fisterra. He had just that instant left a message on my mobile phone to tell me that he had reached the end of St-James' path... These experiences are subtle: some feel guided to go with the flow without asking themselves too many questions. Answers can arise spontaneously along the Way if you are open to the unexpected.

Living Paths of Faith

The spiritual milestones along the pilgrimage routes help to keep the faith alive. On the Via Jacobi, the baroque church in Einsiedeln is a landmark of the Swiss Catholic faith. Many pilgrims come from all over Switzerland, especially the Yenisch community - the Swiss Travellers - to venerate the Black Madonna. Black Madonnas are surrounded by mysteries. There is one in the cathedral of Le Puy-en-Velay and another in Rocamadour when you leave the main path from Figeac on the

French route to Compostela. On the Via Jacobi, I remember a night spent in Orsonnens in the canton of Fribourg at the monastery of Our Lady of Fatima, founded by Vietnamese monks who had fled the war in their country. They make 300 kg of tofu every week. Their religious celebrations are held entirely in Vietnamese. It is another world that I would never have discovered except by walking along the Via Jacobi. After the French crossing of the Aubrac, the warm welcome of the Premontrai friar monks in the abbey church of Conques remains one of the outstanding spiritual experiences of the route. It is here that « *Ultréia* »¹⁰, the official song of the Camino is learned as the pilgrims are eating together. As well as along the Via Francigena, the monastery of San Miniato in Tuscany with its huge roof in the shape of an upturned ship's hull impressed me¹¹. Sleeping in this place was very inspiring even if it is almost void of its community, the succession of monks not being assured for the moment. On the other hand, the closer I got to Rome, the more places are hosted by religious men and women originating from emerging countries (Africa, India, South America...) showing the richness and the evolution of the Church of tomorrow. The striking beauty of the cathedrals of Burgos and Leon, major stops on the traditional Spanish Camino, also allow us to connect with a nourishing spiritual dimension of peace and beauty.

Fraternity

The Camino is like a large country, thousands of kilometres long and 500 metres wide, over which the flow of pilgrims flows. The path creates a powerful social bond: it is « one of the last spaces of transmission » for French anthropologist David Le Breton. The

¹⁰ « Go forward » is the rallying cry of the pilgrims to Compostela.

¹¹ Emmanuel Tagnard, *Très Saint-Père, lettres ouvertes au pape François*, Ed. Salvator, Paris, 2018, pp.108-109.

authenticity of the encounters works as if each walker possessed pieces of a jigsaw that can be used by the people they meet to complete their own puzzle. The path is the image of what life should be : an opening to availability. The encounter is then an opportunity to activate an intimate part of oneself: a return to wonder, to listening to others and to the « All-Other ». And then, we don't walk only for ourselves. Walking also means carrying in our thoughts and prayers those who cannot do the same because of old age or illness. On my way to Compostela, I sometimes wore the T-shirt of the association of Sainte-Elise Weber, a friend who has been suffering from Charcot's disease (SLA) for over eight years. She endures it with courage, patience and dignity. It is a form of communion. But let us not idealise the path. There can be difficult encounters too: if for some reason you don't feel comfortable, you can just take two stages in one day and find yourself in the next wave, away from people who don't suit you.

Maintenance and Welcome

Following a pilgrimage route or a GR is like a huge treasure hunt on a European scale requiring special attention to find the next scallop shell or the red and white GR sign confirming that the walker is on the proper path. We can express a paramount thanks to the work of the volunteer associations that maintain the signposting of the routes, such as the Swiss Friends of the Way of St James, the International Association of the Via Francigena or the one in charge of the GR5. As far as accommodation is concerned, there are not many gites on certain sections. This is why there are networks of « Jacobean welcome » (« accueil jacquaire »). These are private individuals who agree to open their doors to passing pilgrims and provide them with a meal and a bed. All of this is « donativo », i.e. at the discretion of the pilgrims. This is particularly the case between Geneva and Le Puy-en-Velay. I am thinking in particular of Mario at the pass of Tracol: former working-

class priest, he welcomes pilgrims into his home with a rare trust and generosity. This is for sure an example of a state of mind to be developed and preserved in our world.

Conclusion

Muslims go to Mecca, Hindus to Benares, Christians to Rome, Jerusalem or Compostela. Pilgrimage is a universal phenomenon, which makes walking a journey. Some people walk these paths for religious reasons, others for cultural, personal or sportive reasons. However, far from being a competition where the challenge is to arrive first, we leave last, following in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. Whether it is a pilgrimage route or a long-distance route, some people are lucky enough to be able to do it in one journey. Others, in small chunks. In all cases, walking allows you to seize the key to the fields, to find a time that belongs to you alone: to take time and not let it take you away. For me, the path is a refuge, not to escape realities but to find my breath. My walks started out as hikes and then metamorphosed into pilgrimages as I met people and walked along the Way.

I think back to Jean Birnbaum's fine analysis¹² of the need to give perspectives and breath to young people in search of meaning, especially after this strange period plagued by the coronavirus. Youth that needs to find hope. Walking helps to invigorate inner hope and encourages people to surpass themselves. It is a concrete way to regain power over oneself by leaving aside some of the burden thinking that can clog up the mind during the year. There is no pilgrimage without some form of physical and psychic stripping. Walking allows you to take care of yourself by giving meaning to your existence. To return from a long walk is to have accumulated countless small moments of grace. These

¹² Jean Birnbaum, *Un silence religieux. La gauche face au djihadisme*, Ed. Seuil, Paris, 2016.

are moments of joyful freedom that we can't wait to taste again. « Even if each walker does not necessarily know where he is going, he is in his own truth », as Saint Gregory of Nyssa reminds us about Abraham¹³.
Ultreia!

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¹³ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Contre Eunome*, Book II, par. 84-96.

SAILING WITH THE SEA, ACROSS OCEANS, ISLANDS, AND CULTURES

Lifestyle Ethic

Patrick Michel

Across Oceans: Biographical Introduction

Born and raised in Geneva/Switzerland by Lake Léman (also called Lake Geneva), I was introduced to sailing at the age of about six, when my father (the « sailor » in the family) signed me up in the sailing school of our Yacht Club, the Société Nautique de Genève. I loved it!

I continued sailing on my father's sailboat and eventually raced in regattas like the Bol d'Or and the Translémanique en Solitaire. Only in my thirties did I venture into the Mediterranean sea and passed the Swiss Sea Sailing License, allowing me to charter and skipper a boat on my own.

In 2010, while working at a well-paid IT job, I urgently felt that I needed more freedom and quit my IT job to become a professional skipper.

A few years later I came across an ad about a beautifully kept 1994 Oyster 55 for sale. I immediately fell in love with her and went to see her in Newport, Rhodes Island/USA. I am very fortunate to have my

own family money, so that I could arrange the financing of the purchase and become the proud owner of « OSTRIKA », her name.

Across Oceans: our Boat is our House

Untying the lines from the dock could probably be one of the most liberating actions a sailor can undertake. It is the beginning of a journey, however long it might be, that leaves the past behind and turns the bow (front) of the boat towards the horizon and the unknown. A departure day is always synonym of change, new beginnings, excitement, but also of stress, nervousness, and fear of the unknown. The previous weeks or even months of preparation in order to get the boat ready for a long crossing, a passage as it's also called, are filled with To Do lists, online shopping, and the unavoidable dose of frustration.

Let me explain a few things for the non-sailors, landlubbers as we call them.

You must understand that our boat is our house, a house that floats on salty seawater and is constantly shaken by the elements. Unlike a house on terra firma, a boat suffers from the slow attack of the salt, which creates all kinds of corrosion issues to the materials it is build with. Then there are the ultra-violet rays of the sun, which degrade almost everything they shine upon, like sails, covers, ropes (which are called lines on a boat) and especially plastics. Also, as much as we love and need the wind to propel our sailboat to the next destination, the wind is always wearing away the sails and fraying the fabrics. Inside the boat, protected from the sun, the wind, and the salt water, are all our creature comfort appliances. I'm talking about things like the fridge, freezer, watermaker, engine, generator, batteries and electricity, pumps, plumbing, gas stove, upholstery and wood, cupboards and cabinets, personal electronics, computers, navigation and communication instruments. All of this equipment is being pushed to its limits by the constant rocking and shaking motion of the sea, by the high

temperatures that build up under the sun of the tropics, and simply by using it. In other words, a boat needs constant care and maintenance to keep it seaworthy, safe, and comfortable.

From 2015 to 2020, I sailed Ostrika from Newport, Rhode Island, USA, to the Caribbean, crossed the Panama Canal and the Pacific Ocean, crisscrossed Indonesia and the Sumatra Strait to Thailand, crossed another ocean, the Indian ocean to South Africa, and then returned to the Caribbean to cross my wake near Antigua, logging about 35'000 nautical miles in total. Of course I didn't do this all by my self, but with the help and company of many different crewmembers who were either friends who came for a visit, or people whom I found through specialized websites. Most of it was done with Paola, my girlfriend at the time, whom I met in Antigua, at the beginning of the trip. We ran the boat just the two of us for most of the time, except during the longer ocean crossings when we needed more abled bodies to stand watch while we rested. Like all couples, we also had ups and downs. Paola left the boat a few times to take a break, and that was when I would select complete strangers to join me and share the adventure for a month, to almost a year at a time. Over the five years I counted twenty-five different people, all with a strong passion for water and sailing.

After completing a full circumnavigation, and dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, I brought the boat to the Mediterranean for some more exploration, but also for some well needed work. During the winter 2020-2021, the boat stayed in Marina di Ragusa in the south of Sicily.

Sicily, and more precisely the Aeolian Islands just north of it, is where a new and very exciting chapter began. During the summer of 2020 I was faced with a big decision: "now what?" Should I stop sailing, sell the boat, and return living as a landlubber in Switzerland? I knew very well that adjusting back to land life, eventually getting a job and

settling down, would not be easy. Just the thought of this new lifestyle was making me uneasy and nervous, and I quickly realized that it would not be the kind of life I was ready to settle for, just now. Paola and I split for good, opening or widening the possibilities even more. It was while I was visiting a friend and previous crewmember in Palermo, that he suggested that I write an ad on an Italian Facebook group, offering a spot on the boat for a few days in the Aeolians to whoever wanted to join. One person's profile emerged from the lot of interested people. We chatted online for days about sailing, boats, Sicily and many other things, and I quickly realized that this person clearly stood apart of the rest. She was an Italian medical doctor who worked in shifts at the emergency room of a nearby hospital. She had very recently passed her Italian sailing license, and wanted more sailing experience. We came up with dates, and decided that she would take the ferry from Catania where she lived, to Lipari island, and we would sail back to mainland Sicily a week later so she could go back to work. During these few days there wasn't much wind so we mostly motored from one island to another, finding nice anchorages, discovering what was on land, like the volcano cone of the island of Vulcano. We spontaneously climbed to the top for sunset. Our cockpit evening discussions were much more interesting than I hoped, making Sara's visit a real pleasure. We could talk about everything and had similar interests. A few days passed and it was time to drop her back in Sicily. We agreed that in the next few days, when I was docked in a marina in Catania, she would show me her town and take me out for dinner. Little did we know that this casual date would turn both of our worlds upside down! We soon became a couple and were already making plans for the winter and the next year. I had reserved a berth in a marina in the south of Sicily until the spring, and I would live aboard during the mild Sicilian winter. Sara quickly moved in as well, preferring driving a little longer to work than spending another winter alone in her apartment in Catania, on the east coast of

Sicily. It was during that time, between boat maintenance jobs, that the crucial question of “Now what?” was answered. As we were falling in love, we both agreed that setting off the next year for a trip of a lifetime, sailing around the world, was the only plan that made sense. We looked at each other one night and said: “let’s do it!”, knowing very well that we just agreed to a huge load of work to make this new dream come true. I will spare you the details, but it involved packing all her belongings in boxes, selecting only a portion of her clothes to take on the boat, and sending the rest to her parents’ place in Italy. She would then give up her apartment and quit her successful job to follow not only me, but also her wildest dream of freedom.

During the months of May and June 2021, we moved the boat to a boatyard in Catania to change the standing rigging (the metal cables holding the mast up) and give the hull a few new fresh coats of antifouling paint. Countless other jobs were also necessary to get Ostrika, a beautiful cutter rigged Oyster 55 built in 1994, ready for her second circumnavigation. During the winter, and now having a proper physical address to have things shipped to, I ordered all the possible spare parts I needed to either fix things that would eventually break, or become even more autonomous in our way of living off the grid.

In July 2021, we finally set sail from Catania to the Ionian Islands in western Greece, where we spent almost two months discovering the islands, the people, the delicious food, and making new friends. It was also the perfect time for Sara to learn the boat and get acclimatized to the new nomad lifestyle. The summer came to an end too soon, and we started making our way back west to Sicily via the Aeolian islands which now have a special meaning to us, and then to the Balearic islands on our way towards Gibraltar. The stop in Palma de Mallorca was planned long ago when I decided during the winter that we would need a new dinghy, as the current faithful one which came with boat when I bought Ostrika, had been sitting in the sun for the past 5 years and was

threatening to burst and split its seams any day now. We are now in Formentera, a small island near Ibiza, with the new tender or dinghy, the term used to name the inflatable rubber boat that we use to go from the boat to shore, when we are at anchor somewhere in a bay.

Living the Dream is the reason behind all the pain and preparation. The rewards of slipping the lines and sailing into the sunset are numerous. Firstly it's about the freedom of being away from the day-to-day life on land, the obligations and restrictions, which we happily leave behind. It's also about disconnecting from the ultra-connectivity we have been used to with Internet, social media platforms, online messaging systems, and the bombardment of news information. After a few hours of sailing, the shorelines disappear, and so do the signal bars on our cellphones. And finally we are on our own; we put away the phones and start shifting our mindset while looking at the empty horizon and the sea.

The first three days of a long ocean passage are all about settling into the new routine of the simple activities: standing watch, cooking and sharing meals, and a new sleep rhythm. It is during these three days that the body slowly gets used to the motion of the boat. Those prone to seasickness finally recover and can at last enjoy the rest of the passage with ease and even pleasure. With four people onboard, the watch schedule is easy: three hours on watch, nine hours off. This system ensures that each of us gets enough uninterrupted sleep. When short handed, with just two people, the watch schedule can be quite taxing on the quality of sleep, so with a full crew of four, everything becomes more enjoyable.

Once these three days of adaptation have passed, one could go on forever. My longest passage duration was four weeks. This sounds like a very long time to keep on sailing, but it is actually quite relaxing, as every day is a bit different.

Let me share with you one of my watches in the South Atlantic, between the island of Saint Helena and the Caribbean:

The Baker and the Sea Birds

It started with one, then a few more, until there were a dozen. Last night at dusk while having a deliciously cooked Indian butter chicken, the one that had to come out of the freezer to make space for the tuna, accompanied with yellow rice and garlic naans, we saw in the darkness the familiar shadows of flying birds. As usual since a few days around that time, medium-sized dark grey birds come from nowhere and try to land on our tender at the back of the boat. It takes them a few tries and courage to achieve this perilous exercise, but the first one seems to always make it without hesitation and somewhat gracefully. He must be the adventurous and fearless one of the flock. I don't know how they manage to find the boat in the middle of the ocean, and in the dark, because last night I forgot to turn on the navigation lights at sunset. Click, they're on now. We are about 600nm from Brazil's Northeastern shores of Cabadelo on the Rio Paraiba.

Shortly after Bold Guy's landing, his friends arrive en masse. By the end of dinner and the washing up in the galley, with the help of a flashlight we count about 12 of these fragile looking birds. They have long thin black beaks with a bit of white around the eyes and on the forehead. I unfortunately don't know my seabirds well and don't have a reference book with pictures. They can easily be approached, even touched. Maybe it's the light that blinds them, or they don't know what a human being is. I shine the flashlight around the deck, up the mast and find 3 more perched on the horizontal spinnaker pole holding out the genoa to starboard. They have much more room up there and don't need to squawk at each other because of close social distancing. On the dingy on the other hand, when one lands too close to another bird already there, the newcomer is immediately screamed at by one or two of his fellow hitchhikers and has to relocate a bit further away in a clumsy

flying ballet. But once everybody is onboard and settled, they all turn and tuck their heads into their back feathers and sleep, standing up and balancing on their webbed little feet. Occasionally one will lose his balance, take a few steps to one side to regain balance and the raucous squawking starts again. Chris is on the 2100-0000 watch and I retire to my cabin for the night.

Bidibidibip, bidibidibip! It's 0545 and my alarm rings. I was already awake since a few minutes, enjoying the fresh(er) temperature of the early morning. Soon it will be almost impossible to stay in the cabin, let alone sleep because of the equatorial sun and heat beating on the deck. I get ready for my watch, turn on the gas and boil some water for my morning fuel. Jessica can't wait to get off watch as she is yawning and tired. But before filling out the logbook, she points out to the back of the boat with excitement. "Come, come and see! There are millions of them, everywhere!" With one eye still closed, I peek out the companionway and indeed see many of our stowaway passengers on the dingy, on the solar panels, on the pole, half of them still sleeping, the other half already grooming themselves. Uhum I mutter, and go back down to fix my thermos cup of Nescafé. "Good night Jessica", and she's already in her cabin.

I sit in the cockpit in my favorite and usual place, the port bench, as it's the one with more space between the folding table and the backrest. I'm a tall guy with long legs, and at this exact moment of dawn when everybody is sleeping, I want to enjoy the peaceful tranquility of the morning sunrise while being comfortably wedged in the cockpit cushions, my hot cup of coffee in hand, staring at the pink and orange horizon... Squawk! Kraaa, kraaa, khkhkhaaa! There are now ten or eleven birds waking up and screaming at each other because one had the indecency of moving a bit too close to another. Quaawk! and the offending member moves a bit further on the dinghy's inflatable tubing. Why they insist landing right next to each other when there is plenty of

space on the other side of the tender, I don't know. And now there were ten. Each of them at equidistance from the other, they share the coveted space equally, some even inside the dingy on a large fender, one perched on the outboard, another, the anarchist, on one of the solar panels. It's the time of the morning ablutions. I'm sipping my coffee watching the Nature channel live. I can almost hear David Attenborough's voice in the background. With their slender beaks, they pick and poke at their feathers, under their necks, to one side, to the other, under the armpits, and even manage to balance on one leg and use the other one to scratch their neck. The show continues but now that the coffee is having some effect, I must tend to my captain's duties.

I look at the battery meter and decide to run the generator to charge the batteries. I check the water tanks levels. We're far from empty, but good seamanship tells me to keep them topped up, just in case. So I lift the floorboard and turn open the valve of the seacock, flip the switch of the watermaker and let it run for a few minutes. I poke my head back out, and now there were nine. One must have had enough rest and flew away. Humm, now what? I'm getting hungry, and as the last loaf of bread is almost finished, I decide that today I will bake scones! In Saint Helena, being a British Overseas Territory, English scones were the only breakfast items available at "The Consulate", one of the hotels in Jamestown where cruisers congregated to get their daily internet and coffee fix. A few weeks earlier I found in one of the little stores packets of readymade scones mix. These mixes were obviously locally made and packaged because of the homemade labels on them, indicating the preparation steps. One just needed to add water, mix, flatten, cut out and bake. Easy peasy, I thought. If they come out like the ones of the Consulate, they would be delicious. But before getting my hands dirty, I needed to test the produced fresh water from the watermaker. I pour a sample in a cup, smell it, sip it, dip the salinity probe in it (it reads 190ppm, perfect), and finally turn the valve from "discharge overboard"

to “tank”. At the rate of 60 liters per hour, it will take a while. Now the inside of the boat is full of noise and roar with the generator and the watermaker running. But one last thing needs to be done in parallel: download a new GRIB (weather) file. I pop back up outside to have a look around, check wind strength and direction, waves, clouds etc. All good. And now there were eight...

I quickly type in our GPS position into my weather and routing software “PredictWind”, select a reasonable and usable sized geographical area, connect the wifi of the laptop to the Iridium GO device, and hit download. I look out again, and now there were seven.

It’s 8am by now and I’m really getting hungry. I read the label on the 1kg pouch of yellow powder:

Basic recipe: 1kg dry mix, 430ml water

Method: Use a mixer fitted with a beater. Add the water to the dry mix in a slow & steady stream with the mixer on slow. Scrape down. Mix on low speed for 1 minute. Add any additional ingredients required & disperse evenly. Rest dough for 5-10 minutes. Roll out dough to required thickness and cut as required. Bake at 220°C for 15-20 minutes.

Thinking that a whole kilo of dough would probably yield too many scones for just the four of us, I try to split it in two. I pour about half of the pouch in a Tupperware and then realize that the Tupperware is not as full as when there is 500g of normal flour. This mix has a different weight to volume ratio than regular flour. Hmmmm, I have to weigh it now. I take out the electronic kitchen scale, put the button battery back in (I learned the hard way several times that keeping the battery in the scale when stored was not a good idea, as each time I, or someone else, uses it, the battery is drained because the boat is always in motion and turns on the scale automatically) and proceed to weigh the half emptied pouch. I wasn’t that far off, but need to spoon back some mix to make it 500g. Now, imagine trying to weigh something on a moving and rolling

boat. The galley counter is never level, and the waves make the boat go up and down, constantly changing the numbers on the scale... I decide that this will do well enough and finally start with the recipe. We have a mixer onboard, but no beater, and I don't want to go looking for the damn kitchen robot under the floorboards, and clean it up afterwards. So in a bowl I simply pour the dry mix, add the water (with the same kind of measuring difficulty as with the scale, but in a graduated jug) and go at it with my hands. The stuff is sticky like hell, but I manage to blend it nicely in about five minutes, without too much dough stuck in between my fingers. I turn on the oven and get out to catch some fresh air. There are still seven...

Ten minutes later I flatten the dough to the required thickness, but what thickness is required? Having in memory the scones of The Consulate which were 1 inch thick, I decide to flatten the dough to about a finger's thickness. That should do it. I cut the dough in small circles with a cup, and place them on a baking tray and in the oven. I set a timer, boil some more water for a second coffee, check the download, and go sit outside with my coffee. One, two, three, four, five... sss... no, only five this time. It's now bright daylight and these five guys are definitely overextending their welcome onboard. They are still poking at their feathers, opening their wings as if they were about to fly away but tuck them back in place while wiggling their tail feathers. These guys won't leave! This is becoming a bit of a problem because in the dingy are six plant pots with two kinds of basil, parsley, chives, Cayenne chilies, and dill, and I need to water them. I go back down below and notice that the weather file finished downloading. I take a quick peek at the information, it looks ok, the Doldrums are still full of wind and there are not too many blue areas (blue is 5 knots, green is 10 knots, yellow 15 knots and orange 20 knots). Most of the area ahead of the little boat icon is green and yellow with just a sprinkle of blue here and there. Good!

Dring dring dring! The timer brings me back to what I was doing, baking. I look through the glass door of the oven and see the little discs have grown, but not as high as anticipated. As my oven can only either bake from below or broil from the top, I switch to the broiler setting for another 2 minutes to make the top of the scones a bit golden, then turn off everything. Silicone oven muff in hand, I take out the tray and see my creation. “Huh, not as high as the others” I mutter. It doesn’t matter. I take out the butter and jam from the fridge, grab a plate and knife, and prepare three of the eleven scones to be devoured. The generator and watermaker are still running, I get to the cockpit table and start enjoying my breakfast while watching the last five birds who are STILL grooming themselves.... and... pooping off course. Never mind.

In 3 minutes the scones are gone, I go down to clean up the mess I made, and see Chris coming out of his cabin for his watch. Another routine is about to start: boil water, ground coffee into French press, top with boiling water, etc etc. I come out, and now there were none... I grab a bottle of water and walk to the dingy to water the plants....

And there was still one, hiding behind the fender!

I very much enjoy these ocean crossings; they are relaxing, and they force one to completely disconnect. No cellphone reception, no Internet, just the empty ocean, the waves, the horizon, and the sky. One has time to read, watch movies, or write a journal. It is also the time to fix the things that were at the bottom of the To Do list before departure, those which one usually never gets to complete. But now there is time, and plenty of! So I look around and usually find something to keep me busy, like gluing and sewing the strap of my broken flip-flops. On the other hand, as the boat is sailing and constantly moving, things continue to break, and now and then I am reminded that if I want to continue to have a safe and seaworthy boat in good working order I shouldn’t lower my guard and attention to details. There are lives at stake, and ultimately it is my responsibility to take care of the crew and of the boat.

A captain wears many different hats. Here are some I can think of: sailor, navigator, meteorologist, communications specialist, general manager, secretary (for the administrative paperwork), accountant, human resources specialist, fisherman, cook, baker, cleaner, mechanic, plumber, electrician, computer technician, sail maker, rigger, painter, carpenter, tailor, mentor or advisor, psychologist, relationship therapist, matchmaker, tourist guide, doctor, swimmer, diver, and a few more which you can easily imagine. One could argue that being the captain of a small ship is one of the most complete existing roles. I am in my element and I love every moment of it, even the hard, cold, lonely, exhausting, and wet ones. The reward of all this hard work is immense! I sometimes pinch myself when making landfall in a new country or island. First come the sights. "Land Ho!" shouts the first one to see land. The shore can be lush and green with dense vegetation, or desert-like and barren, scorched by the tropical sun and heat. The water turns from the deep vivid blue of the ocean to light turquoise when the sandy seabed rises. One starts to see the beaches, rocks, cliffs or mountains. Shortly after this come the smells of the land: one can clearly distinguish the subtle fragrances of green trees, of the soil, or of the smoke of the cooking fires. Once we are close enough to drop anchor, we take in the surroundings of the bay or the harbor. We see houses, buildings, churches or mosques. Then we distinguish people, cars, mopeds, all the signs of a civilization. We soon notice the new sounds we haven't heard in weeks: cars, horns, voices, engines, bells and music. Even the sound of the wind in the branches or palm tree fronds is new, yet reassuring. There is a lot of excitement on the boat. The crew is busy clearing up the boat, putting away lines, sheets, and other sailing equipment not needed anymore. We change from the sailing mode to the anchoring mode. Day to day objects come back out from their stowed positions, and life starts again in the cockpit. A landing drink is in order!

Across Islands

In order to keep within the law in the new country, we must check-in with the authorities. This obligatory step is like going through immigration and customs at the airport, except that one usually has to go ashore with the dinghy, and find the relevant offices. In some countries it can be as easy as filling out a form on a computer in a ship chandler store, or as difficult as a triathlon. One never really knows how long it's going to take. On the way to the first office, our usual routine is to find an ATM to withdraw some local currency. With very few exceptions this is easily done. But it can happen that in countries where we land, money is not that common, and barter is the way of life. In such circumstances we exchange old clothes, ropes or sugar, coffee, for fresh vegetables and fruits. Quite often the local villagers will have spotted us even long before we have dropped the anchor. They then come in their canoes, and offer us the vegetables and fruits they grow, the fish, crabs or octopus they caught, in exchange for goods they need. These little moments of exchange are precious, and always reconcile me with humanity. People overall are genuinely good, welcoming and curious. Yes you will always find a bad apple, the greedy, the thief, or the authoritarian one, but, as I have found, these are clearly the exceptions.

Once the official papers and passports are stamped, duties and visas paid, it's time to look for a local SIM card for our phones, so that we can communicate again, read our hundreds of emails, give reassuring news to our loved ones, and read the news of the world that we missed. However, when we are offshore, we are never completely out of communication. A small device, the Iridium Go, is our satellite link to civilization. It gives the weather forecasts in form of GRIB files (digital files small enough to be downloaded with a very small and painfully slow bandwidth), maintain an email communication with other boats by sharing positions, speed and direction, wind and sea state, and of course also with friends and family. In an emergency, voice calls can also be

made. We also carry a small tracker, which automatically sends our position to a server in the form of an SMS. Those who have the link of the webpage can follow our track, position and speed. It is often the source of funny comments, or, in rare cases, concern.

I make it a tradition to invite the entire crew for a celebration dinner, and like generations of sailors before us, the first day (and night) on land can be quite fun. We can finally lower our guard, let our hair down, and drink and party. I don't run a "dry" ship, meaning we are allowed to drink moderately while on passage, but never to the point of being even slightly incapacitated. A beer or glass of wine at sunset on a beautiful evening is what makes this lifestyle enjoyable. Should I remind you that we chose this way of living for the pleasures it brings?

The first night at anchor after a long crossing is always synonymous with good sleep. The boat isn't moving anymore, it's quiet, and the bed is finally flat and horizontal again. The strong morning sun and heat usually finds a way to wake us up rather early, regardless of the hangover from the night before. Soon the smell of bacon makes it to the nostrils of those still sleeping, and once everybody is awake, we all share a large and heavy English breakfast. The topic of the table conversation quickly turns to what we are going to do on this island. We find out about the must-do touristy places if there are any, and plan our stay. It could be for just a week, or a few months. Do we sleep onboard every night and just go on day trips, or do we secure a berth or mooring and go travelling for a few days or weeks? There is also the prospect of cruising around the country and its islands, enabling us to see the most of everything. To me this is the essence of adventure. Arrive in a place and discover. Meet the locals and, as I learned, never say No to an offer. You never know what you might miss, be it a visit to a non-touristic area, a meal at someone's home, or a ceremony of some sort, like a wedding or birthday party of complete strangers. The best and most memorable moments are the most spontaneous ones. Going for a walk

or a hike without a studied and planned itinerary is what I prefer. Walking around an entire island along the beaches and rocky shores brings a sense of accomplishment, but also of knowledge. You now know what, or who, lies on the other side. Turning a corner and discovering the perfect beach lined with coconut trees is like stepping into paradise. Add a place for a fire pit on the sand and enough firewood for the night, and there is our evening activity: barbecue night under the stars.

Over my five years for sailing around the world, only maybe a handful of times did I have the opportunity to do just that: a barbecue on the beach under the full moon, during a hot and windless night, in great company, cooking our own caught fish, listening to good music, all this with good drinks. It takes a bit of organization to pack and bring all the necessary dishes, plates, utensils, Bluetooth speaker, tarp, light, volleyball, and cooler on the dinghy from the boat to the beach, but these are the moments that only very few people have experienced. If the weather is fine, and the mosquitos not too aggressive, we sometimes also fall asleep on the beach until the next morning. Imagine Robinson Crusoe or Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*, minus the inconvenience of being stranded. One of these magical evenings was indeed spent on Modriki Island in Fiji, where *Cast Away* was filmed.

Other, even more deserted islands, can be found in the British Indian Ocean Territory of Chagos, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, south of the Maldives. Chagos is a very special place for cruisers. One needs to apply for a permit to be able to sail there, for a maximum stay of four weeks. With this permit in hand, one must sail to one of the two atolls where it is allowed to drop anchor. The area is completely uninhabited, except for the naval US military base of Diego Garcia, some 100 nautical miles away. The only way to get there is by private boat, which drastically limits access. There is absolutely no infrastructure, no electricity, no water, no internet nor telephone, no houses, no stores, no

people, nothing but sand, coconut trees and coconut crabs, fish and dolphins in the lagoon, and a lush and vibrant natural, untouched ecosystem surrounded by a remarkable reef.

As soon as the anchor is lowered, I go for a swim. The coral is alive and colorful, a big change from the Maldives where most of it is bleached and dead. The fish is plentiful and everywhere. Not used to humans, they are inquisitive or just ignore us. We then arrive onshore on this deserted island, like washed up Robinson Crusoe's. Wow, what a sight! I have been to many uninhabited islands, but here it's special: the wild life is not used to humans. Crabs, eels, sharks (on the reef), birds (boobies, frigate birds, birds of paradise, etc.) are not scared. They look at us with curiosity. We take a little walk on the beach amongst the many fallen coconuts. They will repopulate the coconut trees in a decade. We open a couple of them with basic tools such as a broken shell and tree trunk, pierce it with a little spiral shell, and then drink the water with a straw made out of a driftwood hollow branch. Yum!! I break it open and eat the thick hard white flesh, the real taste of the tropics! We make it back to the boat before sunset, pour ourselves some gin and tonics and watch the sunset in awe, while right next to us the fish engage in their evening feeding frenzy. A shark passes by. The birds, attracted by the fish jumping out of the water join the dinner melee.

There are a few more islands in the Salomon atoll of Chagos to explore, a couple of wrecks to inspect, and, for the moment, just one other sailboat on the other side of the atoll to go say Hi to. When we left Gan in the south of the Maldives, some 6-7 other boats were waiting for a better weather window to sail to Chagos. They should have left today, so we expect to have more company in 3 days: Germans, Chinese, French, Americans, Canadians, etc. It will be a party soon, as long as they still have some booze onboard! We quickly get to meet them and make new friends. When there is no bar or restaurant to go to, one

improvises, and we invite each other for sundowners and meals. This is the true cruiser's paradise! I had been dreaming and thinking about this place for a few years, and I'm very happy not to have been disappointed.

For some more (dark) history about the place, there is a documentary called "Stealing a Nation" which describes what happened to the former inhabitants of the Chagos atolls and how the UK and the US struck a deal to open the military base of Diego Garcia. I am not impressed by the attitude (or should I say crimes) of these two nations.

Across Cultures

The Western culture is definitely not the only culture on this world. Travelling, especially by boat, is the best way to discover the other cultures, unknown to us. During my circumnavigation I had the privilege to encounter a few of them. Before this trip I only had knowledge of them through magazines such as National Geographic, nature documentaries, or historical movies. Through school and university you can learn a lot, but nothing compares to actually being in a place and meeting the people.

Imagine arriving on an island where the local custom is to present a bundle of brown roots called Kava to the village chief, in order to introduce yourself and ask for permission to be on his land and to anchor in the nearby waters. This ceremony was completely unknown to me before I read a book about a young American teacher who travelled in the area of Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu. In these two countries of the Pacific islands, the custom is to ask for the welcome of the chief of the area by offering a bundle of kava roots (from the kava bush) and sharing the brown water drink made from it. One sits cross-legged in a circle in front of the chief and his assistant, a lot of clapping is involved, some incomprehensible words are spoken, and the matter is over in a few

minutes. Permission to anchor and fish in the village's water is granted, so as wandering on its land. At first it sounds like a very peculiar tradition, but after experiencing it a few times, you understand the need for some formal and peaceful introduction. It can be compared to the tea culture we know in the Western world and in other parts of the world. Sharing a drink (alcoholic or not) with a dignitary, authority or foreign person is one of the oldest kind of tradition, like shaking hands. Drinking kava is not the most pleasant experience. The beverage is like muddy water, with some earthy and bitter taste. The liquid soon has a numbing effect on the lips and gums. It is not at all hallucinogenic, but the effect can be sedative and relaxing. This is why it is also drunk at official gatherings, and in private homes, as you would drink tea.

Luckily when we arrived in Tonga for the first time, all the guidebooks, cruising guides and local people had told us about this custom. We were taken to the local fresh market to buy a few bunches of the root. Without the help of the locals we would not have known what quantity and quality to buy. Back on the boat we stored about a dozen of these prepared bundles, wrapped in newspaper. We hung them in the nets over the saloon table where we store some of our fresh vegetables and fruits. Each time we arrived on a new island or area, we meticulously changed into sarongs, both for men and women, in order to cover our legs. We would then drive the dinghy to the beach and ask for the chief. Invariably we would be shown the way to one of the village huts where the ceremony would take place once the chief was summoned due to our arrival. After the ceremony, we would usually be shown around to visit the church, school, some of the houses and special features of the small village. The children would run up to us white people, and surround us for the time of our visit, wanting to hold our hand or simply exchange a few English phrases they learned at school.

Yam is another important crop in the Western Pacific. These huge root vegetables are grown mainly for their carbohydrates content, like

potatoes, but the symbol and veneration has other reasons. They ensure the survival of the people in case of famine or bad harvest, due to a tropical cyclone, droughts or floods. The villagers hold ceremonies, or festivals, like we do in the fall for the harvest. This is to thank the gods for providing sustenance and to pray for a fertile future season. We witnessed such a festival, albeit geared to us tourists. The men wear their traditional gear, with headpieces, palm leaves, and...penis sheath, made of leather, bamboo or palm leaves, and kept in place with a string around the waist. For the rest they are naked. They perform dances by stomping the ground with their bare feet, chanting and clapping.

In other parts of the world, like in Southeast Asia, not only are the religions different, but the food, the ethnicities, the languages, and the customs are very different from the Pacific nations of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia. While discovering Indonesia right after Papua New Guinea, something struck me from the beginning. Something so obvious, but which we don't necessarily notice or think about. Compared to the poorer and simpler countries of the Pacific in Indonesia, I noticed that Art is very developed. My analytical mind asked the question about this major difference. The answer is also quite simple: once the basic survival needs are met, such as food, shelter and warmth, humans have more time to think about other fulfilling things, such as culture and art, to embellish life. I noticed the colorful clothes and houses, and the effort put into decorating almost everything. A little further west on the mainland of Southeast Asia, in Malaysia and Thailand, Buddhism plays a great role, and the customs and traditions I could observe are vastly different. Religion is also much more present in everyday life. From the simple bow in a greeting to the mindset of people, everything is wrapped in a different way of feeling.

The food matter really caught my attention during the circumnavigation. Every country has a different culinary culture. Visiting these countries in succession is like going to a different

restaurant every night. It started with the Caribbean and the various influences that reached each island nation. These islands were influenced by the French, the British, the Dutch, and the Spaniards. It really shows in the taste of food, and in the spoken languages. Further west are the vastly spread islands of French Polynesia with, like the name suggests, a huge French influence. However the local food is influenced not only by the former colonizers, but also by the natural resources that make up the local diet: tropical fruits, fish and seafood, coffee, and bread to name just a few. We are then getting closer to the Anglo-Saxon nations, New-Zealand and Australia, with more modern diets, with remnants of a still strong Maori culture. With the next hop westward we enter Asia, somewhere around Papua New Guinea and more precisely Indonesia. There we have another explosion of flavors: spiciness plays a large role in the preparation of the dishes. As during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Indonesia was also ruled by various European nations, you also find some traces of European influence again. In Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the ones I visited, the food is also prepared differently, a lot of chilly peppers is used. Over there you have to get used to spicy foods, especially in the curries. The Andaman Islands, which belong to India, but lay close to Myanmar and Thailand, are very different again. Indian food is subtle, savory, not always spicy, and caters to a more vegetarian diet. Sri Lanka is quite similar, geographically closer to India. In these countries you really eat with the bare hands, normally using only the scooped up fingers of the right hand, thus creating a kind of spoon. Everywhere we went in Sri Lanka, the basic meal consisted of rice, some kind of dahl, and pieces of meat. It is good and filling, but after a few weeks of traveling within the country and finding the same dish over and over again, we needed something different. This something different came when we set sail from Sri Lanka to the Maldives. This nation of low-lying atolls, lagoons and islands does not really have a

very specific food or outstanding dish. We were of course served all kinds of fish, fish soup, but also samosas, banana flower salad, and good chapatti flat bread. Further south and west, we arrive in Madagascar, our first African country. It is a rather poor country, and the food is quite basic, rather resembling the Western habits. It is composed of fish, meat, or poultry, accompanied by rice. Cooked with little spices, it is still very tasty. Moving all the way south to South Africa, we enter the kingdom of barbecue, or Braai. I am not joking about the term kingdom. With their barbecues the South Africans can easily compete with the Australians and the Americans. It is a serious affair, not only on weekends while watching some sport on television, but also for a simple weekday evening meal.

Travelling by boat, slowly and differently opens up thousands of possibilities. Once the fear of the high seas and bad weather is overcome, the slow pace, flexibility, and the fact that one is moving with one's house, makes this kind of travel very special for example. I love the fact that one bypasses the sterile airport arrival environment. Instead, one has a more gradual experience of the arrival, slowly seeing the shore appear. Then the much slower process of making it to shore, be it by stepping onto the dock, or taking the dinghy and landing on the beach. The transition is slower and more gradual than just walking through the sliding doors of customs and immigration at the airport, and being immediately thrown into the hustle and bustle of the city. Sailing is definitely an effort, it makes the journey enjoyable and one must earn the destination. No wonder that more and more people choose this kind of adventurous lifestyle these days, and even more during this period of worldwide pandemic. Nowadays there is a huge number of new boat owners, with various degrees of experience in boating, taking to the sea. It is becoming more and more difficult to buy a good boat and the market is drying up. Boat manufacturers are experiencing longer delivery times, of two to three years. Today people notice even more

that the world is not doing well, and that they need some escape plan. A nine to five job and the rat race is not all there is to life. As we all know, life is short... In order to make the most of it, and to follow our dreams, let us have the courage to untie the lines and set sail into the sunset

AN ACT OF WALKING WITH THE EARTH IN WEST AFRICA

**An Ecological Reflection on Religious
and Traditional Practices of the Igbo People
of Amorji, Obeagu, Nigeria**

Chukwudi Johnpaul Okolo

Abstract

Nature and the social world differ. Although nature has formed a recurrent base of knowledge evidenced from what is perceived as empirical, the social world order presents a compromising value, which differs in context. Care for the environment shows universally that selfish drives against nature preservation to man's benefits backfires, it is much wiser to start a dialogue between what has been considered as a firm dichotomy between the social sphere of living interactions and what we project as Nature.

This is a reflection on the cultural practice of the Igbo people of Obeagu, which is in other words an ethics of ecology and religion that achieves the preservation of the environment as an act of walking the

earth. This reflection on walking the earth can be said to be another form of introspection or self-realization where the consciousness of what man is composed of, and what man depends on, as well as the realization of the limitedness of man, is appreciated as exposing man as a transient and dependent being.

Concepts like indigeneity and cultural values as inherited and preserved through religious beliefs and worship become media of preserving and improving the ecosystem and preserving the earth. This, in other words, implies that the pre-colonial indigenous Africans and Igbos in this instance had a perfect way of walking with the earth through the interconnectedness of their religion with ecology.

Introduction

Walking the earth can be a rewarding walk where interdependency and reciprocity enriches the relationship that exists between men and the environment. This is an act of sharing where both walking parties support, motivate, and encourage each other. Walking with the earth entails a relationship where man lives as both a benefactor and a beneficiary to the earth. The symbiosis in the form of the earth and man relationship is further elaborated in the contribution of John Grim, where he discusses persons as Somatic centre which enquires on what constitutes a person as assessed from the relationship between the human body, the sense, and the mind (Allison, 2016).

This study presents a case of the traditional practices of Amorji village in the Obeagu community of Enugu State, Nigeria, to give insight into some religious practices of indigenous people, and how they add value to the growth of the environment. Although best practices require an in-depth case study and analysis to further validate the issues, this is a reflection from experiential knowledge and insight.

This reflection calls for an evaluation of how man has been more a benefactor than a beneficiary of the earth. The former being where the

challenge exists, has entertained several condemnations from proponents of climate change, climate justice and the advocates for a change of attitude towards the earth, the climate, and the environment. It recommends a reinvention of the indigenous practices that have gone extinct as the sustainable solution to the identified challenges of climate justice, climate change, global warming, and so on.

The choice of Amorji Obeagu as the basis of the reflection and the case presentation is because of the childhood memory which the author attaches with it in reflecting where ecology meets with traditional practices and the role that religion plays in the mix to sustain such practices that enrich the earth.

Concepts

The argument for indigeneity has enjoyed positions of thoughts both for and against. The oxford dictionary definition of indigeneity states: *(of people and their culture) coming from a particular place and having lived there for a long time before other people came there; relating to, belonging to, or developed by these people*. This would suffice to represent the needed conceptual framework of this reflection, but it is important to highlight that there are other reflections that identify backgrounds and underlying factors to the concept of indigeneity. Jacob et al, as cited in *Indigenous philosophy of Education work*, presents indigeneity as a sense of distinctiveness and cultural coherence for those who live in distinct locations, who speak some remnant of a distinct language, who struggle with/against concurrent claims of government authority, and who self-identify as belonging to a place prior to its annexation or colonization (Petrovic & Mitchell, 2018). This appears indicative of identification as an agent of change, which also means a rejection of western hegemonic conceptualization. UNESCO identified some factors in determining indigenous people including self-identification, existing prior to colonial subjugation, strong ties to

specific territories, regions or land; a distinct social, economic, and political system; unique language, culture, and beliefs; existence as a non-dominant group; and a strong motivation to maintain and reproduce ancestral ways of living and knowing as a community of people (Petrovic & Mitchell, 2018).

It is on this background that it becomes necessary to reflect with the proponents of “Ecology and Religion”, whose ideas and work (Grim, 2006; Tucker & Grim, 2001) have set the pace on connecting culture, ecology, ethics and religion. Elizabeth Allison (2016), in a review of the works of the Grim and Tucker on Ecology and Religion, summed it as an effort to insight ecological scientists, showing how religion has woven humanity into nature with rituals, symbols and ethical practices, which is a form of bridge that connects or re-binds humans to our earthly home. This implies an effort of expression of lived relationship and intimacy with local environment as significant pathways for personal maturity, communal identity, spiritual ecology, and cosmological contemplation among the native people who transmit them, thereby making convictions that indigenous religiosity has gradually made indigenous traditions important participants of some cross-cultural, interreligious, and global dialogue of cultures (Grim, 2006).

The ethics of ecological management emphasises faithfulness and care of what has been given to humanity. This takes an understanding of what ownership entails in conviction that the earth does not belong to man but was only given to man to keep. Keeping means taking care. This is what Stueckelberger (2010) calls “responsible behaviour of acting as a care-holder”, which he says is a vision for everybody according to the teachings and injunction of Jesus. This stewardship duties are characterized by the six virtues of Caring, Protecting, Guiding, Ordering, Serving, and Sharing. This is what ethical care for the earth entails, giving care in return for what has been received.

Case Presentation – Amorji Traditional Religious Practice as Ecological Ethics

The Amorji Traditional Practice expresses religious beliefs in acts and norms that are similar to other forms of African Traditional Religion. In this practice we find an indigenous philosophy and ideology that forms the opinions and beliefs of a people. The Amorji people are Igbos who live in the South-East of Nigeria. These Igbos are the same people referred to as Biafrans, who fought a 30 months war in defence of their defunct country-state (Achebe, 1995, 2012). The African Traditional Religious practice is an indigenous practice of Africans which connects them in their belief to their Supreme Being, who they believe is almighty and creator of everything. It reflects their cosmology, signs and symbols, ritual practices, and art, but is ultimately connected to their environment and natural space, with land, water and air.

The practices of the Amorji people, which are of interest in this reflection, relate to acts that promote planting and ownership of trees, respect for vegetation, and respect for the streams and the animals that live in them. But it is important to establish the background of what their traditional beliefs entail in relation to the Igbo traditional belief system.

The Igbos believe in *Chukwu*, which is coined from two words: *Chi* and *Ukwu* (meaning God, and Great or Mighty respectively). The works of Egboh (1972) and Basden (1966), and some references to Shelton (1972), give insight into the Igbo Traditional Religion. This supreme God is believed to be the creator of everything: rain, growing crops, humans, life, and the world. The title of *Chineke* (God the creator) represents the powers of *Chukwu* in creation. There is also the *Chi*, who is the guardian spirit of a person. The Igbos believe that the personal *Chi* of every person is present all the time and is called upon both in times of good and in times of bad. The *Chi* is little lower than *Chukwu* or *Chineke* because *Chi* does not play part in creation. *Ala* (also *Ani* or *Anu*

or *Ali* in some dialects, may be used interchangeably) is the earth spirit which protects the land and gives fertility to the people. Parrinder (in Egboh, 1972) is cited with the opinion that *Ala* is a goddess and is addressed in matters pertaining to harvests, famine, drought, and childbirth. *Ala* is also said to be the custodian of morality and plays punitive role within the Igbo communities, such that when one does wrong, it is against *Ala*, and it is the *Ala* who also punishes the offender. Such punishable crimes include theft, murder, immorality, etc. Ike & Edozien (2001) captured the morals in the Igbo culture with the words of prayer contained in the breaking of Kolanut, thus:

“... If I have ever touched the wife of my relation
Or seen the nakedness of a sister.

If I have ever stolen what belongs to any human being

Or oppressed a widow,

Or cheated an orphan, or borne false witness,

Or spoken calumny.

If I have killed any human being with knife or spear or arrow or rope,

Or poison or witchcraft.

If I have ever done any of these things, may our land and the mother
earth (*Ala*) eat me.”

(Excerpts from a *Traditional Prayer over the Oji Kola-nut*)

The above clarifies how the Igbos reverence and worship the *Ala* and avoid her punishment by doing good deeds. These good deeds go with the reward of joining the ancestral spirits after one dies, which happens with the funeral rites of passage. The Igbos reverence those fathers and forefathers who led good lives and have passed to the world beyond. These ancestors are also intercessors who are invoked during prayers. On this discourse, Ike (2000) opined that all natural resources belong to *Chukwu* (the Supreme God), who ceded management thereof to ‘*Ala*’, the earth deity. The ancestors were thought to have obtained the

‘traditions and customs of the land’ (referred to as *Omenala*) from ‘*Ala*’. In the Igbo Traditional religion, there is universality in their beliefs and practices; same *Chukwu*, *Chi*, *Chineke*, *Ala* and the ancestors. But observable is the fact that each community, town, or village personalizes their *Ala*. In the personalizing of the *Chi*, the guardian angel, and the *Ala*, the protector and giver of fertility and punisher of evil, there is found places of worship known as shrines of *Ala* or the deities of a community, often the common ground or village square. This is where the *Ezemuo* is found, the chief priest. There are several places of worship for *Ala* according to community, town, or village. The religion of the Igbos is interwoven with his life and both are inseparable. This is the opinion holding that religion permeates all aspects of the Igbo lives, with reference to Mbiti: “*they (Africans) eat, drink, work, bathe, and dress religiously*”. This opinion institutionalizes religion and tradition into a non-institutional mix that weave the society’s communal way of life into one (Ike & Edozien, 2001). This makes its religion, tradition, laws and practices inseparable from the other and interconnected to one and the other.

However, there is no difference of the traditional practice of Amorji, which is the case presentation comparative with the earlier Igbo Traditional practice. But the interest in this reflection is to relate their religious philosophy to their ecological and environmental protection and enrichment. Amorji, being one of the five villages in Obeagu, has her *Ala* which is called *Ala Amorji*. *Ala-Amorji* is sacred and revered, and like other *Ala*, it is the goddess of fertility for humans, animals and land. The inseparability of the Igbo people with their *Ala* is seen in some families taking names of *Ala-Chebe* (May the land protect) or *Ani-ebonam* (may the Land not condemn me). There is also *Ajanu-Amorji*, which may translate in central Igbo dialect as *Aja- Anu-Amorji*, (earth of Amorji land) which cannot be clarified in this reflection. *Ajanu-Amorji* has a special place in Amorji, because it is more referenced than Ani-

Amorji, which implies some strong tie. There are forests that are dedicated to *Ajanu-Amorji*, as well as goats and poultry which are products of routine sacrifices by the worshipping people. *Okpom* is the God of the stream of Amorji. *Okpom* is a stream that runs through the village, sourcing from the northern part and flowing down to the south of the village, and has some fishes and other sea animals. Not so much is similar between *Okpom* and *Ala* when assessing the universality of the concept, although other communities have sacred fishes and sacred streams and rivers, but notable is the fact that just as every individual has her *Chi*, there are also dedications of villages or towns to their own God, different from *Ala*.

However, the traditional practices of Amorji people in relation to their worship of *Okpom* or *Ajanu-Amorji*, is of particular interest. *Okpom* has fishes and other sea animals that live in and around it and thus there are laws guiding the use of *Okpom* with punishments and rites of atonement that go with violating them. The fishes and sea animals in *Okpom* are dedicated to it, and one is forbidden to kill anything coming from it. The law also holds that a menstruating woman or a new-born mother cannot bath in the stream. It is not a punishment, because they have all the help they need from the community. My reflection relates these laws with the seasonal changes that happen to this stream during the dry season, or *harmattan*, in southeastern Nigeria; the waters tend to dry up at this time, which puts the community in scarcity of water. This law, like in the instance of *Okpom*, tends to check the contamination of the water to ensure its health for the good of the people who use it and to enhance water with reduced human activities in it that would force the water to dry up fast. This is one example of religious practice being ecologically healthy and preserving the environment.

Furthermore, the worship of *Ajanu-Amorji* goes with certain laws and practices that are related to land and environmental preservation. There exists the *ofia-Ajanu-Amorji* (the forest of *Ajanu-Amorji*), which

is a tick forest area within the village and houses the great Ngwu tree. This tree is a sacred tree, great and tall, worshipped by the people as a representation of the mystery of their god. Obodimma Oha has a beautiful reflection on the Ngwu tree (Oha, 2019). The law forbids one from cutting any tree or branch in Ofia-Ajanu-Amorji. It is at this place that the women folk preserve their cocoyam after harvesting. This is because the cocoyam survives at less than 10 degrees Celsius, which is often the temperature of the Ofia-Ajanu-Amorji due to the thick vegetation. There is also a practice where nursing mothers are forbidden from entering the sacred forest which holds the interpretation of not desecrating the forest, but more to forbid her from work and give more attention to nursing the newborn. The practice of not cutting trees at Ofia-Ajanu-Amorji has helped preserve the forest and increased the vegetation of the community. There are several other forests that are preserved as sacred where people are forbidden from cutting, burning, or any form of tampering. Okpom, the sacred stream, has one of such forests and it also houses the Ngwu tree.

On another note, there is a third practice which has to do with the culture of planting palm trees. The sign of wealth of a successful man in the Igbo culture is the number of lands that he has and the number of palm trees he possesses (Achebe, 1995; Ike & Edozien, 2001). The reality is that the palm tree is rich in giving oil for cooking, oiling the body or for medical uses, while also sourcing the palm wine, which is the traditional drink of the Igbo people. The land, on the other hand, is important for cultivation and informs a man's ability to feed his family or the community through his hard work. The Igbos of the Amorji village have the culture of bestowing on any new-born child a palm tree. This is called *Nkwu-eno* (Navel Palm Tree) or in a possessive sense, *Nkwu-Eno Okeke* (Okeke's Navel Palm Tree) or *Nkwu-Eno Obinna* (Obinna's Navel Palm Tree). *Eno* is the umbilicus that falls from the child after some weeks of disconnecting from the mother. The *nkwu eno*

practice has proven to encourage the planting of palm trees as every newborn child of every family gets one *nkwu-eno*. The ritual is that once the umbilicus falls off the baby, the father takes it and buries it on the palm tree that he chooses for the child. This child grows up to own it, tendering it with his mother, and they alone have the right to care for the tree.

The above three religious practices of the Amorji people of Obeagu, present healthy practices that target protection of the ecosystem, especially for water and trees. These are practices that lived for hundreds of years and the people have identified them with the sense of duty and religiosity. They become religious responsibilities and are enforced by the people as a moral duty to themselves and their god. In it is found the ethics of care, solidarity, sharing and responsibility.

However, the above is a description of the interconnectedness of the religious beliefs of the Igbos, their religious practices, and their environment. The beautiful part is that this singular practice has helped preserve the environment to give rich vegetation to their land and waters. This is a beautiful way that the Igbos have walked with the earth through their religion and tradition, interwoven with their care for the environment. It is ethical, it is sustainable and it is for the good of the people and costs no energy. This practice is not limited to any Igbo village or town as there are other places with similar practices of preserving sacred forests and sacred streams, sacred animals and other beautiful cultures that care for the environment (Okeke et al., 2017). There is the understanding that care for the earth is care for humanity through care for the representation of the gods and the deities, which is the mystery of creation that they adore. All their wealth is sourced from nature, which the earth brings their food and water, their shelter and general livelihood is from what the earth gave forth. They are very connected to nature and understand the need for its care, which informed the norms, laws and regulations to ensure its sustainability.

Reinventing the Indigenous Traditional Practices for the Good of the Earth

The call for renewal of human efforts in solidarity and subsidiarity with the earth is urgent and genuine. This is the message that the reflection on walking with the earth brings, and it is also an ethical responsibility, which the indigenous and cultural practices seen in the reviewed case prove to be sustainable and enduring. There is an urgency to introduce a new ecological culture, which shares an understandable sustainability in reinventing the indigenous practices, which has connection with the faith and belief of the people.

Kathy Sherman, CSJ wrote a beautiful song about the earth whose refrain reads:

Touch the earth with gentleness
Touch the earth with love
Touch her with a future
By the way you live today
God has given us the power
To create the world anew
If we touch the earth
Together Me and you.

This song says so much about our duty of kindness, gentleness and love that calls humanity to use God's given power to touch the earth. This prayer, that is couched in a song, is a call to duty. It is a call on humanity to take up an ethical responsibility to the earth, which benefits us in return. It bears the message of solidarity with an awareness that cares for the earth is care for one another. The Igbos of Nigeria in West African understand this, and one can find them in their dicta: *onye aghana nwanne ya* (leave not the other behind), *egbe bere, ugo bere* (let the kite perch and let the eagle too), and many more of this. The facts in the Igbo religion, which are interwoven with their culture and belief in

ecology, is that the laws are not exclusive to any person, and it is beneficial to every person. Understanding the Igbo governance system and community administrative structure will clarify the inclusivity in laws, practices and agreements that govern the land. This is not exclusive to the Igbos in Nigeria, West Africa, but the traits can be found in other indigenous peoples. The works of Tucker & Grim (2001) can give insight as they have worked across cultures, tribes, and religions. Care for the earth is the objective in commissioning the Earth Charter during the Earth Summit in Rio, 1992, whose sixteen key principles were summed up under four headings: Respect and care for community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, nonviolence, and peace.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the indigenous cultures and traditions have had practices that preserved and enriched the earth. The case of the Igbo culture and the instance of the Amorji traditional practices throw more light to this. The question then is, how can these traditions be reinvented to inculcate care for the earth and show solidarity, which is the mission and message of walking the earth? There is a pre-supposition of gap or demise in the question which is true; that those traditional practices like in Amorji are extinct. The impact of colonization and westernization balkanised and bastardized the Igbo as well as representing African Traditional Religion and practices as mundane, bad, evil, and not to be associated with. This is a sad situation but an issue for another reflection. But how can the foregone cultures be brought back into the mainstay of cultural and ecological practice for the good of the earth and of humanity?

Conclusion

This reflection has attempted to arouse a reflection on how the traditional practices of pre-colonial era as presented in the case of Amorji Obeagu Igbo community in Nigeria of West Africa, has

contributed to ecological preservation. This is a practice of a people that by given parameters are considered indigenous and there are indicators of those practices being sustainable.

It is unfortunate that these traditional practices are not practiced anymore because of factors of misconceived civilization that discontinued cultural practices by introducing novel and unfounded practices as a new culture that is neither Western nor African. A practice that has condemned the traditional practices as demonic, idolatrous, mundane, and bad. This resulted in indigenous people abandoning their traditional practices in pursuit of the new way of life and the misconceived western practices. Thus, the death of the traditional practices happened.

It is however important to look at these practices again and find ways to reinvent them into the mainstay of ecological practices. Only this can be the realistic way of showing solidarity with the earth in a sustainable manner. This is the true way of walking with the earth because it gives back to the earth as much as it is beneficial to man. This relationship needs to be strengthened and encouraged because it goes a long way to ease the global push for solidarity with the earth, which several agencies and campaigns on climate change, global warming, earth charter, and so on, have been advocating.

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WHAT KIERKEGAARD MISSED AND THE BEATLES GOT RIGHT

Jes Colding

Flawed Fictions

As a young boy scout, my perception of Nature was one of awe, affection and respect. While I built skills to survive in and live with Nature, I was, in return, rewarded by an intuitive but inexplicable sense of belonging and balance whenever I walked in the forests, on the heaths or along the coasts. Yet, in spite of this gut feeling of parity, I soon became a product of one of Mankind's (in the following, I shall use the conventional male reference for Humankind for ease of reading, in no way as a reflection of one gender's position over the other) most fundamental collective fictions (Harari's Sapiens): that Man's place in the World was as ruler of The Earth. After millennia of living alongside with all other animals and nature, we abandoned our animistic ethics and beliefs and invented monotheistic religions which formalized and authorized our natural birthright to be "in charge of fish, the birds, and all the wild animals" (Genesis 1.28) just as we had invented agriculture and domestication of animals.

Although the concept of Man as an integral part of Nature has continued to emerge in many different schools of thought over the last 3,000 years, the dominant conventional wisdom has placed Man at the top of the hierarchy from where he (and certainly not she, another fiction of ours) rules the lands and the oceans, the animals and everything living. What may have been intended as a caretaker position, soon turned into a giant self-service buffet, where Nature was seen as an inexhaustible resource at Man's availability and for his betterment.

To consider all living as an asset at Man's disposal was only rarely considered unethical, since philosophers and thinkers up through the ages tended to focus on ethics as moral principles to govern all inter-human and social behavior only. Limited by our five senses, Man has been unable to fully fathom the Natural world, most of which is invisible to him and so complex that it escapes his intellectual capacity. Attempts to thrust beyond the sober use of Man's greatest tool, the brain, whether assisted by fungi or chemistry, may have promoted the notion of "the World will be as one" (John Lennon, *Imagine*) but never really made it into mainstream society and thinking. That Man and Nature are on par and not the dichotomy defined in the Old Testament, that everything living is connected and interdependent were ideas that were reserved for the individual human being's spiritual world and beliefs – similar to my feeling of balance whenever I walked in nature – and never became a foundation for how we built our civilization.

And so, I grew up, as all other humans in the modern age, with a naïve belief, that the main challenge lying ahead of Man was the journey towards world peace and a Brotherhood of Man (Lennon again). This belief fostered wars and bloody battles, clashes of ideologies and religions, endless discussions about what is good and evil, ethical and unethical and in the case of the welfare state of Denmark to repetitious and predictable conflicts over which citizens deserve the State's pity and

support when redistributing 53% of the GNP. A far cry from my fellow countryman Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist reflections over the unescapable responsibility of "hiin enkelte" (that single individual) in the first half of the 19th century.

The End of History

With increasing confidence and the feeling of being on the right track, I and others of my privileged generation watched as mankind managed to successfully address many of the scourges of the past: famine, disease, war, poverty – all at their all time low in recorded history. With the Millennium Development Goals largely achieved by 2015 and the sober and ideology-free book "Factfulness", from 2018, by Hans Rosling, it seemed that Man could almost achieve any objective he defined.

Acting as an international business manager up through the 80's, 90's and 00's, I was in a good position to watch from the front row how the Global Village and globalization became a reality facilitated by progress in technology and communications. Increasing world trade and interdependency was the best deterrence against war and bloodshed. As history has repeatedly shown, civilizations free of war and religious or other dogma have always thrived and prospered, allowing us to aspire towards better ethics and more humane societies.

As a reflection of the times, my professional course changed direction in the second half of the 00's as I quit my management career and started working in the area of sustainable development finance, focusing on promoting financial inclusion in emerging economies. As a private consultant, drawing on my skills and experience in international business, I soon found myself involved in a broad range of projects in the minefield between NGO's and the private sector, all striving to

secure a better and more just world: microfinance, Village savings and Loan Associations, Cooperatives, Good Agricultural Practices, Solar Household Systems, solar irrigation, grassroots entrepreneurship, improved nutrition, access to clean water, reforestation, education, Conservation Agriculture... to name but a few.

On top of such ethics driven improvements towards the creation of a better World and the true Brotherhood of Man, the exponential speed of development in technology gave new possibilities and hopes: cures against cancer and other deceases, AI and robots to make human lives safer and more comfortable, the World Wide Web with its' democratizing potential and social minority facilitation, in vitro technology to battle increasing infertility, sex change operations for the unfortunate who were born in a wrong body, longevity or even eternal life within technological reach, gene technology to cultivate not only GMO crops but also the flawless, idealized human of the ruling collective fiction etc. etc. – all progress that would add to the Homo Deus (Harari again) illusion than man is indeed God and rules Nature.

Fewer wars, less famine and fewer incurable deceases coupled with green farming and mass production technologies allowed for an explosion in the world population unprecedented or tested before during Man's walk on Earth. Growth is good, became the collective fiction, and this tragic misconception was transplanted to the number of humans inhabiting our planet. A large population came to reflect Man's ability to survive and the success of our species. The more the merrier. Attempts to interfere with the holy Western individual's freedom and human rights, or to even question the wisdom of accelerating population growth would be considered heresy. The one-child policy in China between 1980-2015 was widely condemned by the rest of the World even though it may mean that our current 7.8 billion population would have been 1-2 billion higher had it not been for this "totalitarian" intervention.

With such progress and increasing self-confidence, it is little wonder that the elephant in the room, Man's unsustainable relationship with Nature and unconstrained use of the Earth's resources, was never addressed. No mainstream politician or thought leader would remind us of Alexander von Humboldt's learnings from Venezuela in 1801 (*The Invention of Nature*) that all ecological systems are bound to fail over time if unbalanced.

Even if Francis Fukuyama in 1992 would have been right when claiming that the victory of Western liberal democracy and market driven capitalism should mark the end of history, such claim would have been entirely worthless considering the much more existential challenges facing mankind, which have become evident since then.

Faced with potential extinction, the human-centric ethics discussions would suddenly seem irrelevant and superfluous. What good would it do if the nurses won higher wages in their union battle, the migration issues were solved, traffic casualties would drop or harmful chemicals would be avoided in toys and packaging, if there was no sustainable tomorrow for Mankind anyway? The haunting, dystopian science fiction movie "Children of Men" from 2006 gives a very plausible bid on how the human species will disintegrate into chaos and misanthropy, when facing the idea of "no tomorrow".

The Snake in Paradise

Ignorant bliss allowed me and the fortunate 3-4 generations following WW2 to experience a period of nothing but peace, progress, improving living standards and a more even, if still greatly skewed, distribution of the World's wealth. Ignorance of the mounting, invisible threat to Mankind caused a naive "Unbearable Lightness of Being" and the conviction that growth was eternal, if not exponential then at least

linear, and this led to stranger and stranger collective fictions: greed is good (God), decadently overpriced sneakers mirroring a world of excessive materialism; mall shopping replacing forest walks as preferred weekend leisure activity, unprecedented levels of narcissism peaking with the notion of “I am what I feel” and social media’s grotesque acceleration of “I am seen, so I exist”, victimization and a vanishing sense of responsibility of the individual, to name but a few.

Bizarre discussions of the price of a human life followed as a consequence of the ruling materialism and consumerism where all aspects of human life had to be monetized in order to have value. Nowhere in this increasing spiritual poverty, did it occur to ask the question of the value of the Natural setting in which Mankind had flourished and succeeded so unchallenged. The more societies invested in education, the expected key to progress and wealth, the more ignorant populations became to matters essential in life and the long term survival of our species. The Internet and the social media, initially hailed to set free the enslaved and give a voice to each and every citizen on the Earth, instead led to the introduction of alternative facts and fake news which made communication and compromise through meaningful intellectual exchanges impossible and resulted in increased polarization amongst humans. So, it was no surprise that the steadily increasing amount of evidence that Man’s life on the planet and self-perception as it’s Master was not sustainable and in fact the path to perdition, was not universally accepted and acknowledged by the inhabitants of our planet.

However, there were plenty of warning signs. Alexander von Humboldt’s and Goethe’s idea that everything existing was linked and bonded only resulted in increasing “silofication” of the sciences. The humanistic, inexact sciences over time became increasingly led by opinions and dogma and less so by facts and knowledge. Democracies elected ignorant talk-show hosts and movie stars as their leaders

mimicking the fate of the first democracies of the 6th century BC city state of Athens, which also gave in to populism and collapsed. As the Athenians voted democratically to execute it's critical thinkers (Socrates) and engage in endless, futile, bankrupting wars, so did humans of the 21st century AD's democracies increasingly exclude science and savants from the public discussions and kept competing for world power, territories and resources.

The exclusion of knowledge was not always just a result of innocent ignorance. Large power wielders like states, corporations and NGO's in many cases withheld knowledge from the masses or distorted it to fit their own purposes. Governments invented motives to engage in "just wars" and create animosity amongst peoples and cultures. The tobacco industry and Seven Sisters paid astronomical amounts of money to keep the negative effects of their products to humans and our planet a secret to the masses. Self righteous NGO's militantly pursued their one-sided agendas and thereby moved focus from the real challenges of Mankind.

So, only very late did a feeling start to emerge that something was fundamentally wrong. As mounting hurricanes, flooding, wildfires and droughts started to affect the lives of millions; it was no longer possible for politicians and leaders to remain oblivious to the biggest challenge ever posed to Mankind. Whereas the 1987 Brundtland report on sustainability primarily caught the attention of conscientious politicians and thinking journalists, it was not until Al Gore's "An inconvenient Truth" in 2006 that a wider share of the population of educated societies of the world got a wake-up call and became aware of the menace. The personal 2020 testimonial of Sir Richard Attenborough's "A Life on our Planet" was underscored by all of this master communicator's integrity, credibility and lifelong first-hand experience with Nature. The UN's IPCC did also chip in but suffered from the UN curse of having to satisfy all members of the very diverse club and not until the sixth report

in 2021 were the warnings of the approaching climate meltdown irrefutably expressed.

In his relentlessly honest and factual “The Uninhabitable Earth” from 2019, David Wallace-Wells lists the consequences of global warming as well as the cascading and tipping point phenomena. The mere fact that 50% of all CO₂ throughout history has been emitted after “An Inconvenient Truth” made the broad public aware of the connection between greenhouse gasses and global warming as well as the speed of change. Once a bite from the forbidden tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden has been taken, it is depressingly difficult to undo and with the knowledge we have today, the known knowns and the known unknowns do not look good. Putting all our hopes in the unknown unknowns, which could turn out negative as well as positive, seems a little like gambling and also does not mobilize what remains Man’s most distinct characteristic and gift: the ability to build Collective Fictions (Harari). The fictions that brought us in this mess may as well be redefined and used to create a new fiction in which Man learns to live as part of Nature rather than it’s Master. We may give in to facts but not give up.

A Question of Balance

One of my favorite bands in the 1970’s was the Moody Blues. In most of their albums, and particularly in their 1970 “A Question of Balance”, they appeal to enhance spiritual elements of Man’s existence and insist on the importance of finding a balance with Nature. This could very well be the underlying, core value of the new Collective Fiction which should govern all decisions made in this eleventh hour. A reorientation of our discussions of ethics as merely human-centric to also encompass Mankind’s ethical behavior in relation to everything living and created. Acknowledging that Kierkegaard and most other thinkers of the Holocene had, in fact, focused on futile and redundant

discussions of good and evil amongst Men, and that the Beatles were much closer to nailing the key to Humankind's long term, sustainable existence on our Planet, when they in the very last recorded song summarized "And in the end, the love you take, is equal to the love you make", will be very painful and difficult for the conceited Human species. To accept that there must be a balance in everything and everywhere in the Universe as everything is bonded and part of the same. To get to this realization from within rather than under duress from the burning platform created by the natural disasters around us, would have been preferable.

As a kid, I always had a sub-conscious feeling that things had to balance to last, that resources were finite and that one had to be economical in all matters of resources. I grew up in the aftermath of the hippie movement and I was sympathetic to the ideas of simple living, paying back and expanding the borders of our conscience. As a student and even after beginning my work life with its usual abundance of resources and means, I preferred a frugal lifestyle over what I saw as rampant consumerism around me. I still use my T-shirts from when I was 16. This intuitive position, which many people share, went against conventional wisdom but must be rooted in an innate quest towards balance, so there is no reason to assume that adapting a new collective fiction of consuming less, abandoning meat, de-growth and living fewer people on our Planet will conflict with the laws of Nature.

Monastery or Meritocracy?

So, what are the responses to imminent extinction? How can Mankind respond to this newly acknowledged crisis, the biggest ever facing Humanity? The vast majority of the World's population are either not aware of the eminent threat or refuse to believe in the facts. The ignorant poor with no access to education are busy surviving till

tomorrow, working their way out of poverty to offer their children a better life than they had. You cannot blame them. The dismissive educated in the rich world prefer to continue dancing to the band as the Titanic sinks and even mounting extreme weather conditions are not sufficient to make them stop that dance and live life to its' fullest as long as they can.

Amongst the, after all, growing crowd of informed realists, there seems to be primarily two ways to react. Driven by a feeling of powerlessness and yet a desire to act, most people look for ways they can contribute to avoid the global warming and further destruction of sustainable ecosystems. A fragile new set of ethics focused on Man's relationship to Nature is materializing as especially the new generations turn their backs to domestication of animals by becoming vegans, oppose mining, support rewilding efforts, stop traveling by air, buy clothes in thrift shops, go from owning to sharing cars, houses and other utilities, ride bikes, reuse-reduce-recycle mantras, energy neutral housing, less food waste schemes like "Too Good to Go", less is more etc. The good thing to be said about all these people's efforts is that people will likely feel better about themselves and that at least they do not think Global Warming is a hoax. The sad thing is, nevertheless, that these activities at an individual level amongst a very small part of the enlightened world's population have little, if any, effect on the problem they seek to address. If well-intended ethical behavior of these first-movers does not work, nor is it realistic or reasonable to expect that the vast majority of the World's population of poor, uneducated or resentful citizens will adopt these new, abstract ethics and interrupt their efforts to improve the life they see and understand every day. No matter how high the sea and rivers' water levels will go, how many hurricanes will erase entire towns and communities, how many houses will give in to wildfires or harvests will go astray due to drought or flooding, it is unlikely that these people will adopt these new ethics. In other words,

expecting that Man's lacking set of ethics governing his relationship with Nature will be remedied by individuals on their own initiative deciding to adapt the more sensible, sustainable, frugal lifestyle of the monks and nuns in the Monastery may be wishful thinking and not save Humanity in the short time window at our disposal.

Another and most likely more effective, way to introduce the new Collective Fiction would be to introduce new political and economic systems or at least to fundamentally reform the present. Without stooping to totalitarianism, as some say is the only way to save Mankind, a migration of the western liberal democracy towards some kind of meritocracy may be a revolution of all modern ethics discussions of human rights and the sacredness of the individual life, but facing extinction and complex problems unfathomable to layman, this may be the time in Man's history where the veneration for human life may yield to the respect for everything living. Maybe also the right time to acknowledge Socrates' words that voting in an election is a skill, not a random intuition. And the words of Plato that "only those who do not seek power are qualified to hold it", such as the reluctant Czech author become President Václav Havel after the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Those with knowledge and skills and no lust for power forming the meritocracy will surely also be able to distinguish between interventions and ethics necessary for our collective survival and those that can be left to "hiin enkelte". When it comes to economics, market-driven capitalism has had its' chance and failed to create long-term balance. While keeping elements such as capitalism's ability to motivate people and optimize use of resources, markets must never again manage essentials such as energy, resources, money or technology, nor may it depend on the trickle-down effect to ensure a fair distribution of wealth. But the motivation of the Malawian farmers who wanted to improve their living conditions by replanting 25 m trees following the horrible deforestation of the country 2001-2011 – the will the do better – should

remain part of any new economic system. Only governed by the new laws of Man/Nature ethics.

No World as We Know It

This must be the end of the World as we know it, or there will be no World at all for Man. Time is of essence and relying on existing systems and ethics will not do the job.

Measured by today's standards, the future should very soon be looking revolutionary different if we are to survive. An entirely new set of ethics must be developed and implemented: Nature's rights will overshadow Human rights and the ethical base of society will no longer be exclusively human-centric; the domestication of animals has served it's purpose, is obsolete and must now be abandoned; a categorical and deadlined stop to use fossil fuels will temporarily end all travel and transport of goods by land, air or water until renewables can replace them; vast parts of the land and the oceans must be rewilded and left to itself to heal and recreate biodiversity; human population growth must be stopped by force; growing living standards replaced by more moderate and frugal lifestyles; people's individual freedoms in matters essential to our co-existence with nature and Mankind's survival will be eliminated; secularism and science will prevail; religion will be a matter of individual, spiritual contemplation and belief; growth will no longer be linear but circular; many people will live poorer lives from a materialistic perspective; nation states will no longer be the primary forum of decision making; where possible, new technologies will replace unnecessary and costly systems such as banks; global taxation systems ensuring rational redistribution of resources will be introduced; spiritual quests for Man's union with Nature must be conducted; humility and humbleness must be universally shared by the future citizens of the Earth. In conclusion, the freedom of the individual will

vanish in matters crucial to his survival on the Earth, but in all other matters, Man can continue to enjoy great freedoms. As Zorba the Greek insists “In work, I am your man, but in things like playing and singing, I am my own, I mean: free”

How to make all this happen? We do not have the systems. We do not have the leaders. Religions and nation states will do all they can to fight this. The ultra-rich of the World will use their power and influence to avoid sharing their wealth. Corporations will continue to seek short-term profits for their shareholders, well-fed overweight consumers around the World will insist that too much is never enough and that growth is a human right etc. etc. The reasons why we will not make it are numerous and well understood. Nevertheless, if Man wants to continue his Walk with the Earth, radical changes and a new ethical paradigm will be a prerequisite so even if our chances of success are slim we must not give up but use our greatest asset, the ability to develop collective fictions, to change the way we see ourselves in the World and act accordingly.

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PART 2: THE VALUE OF SHARING

MIGRATION AND ECOLOGICAL CARE

Christian J. Jäggi

Migration as a Fundamental Right

As early as 1963, Pope John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, called for the right for every person to “migrate to other states and take up residence there” “if just causes so advise” (*Pacem in Terris* 12). One could argue with Dimitry Kochenov (2015:144) that territorial borders reinforce notions that persons are “state property,” so to speak. Whenever a border is drawn, he argues, it creates two separate spaces. This does not mean that borders should be abolished - they should only be permeable, at least for people. Therefore, a right to migrate means nothing more than being able to leave the space on one side of the border, move to the space on the other side of the border, and stay there. The right to migrate includes the freedom to “vote with one's feet” - and many of the border demarcations, some of which took place centuries ago, basically curtail people's freedom of movement - a rather nonsensical practice that would hardly be accepted in many other areas. While Article 13 of the Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right to leave one's country of origin or residence and return to one's country of origin, it lacks a corresponding right to enter and settle in another country of one's choice.

Art. 13, para. 2 of the European Declaration of Human Rights

Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

One of the most glaring inequalities in the age of neo-liberal globalization is the differential treatment of goods, services and capital on the one hand and people on the other. While capital can circulate freely around the globe, people still cannot. State repression, police and sometimes even army are used to inhibit people from circulating freely and to deny them entry to many countries. The rich countries are afraid of losing their advantageous living conditions, while elsewhere millions of people are forced by wars, environmental destruction, climate change, political unrest or poverty to vegetate under the saddest of living conditions.

Basically, the rich immigration countries do not care about the legitimate wish of millions of people to find decent living conditions elsewhere. Only when it serves their interests - e.g. when they need additional skilled labor - do highly developed countries open their borders to people from other countries and continents, and even then only extremely selectively.

The question arises whether every person living on this planet should not have a basic right to free migration and free settlement - and associated with this access to all civil rights such as voting and electoral rights wherever they live.

The illegalization and criminalization of whole groups of people through immigration and asylum procedures with all the manifold repression, deportation and forced repatriation practices undoubtedly contradict at least the spirit of human rights and human dignity.

Global Warming as an Increasing Cause of Migration

In recent years, the importance of climate change and natural disasters for migration has increased significantly. For example, Walter Kälin (2014:164) estimated the number of internally displaced persons due to environmental disasters - in addition to those displaced by violence - at 42.3 million (2011) and 32.4 million (2012). Of these internal migrants, an estimated 50% lived in Africa in the early 21st century. However, estimates of environmental change as a cause of migration vary widely. For example, Sari Hanafi (2014:594) estimated a total of 33.8 million people affected by natural disasters for countries in the Middle East and North Africa from 1991 to 2010-with 23,500 people killed at the same time. In 2011, experts expected between 25 million and one billion migrants and refugees over the next 40 years as a result of climate change (see International Organization for Migration 2012:63). Central to understanding environmental migration is the concept of vulnerability. Vulnerability can be understood as a function between the extent to which a population is exposed to environmental factors and its ability to adapt. Accordingly, (environmental) migration can be a survival strategy or an adaptation strategy to changing living conditions (see International Organization for Migration 2012:63).

Environmental problems - in addition to war and violence - are also increasingly triggering people to flee to another area in the same country or abroad.

Well-known is the war situation in Syria, in Afghanistan, but also in many countries of northern Africa. What is less well known, however, is that in many places there were climatically induced shifts prior to warlike conflicts: in 2009, for example, of the approximately 22 million Syrians, fully 1.5 million Syrians were affected by advancing desertification, leading to a massive rural exodus - and internal migration - of farmers, pastoralists and their families. Overgrazing, exploitation of natural resources, and a nearly 50% decline in

groundwater reserves led to social unrest, opposition movements, and ultimately civil war in Syria (see Sinai 2015:1). Boko Haram areas in western Africa had also experienced massive climatic changes, drought formation, and other ecological problems before they became strong, forcing entire villages to be abandoned (cf. Sinai 2015:18).

Steps towards an Ecological Spirituality

Konrad Dietzfelbinger (2017:17) has suggested to see the human being as an individual on the way from his small ego to his true self: “Our true self is presently separated from its origin and source, the divine world. Therefore, it is not nourished by it, no longer receives life force, is not conscious and effective. You could say it is practically absent in our lives. It is this absence of the true self that creates a sense of meaninglessness in many and causes the numerous futile attempts to eliminate the agony of inner emptiness through frantic activities of the outward-oriented ego” (Dietzfelbinger 2017:24).

Joanna Macy (2015:162) has argued that the crisis of our planet springs from “an ineffectual, pathological understanding of the self”: “Whether we look at the military, ecological, or social side of the crisis, we always recognize a fallacy about our place in the order of things. Our fallacy consists in the assumption that the self exists separately from everything else and that it is so fragile that we must always mark and defend its boundaries anew.” Accordingly, Macy (2015:169) called for expanding “our self-interest toward the ecological self” and allowing ourselves to “green up” and “become native again in our time.”

Leonardo Boff (2010) has called for a new “ecological spirituality.” Boff (2010:131ff.) saw human ignorance, outdated anthropocentrism, insensitive rationalism devoid of heart and compassion, culturally embedded individualism, competitiveness and competition, and consumerism as the main obstacles to an ecological approach to the world. It is about an integral ecology, in the sense of a “panentheism”

(not pantheism), according to which “God and the creature are different from each other, but ... both always in each other in mutual relationship without any distance” (Boff 2010:139).

Jonas (2003:57) has questioned whether an ethics is even conceivable without the restoration of the category of the sacred, which can tame contemporary forces and the (unholy) power of modern science and technology. The sacred, the whole, can put the profane and the demonic in check, or at least counteract the splitting of the world into the profane and the sacred, with increasing marginalization of the latter: it is a matter of increasing "sanctification" of all that is.

In the sense of Leonardo Boff (2016:340f.), the universe can be seen as both self-conscious and spiritual: “Cosmologically speaking, spirit can be understood as the capacity of the first energies and of matter itself to interact with each other in such a way that they create, self-organize, and form themselves into open systems (autopoiesis) that generate an increasingly complex web of interrelatedness that ultimately sustain the entire cosmos” (Boff 2016:340). This view is undoubtedly intriguing. Boff concludes, “Understood in this way, the cosmos is overflowing with spirit, for it is interactive, panrelational, that is, all-sidedly relational and creative. ... All things, all forms of being - from subatomic particles to galaxies - participate in spirit, consciousness and life to some extent. The difference between the mind of a mountain and the mind of a man is not one of principle, but of degree. The principles of interaction and creation are present in both, but in different ways. The human spirit is just this cosmic spirit which has become conscious of itself and now speaks and communicates consciously. The spirit that permeates all things reaches a new depth and stage of crystallization in man” (Boff 2016:340f.).

Boff argues that the opposite of spirit is not matter, but death or the absence of relationships. Matter, in this view, is “a field permeated by energy, interaction, and information,” and spirituality, according to Boff

(2016:341), is “the greatest empowerment of life, and therefore it is commitment to the protection and flourishing of life.” Accordingly, a just and ecological world order must place the intrinsic value of life - of all life - at the center.

Bridge Concepts for an Ecological Order that Transcends Worldviews

The following basic ideas and concepts can act as bridging concepts between secular and religious ideas for a just ecological order (cf. Jäggi 2021:123ff.):

First bridging concept: both secular and religious worldviews converge on the point that they *grant inherent worth to all humans, animals, plants, and nature*. Thus, according to Regan (1999:97), “inherent worth ... belongs to sentient subjects of a life. Whether it also belongs to other beings - to rocks and rivers, trees and glaciers, for example - we do not know and may never know.” But while in religious ethics the intrinsic value of all living beings and all of nature can be understood and interpreted in terms of creation theology, in secular ethics the intrinsic value of living beings and non-living objects can at least be understood in utilitarian terms, that is, as valuable in function to human beings - and indeed to present and future generations. It also follows from such an instrumental or human-centered conception of utility that animals, plants, and natural objects deserve protection - precisely because they all represent value. It follows that even the use of anything can only ever be a relative use - taking into account the intrinsic value of everything that is. Thus, one could argue with Regan (1999:97) for a concept of graded intrinsic value of humans, animals, plants, etc. From this follows respect and rights for animals, plants, and living things.

From the point of view of a theological ethics, however, the question is to be asked whether life stands for itself as a value or whether life is to

be seen “only” as a function and in dependence on to God. For an ecological ethics, this distinction is central. In the first case, life represents a value in and of itself; in the second case, it represents a secondary value dependent on other quantities. The first view is likely to lead to a biocentric ethics, the second to either a theocentric or an anthropocentric ethics.

A second bridging concept follows from this: throughout the Hebrew Bible, the basic conviction that *creation is inherently good* is expressed again and again (cf. Seidenberg 2015:15). This notion is continued in the Christian Bible and the Qur'an. Because, after all, secular theories also assume at least an implicit and anthropogenic “goodness” of the environment and nature, this view can function as a bridging concept for trans-secular and interreligious ethics. This notion can be unfolded into a “love of life” or “love of nature.” Reverence for life refers both to life and to all living beings, as well as to what is “behind” it - however one conceives of the act of creation and the Creator. Ultimately, the love of life cannot be thought of only materially, but must always be thought of spiritually as well - for the principle of life is, after all, a spiritual, immaterial principle that expresses itself materially.

The third bridging concept could be the *Gaia theory*, which in the sense of Curry (2011:100) has a “powerful positive ecocentric potential,” but from a liberal point of view also needs additions, especially with regard to the fundamental rights of human beings. The Gaia concept may prove to be a fruitful bridging concept between secular and religious ideas precisely because it can be thought of both as an inanimate, self-regulating system and as a living being animated by spirit-and the implications and possibilities that arise are valid and fruitful for both views.

A fourth, central bridging concept is represented by the *original* - and not yet watered down - *notion of sustainability* or *intergenerational justice* for secular and religious conceptions of ecology. In terms of the

Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (2020), intergenerational justice can be defined as follows: “Generational justice is achieved when the opportunities of future generations to satisfy their own needs are at least as great as those of previous generations” (quoted from Radermacher 2002:103). In this context, according to Nees (2000:114f.), the biblical commandment: “You shall honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth” (cf. Ex 20:12 and Dt 5:16) can also be read as a call to intergenerational justice.

As a *fifth bridging concept*, especially also to contemporary science, a *concept of allconnectedness* and interdependence of all life could serve. Thus, Ibrahim (2015:18) has proposed the three terms web of life, interconnectedness, and interdependence to “express the indissoluble interconnectedness of everything created together.” This view is broadly consistent with the Gaia hypothesis, while at the same time pushing back against a purely instrumental view of nature and life.

As a *sixth bridge concept*, an *oikologia*, i.e. as a comprehensive community or overall assembly, should be thought of and formed, which includes all communities, faith and worldview communities, religions and groupings. So it would be time today to think of the Jewish *synagoga*, the Christian *ekklesia* and the Islamic *umma* as a *common oikologia*, which should also be joined by people who do not profess a belief in a - personal or impersonal - God, but who also want to work on a common human future and intergenerational environmental ethics. Such an *oikologia* would not only have to be inter-religious and inter-ideological, but would also have to focus on the idea of unity between humans, living beings and ecosystems and enable a future-oriented communication of all with all, in particular also the peaceful settlement of conflicts and clashes of interests.

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THE ETHICS OF THE “US”: SUBVERSIONS IN THE CAPITALOCENE

Leonel Iván Jiménez Jiménez

2021: a year that seems closer to the predictions about the end of the world after more than a year of a pandemic, floods in major cities, stronger hurricanes, fires in several parts of the world, cruel droughts, and severe concerns about ice melting in places like Greenland, the Himalaya or the Andes. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, news from different parts of the world were encouraging about the restoration of Earth as the cities stopped their activities. Even amid the desolation caused by the virus, a little light of hope appeared: maybe the pandemic would bring a new consciousness about human and governmental responsibility to the Earth. Sadly, as the pandemic continued, those hopes diminished, and the alarms went on, calling for decisive actions to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

Prevention of a global catastrophe does not accept half solutions. The planet's current state calls for radical decisions because 'time is near.' The hoax in the strategy against climate change is to think that the primary solution is only a technical one. While technological development is necessary and urgent to solve humanity's many

problems and its relationship with the planet, it is not the main and only solution to the climate crisis. Technology and technical solutions can create a fiction about the present crisis equating development to alternatives. ‘Green consumerism’ presents the same problem, which seems to be a solution to the climate crisis without affecting the privileges of certain groups. It is not different from other forms of consumerism as it is incapable of modifying consumers’ habits.

A systemic and radical change is the only solution to the climate crisis. Humanity needs to go beyond capitalism and the dichotomy between society and nature, having democratic and accessible technological development at the service of the planet, ending current consumerism habits, building new relationships between humans and cultures, and between humans and the Earth. These will be possible only if capitalism, in its necropolitical stage, is dismantled once and forever.

Capitalocene: a Narrative of Destruction

Capitalism is a whole system of relations between human beings and between humans and the Earth. As an economic, political, and cultural system, capitalism has developed a dichotomy between human society and the so-called nature, understood as the wild stage of the planet that finds utility as it becomes domesticated. This process has received the name of progress, a result of violence, colonization, and dispossession. In the name of progress, the destruction of ecosystems is necessary to satisfy growing human necessities. In capitalism, colonizing territories is imperative for strong societies to achieve dominion and power. Dispossession is a mandate of progress: ‘the civilized’ must control and extract resources for their growing economies. Capitalism is a synonym of war: the use of violence to achieve growth. Earth and marginalized people are the first victims of capitalism’s progress.

The mandate of growth and progress implies that ecosystems must suffer to benefit the so-called advanced societies. Anything goes. The

pollution of rivers and accidents in oil extraction is justified. Destruction of the rainforest is collateral damage to satisfy the needs of consumers; exploration and exploitation of the Arctic is a necessary action to sustain the existence of big oil companies.

Progress, overpopulation, human activities, and waste already have a place in the planet’s geological history. The planet lives in the Anthropocene: the geological era in which human activity is a terrestrial phenomenon, with the same power of transformation of the plate tectonics¹⁴. In the millennia to come, the marks of human activity will remain in the geological setting of the planet.

The humanity of the Anthropocene is now facing the beginning of a major climate shift produced by human activity. Global warming and climate change are facts demonstrable by scientific studies, with noticeable and catastrophic effects in many places on Earth. All humanity participates in environmental deterioration. Every person is part of the complex and enslaving system of capitalism that provokes consumerism, waste, pollution, and destruction. As the biblical verdict says: “there is no one righteous, not even one.” However, not every human being is equally responsible for the climate crisis. Every person participates in the climate crisis, but not everyone is equally responsible for worsening the crisis. Every human being pollutes the environment, but a poor woman in Bangladesh is not equally responsible for contamination as an oil company or a negligent government. We all live in the Anthropocene but its causes and consequences are not equal in responsibility for all, neither the destruction is equally suffered.

The term ‘Capitalocene’ names the inequality of responsibilities and the different sufferings of the victims in the climate crisis. Capitalocene is the era of climate crisis driven by capitalism. It is a narrative of destruction for the sake of progress and power. Through war,

¹⁴ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Medford: Polity Press, 2017), 114-115.

colonization, privatization, and dispossession, capitalism drives to destruction and death. The Capitalocene is the era of extinction. No one on Earth is free of the consequences of human activity, mainly of the devastation provoked by the richer and powerful potentates. In Capitalocene, everyone is an object, and every ecosystem is cheap. Nothing is immune to the power of capitalism. Everyone is on sale, and the jaws of the Capitalocene swallow every ecosystem.

As Francisco Serratos states, talking about the Capitalocene as witnesses of the devastation provoked by some humans benefited in detriment of the majority is an affirmation of justice against pessimism, from which hope and solutions can emerge¹⁵. Only by the process of visibilization the individual, institutional, corporate, and governmental responsibilities, the possibility of changing will have a chance to become real.

Resisting Capitalism, Saving the Earth

The ethical imperative for the care of Earth is resistance and subversion to capitalism. These may seem impossible. Capitalism is a narrative that has destroyed or made invisible other voices. Therefore, it is complicated to imagine a world beyond capitalism due to the invisibilization of different narratives. Capitalism's narrative presents itself as the end of history: a perfect system that leads human civilization to its pinnacle. The Earth faces a mythological narrative that presents capitalism as a living being, independent, full of vitality, and flexible to adapt to every crisis.

The resistance to capitalism and climate change emerges from the alliance between different voices, cultures, and subjects suffering the most adverse effects of climate change in the Capitalocene. Climate

¹⁵ Francisco Serratos, *El Capitaloceno: Una historia radical de la crisis climática* (México: UNAM-Festina, 2020), 39.

change will affect every human and living creature on Earth. With the first catastrophic effects, the poorer and marginalized are suffering, but as the crisis grows, everyone will know the price of ecological negligence. Therefore, the dialectical participation of diverse ideologies, cultures, spiritualities, and voices is essential to find paths of reconciliation with the Earth, agreements, and solutions to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

If the power of capitalism is global, then resistance and subversion can be planetary. Against the sole narrative of capitalism, planetary resistance shows the multitude of narratives coming from different experiences and cosmologies. Planetary resistance denies the existence of only one solution to consumerism (green consumerism) and a unique way to oppose anti-ecological policies (Western ecogism). Planetary resistance considers a radical transformation beyond technical solutions.

The Community of ‘Us’

The Tojolabal culture, part of the Maya people that live in Chiapas (Mexico), offers knowledge that other cultures must hear in the struggle for a systemic change. This ancestral culture subverts the principles of capitalism and teaches a different way to be related to the Earth in a holistic perspective.

For the Tojolabal, everything that exists is a subject, never an object. Animals, plants, rocks, rivers, mountains, and forests, everything is a *subject* needed for mutual existence. Therefore, everyone and everything is equal: because we all are subjects, we all are equal. The differences of every-subject are necessary, bringing life to others as they complement every-subject that exists.

The community of the subjects forms the *Us*. Every subject has individual characteristics, but in every subject exists the inclination to constitute the *Us*. The *Us* is not the sum of the parts, but a whole, one reality, the cosmos. In the *Us* community, every subject shares

him/herself with the others because every subject has unique characteristics that the others need to exist. The ethics of the *Us* is the existence of sharing the own life with others, therefore the recognition of the indispensability of every subject. No subject is disposable, every-subject is indispensable for life.

In the cosmos formed by the *Us* community, every subject is full of life, and every member of the community (rivers, mountains, rocks, soil, plants, animals, etcetera) has a heart, a soul. Every-subject is alive and is transcendent. No-subject is disposable, but every-subject is transcendent. Every-subject exists related to the other subjects, for life is interconnected. No one can live without the others. Therefore, the principal virtue is the capacity to create, recognize, and honor relationships.

If mutual existence depends on the lives of the others, then the ethic of *Us* requires mutual recognition and responsibility. Every subject of *Us* must recognize the life, value, gifts, and transcendence of other subjects. By recognizing the others, violence and exploitation of the other are absurd. If any member of *Us* suffers exploitation or damage, then the own life is in peril. Therefore, every subject is co-responsible to the *Us* community. The community of *Us* subsists by the co-responsibility of the subjects: plants are responsible for bringing their gifts of oxygen and nutrients. Rivers are responsible for bringing the gift of freshwater. The soil is responsible for bringing the gift of food. Birds carry the gift of beauty and music. Sun brings the gift of light and warmth. Every subject in the cosmos is co-responsible to the other.

The cosmic community of *Us* is sacred. Dichotomies are impossible in the ethics of *Us*, for reality is not divided. There are no subjects/objects, nor secular/sacred realities. The *Us* is the cosmic community of every-subject, so it is a sacred and shared reality. Sacredness exists in the vitality of every relationship, the transcendence

of the subjects, and the recognition of life. Every subject lives in the sacredness of the *Us* community.

The soil is sacred, so it cannot be sold or bought. Water is sacred and needs to be preserved clean and free of any owner. Animals are sacred, so they need to be listened, respected, and loved as neighbors. Every subject of the cosmos is equally sacred, so the cosmos -*Us*- is sacred.

The Subversion of *Us*

The Tojolabal teaches us to feel/think/act as the community of *Us*, with the whole cosmos, with the Earth. The *Us* community does not intend to show a different way of progress; neither contributes to Western ecologism or green capitalism. The ethics of *Us*, the sacredness of the community of *Us*, is an anti-systemic way of *feeling/thinking/acting-with-others*. The Tojolabal shows an alternative to Western ecologism by unlearning the hegemonical myths and learn to share, feel, hear, see, imagine, and think the cosmos.

Western ecologism seeks other ways of consumerism, strategies to continue with the principles of capitalism, and forms of maintaining privileges covered by 'green' politics and economic measures. The Tojolabal and other marginalized voices bring their gifts of showing a radically different way of being-in-the-cosmos as a community of subjects in which everyone has a soul, a heart, and gifts to share. 'Green' politics and economic measures seek alternatives of progress and development, while marginalized voices, as the Tojolabal, show alternatives *to* progress and development.

The ethics of *Us* subordinates any economic objective to the criteria of the well-being of the cosmos, the dignity of every human life, and social/environmental justice, without which 'peace on Earth' is impossible.

A Time for New Possibilities

Subverting the principles of capitalism is the only way to contest and partially reverse the worst effects of climate change produced by human activity. Listening to the voices of cultures as the Tojolabal brings the opportunity to create a non-anthropocentric relationship with the Earth.

Taking into account the marginalized cultures helps to recognize the different layers of responsibility for ecological damage. Indeed, everyone will suffer the consequences of climate change, but the present victims are among the marginalized humanity, who suffer the most. The present victims of climate change are also entire ecosystems that are being destroyed, animal species that are in the path of extinction, together with the soil, air, inland waters and oceans that are increasingly polluted, in many cases without solution.

While the world is still trying to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is hope for change. New voices can arise from their invisibility and share their knowledge. Only by mutual hearing, respect, and learning can we find an alternative solution to climate change. The Capitalocene is here, but also the seed of planetary change. COVID-19 pandemic showed the possibility of the unexpected. Therefore, the possibility of changing the present regime exists, but it needs solidarity, dignity, and the participation of all voices, cultures, spiritualities, identities. No one can be left behind.

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EARTH'S FUTURE AND FUTURES OF HUMANS: TOWARDS A PLANETARY THEOLOGY

John Mohan Razu

Short Introduction

Any work on earth's future and futures of humans is most welcome at this juncture when so much of nature – God's creation – is under threat. Extinction of species, growing threat from climate change, unsustainable population, indiscriminate expropriation of natural resources along with other factors are threatening the very existence of human life on earth. Despite four decades of growing awareness on ecology and environmental movements, the global and national scenarios continue to pose grave concern as they posit deterioration in all fronts.

For instance, Amazonian rainforest deforestation, ozone layers and arctic sea ice melting and a host of others present a bleak future. Politicians and legislators at the global and national levels have been relatively ineffective in bringing strong legislations and deterrent methods to avoid the impending catastrophe. Radical changes and total shift in approach from planning to executing are needed to tide over the situation.

This shows that we are facing a moral, philosophical, religious and ethical crisis that needs more than political solutions and more involvement and pressures be employed at different facets. The Holy Scriptures across religion, especially the Bible, prescribe a compelling work on the care and stewardship of creation. The theme and subthemes surface in this essay bring to the foreground the sanctity of the created order that needs to be respected and never be ignored.

In spite of the commands given to us to nurture and protect the environs and the planet earth, along with others Christians have undermined to strive for relational responsibility. As against the background, this essay makes an attempt to re-capture, re-imagine and re-vitalize the importance of preserving the living and non-living on this earth by proposing a planetary theology.

The Future of Our Planet and Humans under Threat

Any work on planet future and futures of humans should be viewed as two futures, because the future of humans is dependent on the future of the planet, and so at this juncture it is important to note that the world of nature, vis-à-vis God's creation, is under threat. Extinction of species, growing threat from climate change, unsustainable population, indiscriminate expropriation and exploitation of natural resources and many other factors driven by greed and human selfishness are threatening the very existence of human life on earth.

God's created order is perfect and intricate, inter-dependent and wholesome. God saw everything entwined with each other falling in its place so minutely and thus satisfied. God was pleased with everything (Psalm 104; Job: Chapters 38 & 41) and gave the responsibility to the humans to take care and nurture in such ways that respect God's Order of Creation. In spite of the commands given to us to nurture and protect the environs and the planet earth as Christians, we have failed in our responsibility.

The theme proposed is particularly pertinent at a time when the entire humanity is struggling to come out of the global pandemic. In our lifetime we have witnessed the rise and fall of industrial civilization and globalization. The decades that passed by 'never were so good for the majority of global populace' as they came and gone.

The notions of 'multi-eco-culturalism', 'inter-dependency' and 'global village' are currently under serious threat and the assumption that nation-states can live by growth-model economics is now under severe test. Those who believe in abusing science and technology for unlimited growth, thereby in the attachment to material wealth, are put under severe strain of spiritual lacuna. Homo sapiens lives under illusion and assumes that high living standards are possible only with the help of technology, which could provide answers to each and everything.

The dominant development paradigm, that echoes a top-down approach, is based on Walt Rostow's theory of modernization and social evolution. It was considered as the magic wand of an 'economic take-off', to work harder so that all nations could rise up to the 'highly-advanced' countries. Growth in GDP, Per capita income and GNP are considered as development indicators. Economic growth alone is considered as 'progress', 'development' and 'modernization' by many, but there are other indicators that determine 'development'.

Walt Rostow's development paradigm is premised on a "take-off" model, wherein agrarian and less-industrialized economies could "catch-up" if they followed his five-phase development as done by the "developed West". Every under-developed and developed country started following the recipe, which later would be modified by others as Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization (LPG). In such a period of confidence, unprecedented growth and advancement of science and technology, a deadly coronavirus, in the form of a global pandemic, devastated all the hopes and aspirations of humans and brought all our so-called "achievements" and "claims" to a grinding halt.

Science and technology are struggling to come to terms to the changing contours of our planet and futures of humans. In such a scenario, it is essential to re-capture, re-imagine and re-vitalize planetary theology. Coronavirus has exposed the dangers of bigness and indiscriminate use of technology in the pursuit of power and profit. Concern for our planet, the environment, values, for nature and for peace should be the undergirding factors for the planetary theology. In the fields of science and theology, planetary theology becomes more appropriate and relevant. People across the globe have started to increasingly question the basis of our civilization.

The ways with which we are going in terms of our governance are being questioned and certainly come under scrutiny. There is a need and an urgency for us to articulate candidly a planetary theology that is grounded on eco-systems, regulated by the laws of nature, which is to be recognized and promoted. Therefore, there is a need for a search of integration and wholeness, with the realization of the importance of the movement for an alternative to the industrialization, modernization and globalization.

Two futures are clashing with each other. In this, the clash is against the most susceptible and vulnerable one: the future of humans. For instance, Herman Kahn, one of the renowned futurologists, said in his work entitled *The Next Two Hundred Years* that "... two hundred years ago almost everywhere human beings were comparatively few, poor, and at the mercy of the forces of nature, and 200 years from now, we expect, almost everywhere they will be numerous, rich, and in control of the forces of nature."

In tune to this, Robert Heilbroner in his work *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* asks "There is a question in the air, more sensed than seen, like the invisible approach of a distant storm. A question that I would hesitate to ask aloud did I not believe it existed unvoiced in the minds of many: Is there hope for man? ". This is the question that all are

asking. Homo sapiens have come to a point and a realization that nature shall never tolerate: if we continue to ignore the laws of nature, then the planet we live is bound to undergo sea changes. The consequences of it would be devastating and horrifying. In such a backdrop, there is a need to evolve to a planetary theology.

Human's Complicity and Duplicity

The present we live is being shaped by the past and at the same time shaping the future. This is how the world in which we live and our lives keep moving. However, there has been a few unprecedented things, such as wars, natural catastrophes, and others, that would change the course of history, which in turn changes the course of our lives and the ways we live. The futurist Alvin Toffler, in his scintillating work *Future Shock*, predicted that “the two-rapid approach of the future and the changes it brings, but in any case, we are obsessed with the total shadow which our present actions cast across the future. A handful of typical concerns illustrates this compulsive “tomorrow-mindedness.”

We live through by now in all fluidity and in all uncertainties under the invisible and yet ravaging spell of coronavirus. The entire world is in a state of shock and stupefied, and to escape we keep invoking a number of measures, such as imposing lockdowns and lifting them whenever the government of the day feels like. The fear followed by psychosis keeps mounting and fluctuating as it has been supplanted by a panic over “many waves”. It grows out of helplessness or anxiety or sheer vagueness of the future, which seems to be ebbing out.

Usually, predictions and prevalence of natural catastrophes or other human-made disasters do for a few days make headlines and gradually disappear. COVID-19 has gripped everyone, and as many as thousands and millions died, and several millions have been tested positive. It has inflicted severe strains in the minds of the people. Across the world,

people live in fear and are totally unaware to a query: How long should we live in such restrictions?

Our movements are restricted; livelihood of teeming millions the poor and the hapless in particular have been snatched; education of children and grandchildren has been grossly affected; those who died could not be with dignity buried or cremated in the presence of their kith and kin and others. People live in such uncommon settings and therefore coronavirus pushed us to such uneasiness about the consequences of the entire humanity and the whole planet.

For the first time since Post-World War II, large number of people are beginning to see and understand that the global humanity, despite of its growth, progress and developments, has begun to realize that they are vulnerable and failed to dare a tiny virus that has totally wilted power and arrogance of those who thought that they were indispensable. One of the major factors is the way we believed in to generate wealth by indiscriminately exploiting the natural resources: it engaged in the degradation of environment, resulting in the depletion of eco-systems for the maximization of profits.

Whether the new vocabularies prompt new awareness and actions or not, it involves the health of our planet, that tells the very existence of the life of the ecosystems, which revolves around the planet. Whether we like it or not, we are part of the planet and our existence is dependent on the health of it, and so the present and futures of humanity are wholly connected. Our concern and care of the planet earth should be reflected in our words and actions, because the problems that we confront right from poverty and hunger, present and futures and above all the very existence of humanity are to a large extent reliant on the health of our planet.

Our approach will have to reflect the ways we respond to the problems that we face by seriously and appropriately addressing the causes of our neglect and responding to the laws of nature. For instance,

we are now confronting erratic changes in the nature. For example, rising temperature and melting Arctic ice are changing global geopolitics. Oil, natural gas, minerals and fish — there is enough of these trapped under the melting sea ice to satiate the world's growing hunger. Everywhere unprecedented exploitation of nature's is happening.

Human nature has been acquisitive. Moderating the human nature needs conscious attempts, but many have fallen into the trap of materialism as ways of life. Acquisitive nature is triggered by an ideology of capitalism. Capitalism as an economic system and an ideology is premised on human nature and its dictum. Further, it is entrenched on promoting 'unlimited wants.' It thrives on leveraging the 'unlimited wants' of humans which is being regulated by capitalism.

Capitalism instils 'insatiable itch' to the consumers. Capitalism operates on maximizing consumerism so that maximization of profits is possible. In the name of "limitless growth", capitalism promotes "progress" and "development. What "progress", "development" and "growth" are achieved? Capitalism in order to maximize its profits keeps innovating and producing more and more products, offered and constantly offered.

Capitalism believes in expanding the markets by triggering competition, so that consumers would have wide-ranging choices. For a free market economy, to function is to be an unregulated market mechanism that demands minimum governments' intervention as it uses the laws of market to regulate on its own. At this juncture, a question emerges: how does the capitalist system keep raising 'insatiable wants' all the time, meaning constantly so that it can maintain its profitability by catering new products in keeping the tempo of the consumers' 'animal spirits'?

More importantly, for the manufacture of products, one of the most important components is raw materials. From where do the capitalists

get them? Planet Earth vis-à-vis Mother Nature offers all kinds of resources for our survival and sustenance. To satiate not the needs of many but the wants of some, we tend to plunder and exploit the nature indiscriminately. It has resulted in the squandering of fossil-fuel reserves by emitting increasing amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. To pursue our 'self-interest' and to satiate commodity fetishism, we have ravaged our planet and, in the process, turned the laws of nature to unleash horrifying effects.

In an age of brand names, labels, logos, slogans and narratives, it is the corporate capitalism that wins and others lose. We live in a world of limitless growth and insatiable greed of acquisition that have drastically affected the future of our planet. As Joseph Stiglitz points out:

We have gone far down an alternative path – creating a society in which materialism dominates moral commitment, in which the rapid growth that we have achieved is not sustainable environmentally or socially, in which we do not act together as a community to address our common needs, partly because rugged individualism and market fundamentalism have ended any sense of community and have led to rampant exploitation of unwary and unprotected individuals and to an increasing social divide. There has been erosion of trust – and not in our financial institutions. It is not too late to close these fissures.¹⁶

Capitalism has intrinsically employed individualism and materialism to its advantage by undermining the cost the humans is going to pay. Proponents of corporate capitalism view greed as a necessary evil in an age of market fundamentalism. In order to maximize profits, the current global economic order works on triggering human greed more and more. Greed is the powerhouse of corporate capitalism. As a result, the Earth Planet is being ravaged to the maximum. The consequences are wide-

¹⁶ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy*, London: Penguin Books, 2009, pp. 275-276.

ranging as some of the resources plundered in appalling ways are non-renewable and others have lost its fertility and sustainability.

Point of Return or No Return

Searing heat, touching 50degree Celsius in the otherwise cold regions of Canada and in the western regions of USA, has brought home the message —once again and loudly— that climate change is here and is about to get worse. This time, the heat was so un- bearable ... killed an estimated 500 people in Canada's British Columbia. Then there are reports of the savage damage it has done to animals and other creatures. The inferno is now adding to the challenge of wildfires, threatening lives and properties. Europe is seeing a similar heatwave, and it is predicted that this year's temperatures will be the highest since records have been kept. Yet another year when we have broken the previous year's heat record!¹⁷

The above quotation candidly describes the changing templates of the planet which has been in existence for millennia, functioning as per the physical and natural laws. As humans progressed particularly in the innovations of science and technology, exploitation of nature started to take place indiscriminately. The aftermath of human interventions and meddling with planet earth has led to drastic changes, manifesting nature's fury in many ways. Expropriation of the natural resources, indiscriminate excavation of precious minerals and felling of trees have resulted in the deterioration of the eco-systems and the atmosphere.

Whether we like it or not that “The fact is this heatwave is not incidental or accidental —a mere weather blip. Scientists working with the World Weather Attribution initiative conclude that this heatwave “was virtually impossible” without human-caused climate change. They find that the temperatures were so extreme that they lie outside the range

¹⁷ Sunit Narain in the Editorial of “Down To Earth”, 16-31 July 2021, p. 3.

of historically observed heat records.”¹⁸ The more we destroy the planet earth, the more repercussions we are going to face. World Weather Attribution initiative concluded that “... the frequency of this once-in-a-1000-year event would increase with temperature rise, and when the world touches 2degree Celsius increase over pre-industrial ages, it would become a five-to 10-year event.”¹⁹

Two decades ago the changes happening in climate and fury of the nature were not so drastic and dramatic, but slow in pace. Since the dawn of the 21st Century, the pace started to grow at appalling levels and the gaps have begun to narrow. So, “What then is clear is this: one, climate change is happening faster than expected and we are certainly unprepared. Two, climate change is a great leveller —extreme and variable rain, increased frequency of tropical cyclones and heat and cold are hitting the world’s poorest.”²⁰

During the catastrophes the poor and the vulnerable used to be hit. “Each event cripples them and makes them even more vulnerable and marginalised.”²¹ A decade ago this used to be the pattern, but now perceptions and the contours of impact keep changing. “But the rich are also not excluded from the revenge of nature. The death of people from heatwaves in Canada must keep reminding us of the tragedy that awaits everyone.”²²

In conjunction to this, “Earth sizzled in July and became the hottest month in 142 years of recordkeeping, US weather official announced. As extreme heat struck parts of the US and Europe, the globe averaged 16.73 degree C (62.07-degree F) last month, beating out the previous

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

record set in July 2016, and tied in 2019 and 2020, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said on Friday.”²³ There has been a radical shift in climatic conditions across the globe. For instance, “Warming on land in western North America and in parts of Europe and Asia really drove the record-setting heat” ²⁴Sanchez-Lugo said.

For the last four decades environmentalists and scientists keep producing data, facts and figures of the worsening situation of our planet earth. Consequences have been disastrous and horrendous, if we fail to address the problems. Nonetheless, the comity of nations continues to ignore and thus undermine the reports, graphs and tables. The impact will be the same for the rich as well as the poor people; developed and underdeveloped countries. Global humanity seems to have undermined the problems being caused due to ruthless environmental destruction.

Despite global and national summits on environment and ecosystems, the majority of the leaders cutting across the continents and ideological divides have not taken the hazards seriously that have arisen from ravaging the planet earth. Precisely due to numerous reasons, a UN panel “warned of worsening climate change caused by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas and other human activity.”²⁵ Recently the United Nations in one of the Environmental Program reports warns that,

Increased use of non-degradable plastics, bio-medical waste and impediments to ongoing climate repair programmes have further exacerbated climate change deterioration. The pandemic (which would

²³ Report published in “The Times of India” titled July was Earth’s ‘hottest month’ in 142 years, August 15th 2021, p. 10.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

end up in oceans or landfills) would cost fisheries, tourism and maritime transport industries an addition \$40 billion.”²⁶

Abundant data and materials on the changes happening in all spheres. Scientists are warning the world at large to take care of the earth planet we live. Jonathan Martin, Professor, Department of Atmospheric and oceanic Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, reiterates that “A good deal of recent research has suggested that excessive climate warming in the very high latitudes impacts the likelihood of prolonged intense anticyclones, and therefore increases the risk of heatwaves.”²⁷

Substantiating further, he adds that “Arctic warming is likely one of several factors that are playing into the climate model projections of a higher risk of deadly heatwaves if current emission scenarios are unaltered.”²⁸ Reading, listening and viewing the incidents happening around us convey a definitive message to all us. The planet earth we live is beautifully and intricately inter-connected with each other. If any harm or too much of meddling with the nature reacts in many ways. In recent times we have been experiencing the ferocity and rapidity of nature at alarming levels.

In June 2020 a paper entitled *Nature Climate Change* deliberates that,

When consecutive storms devastate infrastructure and lead to loss homes and livelihood, or a hot and dry summer cause agricultural loss leading to a strain on government budgets, the combination of extreme events can be terms as connected to better represent the “diversity and complexity of interacting physical and societal mechanisms that cause

²⁶ Damini Chopra “The big opportunity” in “The Hindu”, 17th August, 2021, p. OPED -7.

²⁷ Cover Story entitled *Global Warming* in “Down To Earth”, 16-31, July, 2021, p. 33.

²⁸ Ibid.

their impacts to be amplified relative to the impacts from those same events occurring separately.” The impacts of connected extreme events, ... are often influenced nonlinearly by nonphysical factors such as vulnerability of a community. These “societal” factors can influence response to closely occurring extreme events such as exhaustion of funds for covid-19 relief, leading to limited funding for emergency response to wildfires.²⁹

The above quotation graphically presents horrifying pictures of incidents happening across the world. Planet Earth is bleeding because the energy, vitality and the natural rhythm on which it has been function providing food, shelter and life to millions of species and billions of humans have been mercilessly ransacked for selfish acquisitive reasons. Homo sapiens particularly for last six hundred years have been ravaging, plundering and devastating the planet earth. As a result, we have squandered the non-replenishable resources.

If we continue to ransack at this rate the natural resources assuming that they could be renewed, we are under false illusion. In view of the current indiscriminate onslaught of our Planet Earth, questions that arise are: Is it possible to bring back? Or are we move toward a point of no return? To these questions the following text comprehensively offers the facts and explanations:

Besides the death toll, heatwaves have multiple other major impacts points out ... They affect affect air quality (pollutants due to hot stable air, increase forest fire risk and the possibility of landslides caused by glacier melting in mountains; damage and cause malfunctioning of infrastructure and transport systems not prepared for such high temperatures; and many other social and economic risks. Heatwaves also have a long-term impact on the region's bio-diversity. It is

²⁹ Ibid, p. 36.

estimated that Canada alone has not lost over 1 billion marine animals. The actual damage is expected to be much more widespread. While these damages and lost lives are irreversible. As per the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5degree Celsius, limiting warming to 1.5 degree Celsius could result in 420 million fewer people being exposed to severe heatwaves. There is time to reverse the current climate change trajectory; but it is fast running out.³⁰

Towards a Planetary Theology

As we stepped into the Third Decade of the 21st Century, dichotomizing our planet in terms of its our lack of concern and consciousness by blaming one another does not stand any merit, but together all of us should bear the responsibility because together we sink or live and there is no in-between or either or. Our plastic addiction emerged as the latest human-induced unnatural to the nature to be fought in an emergency level. In such a scenario, as a community of believers we are required to re-look and re-examine our belief systems, doctrines and theology.

More importantly, Christian principles and ethical values are under severe strain and intense test that calls for the ways and means to approach the immanent problem that the entire human race is facing. Failing not to address the paramount issue of our times and if not comprehensively addressed now, in all certainty in due course of time the entire human race will be wiped-off. Over and above, as Christians we are put into difficult proposition as the credo of capitalism seem to have found its roots in Christianity.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism by Max Weber, a German Sociologist, economist and political pragmatist analyses the

³⁰ Ibid.

relationship between the ethics of ascetic Protestantism and the emergence of modern capitalism. Weber argues, in his seminal work published in German more than a century ago, that religion is a potential cause of the economic condition thereby establishes the fact that modern spirit of Capitalism which sees the profit as an end in itself prompting everyone to pursue maximization of profits seen as virtuous.

Weber beautifully weaves Protestantism to a vocation of worldly 'calling' by giving a religious character to a worldly activity. Further he brings to the fore Calvin who proposes the doctrine of pre-destination candidly distinguishing and deliberating about who is to be saved and damned. For that the sole justification is whoever succeeds in the worldly activity is saved and others are damned. Therefore, protestant ethics seem to have become redundant or unnecessary when it comes to economic activity as it has taken-off to different tangents.

As against the backdrop, serious consideration and careful examination are to be given to some of the concepts such as 'stewardship', 'caring', 'creator', 'God's dominion' so on and so forth that we use often have been abused, overused and misused for long. For instance, "... the biblical injunction to 'have dominion' has been a major element in determining environmental attitude, encouraged by the incorporation of Greek philosophical idea of the hierarchical nature of the world into the doctrines of the early Church ..."³¹

Theological and philosophical frameworks evolved around these ideas and so "since the roots by the incorporation of Greek philosophical ideas of the hierarchical nature of the world of our (ecological) trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not."³². Further, over the years, increasing

³¹ R. J. Berry, "Stewardship: *A Default Position*" in *Critical Perspectives – Past and Present: Environmental Stewardship* in the Introduction, R.J. Berry (ed.), New York – London: T & T Clark International, 2006, p. 5.

³² Ibid.

dominance of human over the natural world through technology seem to have influenced global theological contents and articulations. Interestingly, “The world came to be seen in strongly utilitarian terms; all creatures were viewed as existing for the sake of humanity and inferior to it because only we were reasoning beings.”³³

“No domination, but, dominion” hardly worked on the ground. More and more increasing dominance over natural world with the help of technology covertly and overtly influenced the Christians and the Christian world. For example,

- Neither the theological nor the exegetical tradition was particularly interested in the human relation with nature.
- Human dominion was interpreted in terms of the usual ways people used nature, not an achievable despotism.
- The world was seen as created and adapted for human use, not open to radical re-shaping.
- The anthropocentricity of dominion was part of a broader theocentricity, although non-human creatures exist for human benefit, nature reflects and exists for the glory of God.
- Anthropocentricity was qualified by subservience to the angels – at least until the Renaissance exaltation of humanity above the angels.
- Combining the last two points, since, angels, humans and other creatures are all God’s creatures, they exist to glorify God – a worship expressly seen in the Benedicite.

³³ Ibid.

- Human dominion was checked by the responsibility to treat non-humans as God's creatures.³⁴

As a teacher of theology and Christian ethics, I'm not at ease and frustrated about the ways in which biblical theology is taught and exegeted. The promises, imperatives and dynamics of the Gospel have been diluted in such ways to suit the dominant ideas that calls for total disengagement from this world justifying that the world we live is impermanent and thus is interim. Biblical texts are distorted and misinterpreted wherein the biblical hopes, commands, promises and calling are repudiated keeping aside 'here and now' imperatives.

There is a meaning and rhythm in the human and non-worlds. These two worlds co-exist. It should be borne in mind that humans are totally dependent on nature and not vice versa. In such a setting, it is important that theology should acknowledge this factor and come to terms with the reality. The episodes we have been witnessing in recent times clearly and categorically manifests and conveys messages that the world of nature shall never be silenced and ruthlessly exploited. Human world may go extinct, not the world of nature.

Christian world has not fully come to terms the sacredness of nature which is foundational to our existence. Somehow it has been delaying in fully acknowledging this very fact. So,

When Christian orthodoxy refuses to articulate a theology for earth, the clamant hurt of God's ancient creation is not thereby silenced. Earth's voices thereby, recollective of her lost grace and her destined redemption, will speak through one or another form of naturalism. If the Church will not have a theology for nature, then irresponsible but sensitive men will act as theology for nature ... as St. Francis profoundly surmised, man's sister, sharer of his sorrow and scene and partial substance of his joys, unquenchably sings out her violated

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 5-6.

wholeness, and in groaning and travelling await with man the restoration of all things.³⁵

We need to contextualize the groaning of the Mother Earth deeply within the domain of Christian faith. If this is so, how can I systematically organize my thought process weaving together the essence and meaning of my faith experience within a theological frame? When Mother Earth is bleeding and groaning, how can a theology of Planet Earth be sophisticated by virtue of the fact that:

First, nature can be subsumed under man. Materially, she is reduced to a resource to a resource for his needs; spiritually she is envisioned as only an unreplying theatre for his proud and pathetic life. Nature, that is to say, is divested her own and proper life and is infested with the goods, the values, and the ends of man. Her life, infinite in richness and variety, is made a symbolic companion of man's life, and all the moods and shadows, the pride and the pathos, the ambiguity and the sudden delight of man's life is read in her mobile face.³⁶

Raw materials for planetary theology are the pains and pathos that the Earth Planet face in the last hundreds of years due to the arrogance and material greed of Homo sapiens who have been cruel in ransacking the nature in numerous ways. Portrayal of all these in the forms of data, facts and figures are cited in the previous sections. They simply testify that humans have violated and trampled upon God's grandeur of creation. By doing like this their actions manifests that humans are no longer to nature as God intended.

God so loved the world and became incarnate (John 3:16). Incarnation as a human into the human world mean restoring those who were lame made to walk, blind given the sight, dead becoming alive,

³⁵ Joe Sittler, "A Theology for the Earth", in *Critical Perspectives – Past and Present: Environmental Stewardship*, R.J. Berry (ed.), New York – London: T & T Clark International, 2006, p.52.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 53.

paralytic to walk and host of others. So, the God who we affirm is the unifier of material and spiritual. For the humans it is the problem of moderation of the material. Therefore God-humans-nature rubric should never be seen in hierarchical ways, but horizontally where we see the inter-dependency of each other.

Planetary theology starts with a critique of humans plundering the abundant resources for their unlimited wants and thus views those as biblical and ethical aberration. Therefore, a theological task is to articulate a theology of planet by engaging in correcting biblical categories and theological conciliations. Planetary theology includes planet earth that goes beyond 'other-worldly' theologies that separates the planet we live, but enjoying all that the earth planet offers for their life and luxuries. Planetary theology therefore considers the earth planet not as a negative construction, but balances earth and heaven – a dialectics.

Planetary theology centers the planet earth as a positive entity in God's created order and in that invokes humans' nature which is filled with greed and materiality. Therefore, Christian faith in God calls for redemptive, restorative and regenerative engagement with the Mother Earth, not as 'damned', but a gift from God. A planetary theology embarks on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ becoming a human, lived on this Mother Nature facing all kinds of trials and tribulations, died and risen – a dialectic dynamic of immanence and transcendence. And so, earth should not be construed as a negative connotation.

The texts usually we rely are Ephesians, Colossians and specifically the eighth chapter of Romans that offers something that falls within the hierarchical frames pushing the Mother Nature to the end. Hierarchical schema and the dominant world views gravitate around anthropocentrism, and so, have not made any in-road or dent to the environment and eco-systems, rather as seen in the previous sections shows deterioration in the drastic changes in the climatic conditions and

environmental degradations. Therefore, theological and theoretical construction should go beyond the current frames, interpretation and exegesis.

In such context specificities planetary theology outrightly demolishes the primacy of *Homo sapiens* pitched above the nature. It rather, emphasizes humanity in nature and with nature. How to handle the current crisis are still novel for most Christian churches. The churches by and large have adequately responded to the environmental and ecological concerns, if they are propelled by the power of the Gospel and the prophets.

The churches and the theological articulations should go beyond the current impasse since they are deeply soaked in their traditions. Hence, we should enter into serious critical scrutiny of the Christian doctrines. These critiques will have to challenge the basic belief that Christians share about creation and its relationship to redemption. A planetary theology offers a scathing critique of some of the themes such as: “The Earth is the Lords”, “The Land Entrusted to Us”, “The Creation Under Our Care”, “The Earth and Its Fullness” and “Sustainability of the Earth”.

How long in our theological articulation we interpret the passages such as Gen 1:26-28, 2: 1-3; Ps: 8: 6-8; 115: 16; 145: 9, 36:6; Exod: 20:10, 23:11; Lev 25:4; Deut 5: 14, 25: 4 in conventional ways. God has been viewed as an absentee landlord and in the name of dominion, domination over nature is taking place. Planetary theology considers *Oikos* in Greek means *house/ household*. The planet earth is a house/household of God which for planetary theology is pivotal and foundational. And a very closely related word is *nomos* in Greek means management.

Planet earth is indeed God’s household (*Oikos*) and its management (*Nomos*) is entrusted to the *Homo sapiens*. The Planet Earth is God’s dwelling place and the Mother Earth is like God’s womb that protects

and nurtures all the humans who live-in. Due to the rampant application of science and technology, God planet earth and the household is under threat. Mother Earth is poisoned and its womb is bleeding. How to respond as a faith community?

Planetary theology and its *Logos* and *Theos* are grounded on creation and redemption. It is candidly articulated in the following: through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God's creative activity continues as a work of redemption. This is clearly affirmed in an early Christian hymn in Colossians that God, through Christ, the first born of all creation, reconciled to himself all thing (human and non-human creatures), whether on earth or in heaven. (Col. 1.1-20). The work of Jesus Christ, therefore, cannot be simplistically limited to 'an after-life' for human beings. Redemption in Jesus Christ is not reductively anthropocentric. It extend to the entire household of life with God embracing all creatures in and through Jesus Christ; in Jesus Christ, the transcendent and the immanent, the 'other-worldly' And the 'this-worldly' next.³⁷

The church at large and theological articulations to an extent treat the doctrines of creation and redemption only at surface or peripheral levels, not to the full extent. The major lapse is not considering the root problem vis-à-vis capitalism. Avoidance of capitalism obviously leads to skewed understanding and surface analysis of the problem. The strategies evolved thus far to fix the environmental and ecological problems failed because they were narrow and partial and disastrously wrong.

There ought to be a radical change in replacing the old schema of anthropocentrism that considers Planet Earth vis-à-vis the Mother Earth to the center stage because Homo sapiens happened to be the perpetrators. Humans have failed to understand the highly complex

³⁷ Anne M. Clifford "From Ecological Lament to a sustainable Oikos" in *Critical Perspective – Past and Present: Environmental Stewardship*, R. J. Berry (ed.), Op. cit., pp. 250-251.

network of life comprised of delicate ecosystems. Hence, planetary theology brings in earth ethic within the larger conceptions and constructs of earth as *Oikos*.

Oikos is for all the living and non-living. We have about 7,9 billion humans, millions of creatures and species living on this planet. A tiny per cent of people enjoy the earth resources and quality life at the cost of billions of people by exploiting the resources the Planet Earth offers. The future generation will face disastrous consequences, if we fail to address the ecological and degradation urgently. Time is ticking at a faster pace, but ...!

According to UNICEF report, “India is among 33 ‘extremely high risk’ countries where children are most at risk of climate change affecting their health and education. It warns of repeated flooding and air pollution, as environmental shocks, leading to adverse socio-economic consequences for children and women.”³⁸ Further, the first Children’s climate Risk Index by UNICEF ranks India at a vulnerable 26 and among four south Asian countries where children would face the most significant adverse impacts of climate change. Besides India, the other south Asian countries are Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan with a ranking of 14, 15 and 25 respectively.³⁹

Substantiating more data, the reports adds that “The 33 extremely high risk” countries collectively emit just 9 per cent of global CO₂ emissions, while 10 highest emitting countries together account for nearly 70 percent of global emissions. China ranks at top accounting for 30.30 percent of global CO₂ emissions, followed by and USA 14.63 percent, India accounts for much least at 7.15 percent.”⁴⁰

Whereas “Nepal and Sri Lanka are among the top 65 countries most impacted globally with a ranking of 51 and 61 respectively. Bhutan has

³⁸ See “Sunday Times of India”, 22nd August, 2021, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

relatively lower risk at a ranking of 111 and shares with UK. The United States is ranked 80 and china 40. The country at the top of the list in terms of maximum risk is Central African Republic and the least vulnerable is Iceland at 163.”⁴¹

The report ranks countries based on children’s exposure to climate and environmental shocks, such as cyclones and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services. South Asia is home to over 600 million children and has the highest number of young people globally. South Asian countries are among the most vulnerable globally to the impacts of climate change.⁴²

According to the report extreme climate-related events such as heatwaves, storms, floods, fires and droughts – affect more than half of the region’s population every year and continue to burden South Asian countries’ economies. Children with poor health status health are significantly more vulnerable to environmental change and stresses. Globally, approximately 1 billion children (nearly half of the world’s children) live in extremely high-risk countries.⁴³

The picture of the future of children is alarming. What kind of future we are paving for our children and grandchildren? What can be done? Is there any ray of hope? Given the situation, UNICEF asserts that countries must cut their emissions by at least 45 per cent (compared to 2010 levels) by 2030 to keep warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius.⁴⁴

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CREATION CARE AS A CHRISTIAN MANDATE? PERCEPTIONS OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS IN GERMANY

Thomas Kroeck

Introduction

The current ecological crisis is a major challenge for humanity. In recent years, theologians and leaders of various churches have addressed this issue. Christian congregations may contribute to the changes of mind-set and behaviour, which are required for the great transformations of our societies⁴⁵. However, there is little empirical research available in Germany, on how members of Christian congregations perceive this issue. To fill this gap, an empirical study was conducted by the Academy for Christian Leadership⁴⁶. Its aim was to explore how Christian congregations and their members are engaged in creation care

⁴⁵ DeLay Lay, Randolph 2014. Religion and Climate Change: Varieties in Viewpoints and Practices. *WIREs Climate Change* 5(2), 261–279. Vogt, Markus 2010. *Worin besteht die theologische Kompetenz im Umweltdiskurs?: Überlegungen aus katholischer Sicht*: 14. Internationaler Renovabis-Kongress „In Verantwortung für die Schöpfung“. Freising.

⁴⁶ www.acf.de

and which factors may support or hinder such an engagement. In this chapter, aspects of theology and worldview will be presented.

The Empirical Study

Two methods were used to explore this broad field of knowledge: an online survey and focus group discussions.

An anonymous online survey was conducted from mid-2020 to early 2021, which resulted in a total of 904 evaluable responses. The majority of the respondents were members of the Protestant mainline churches (EKD, 234 responses), the Free Evangelical Churches (FeG, 242 responses) and the pietistic movement (Gnadauer Gemeinschaftsverband, 270 responses). The evaluation of the data concentrates on these three groups. While the first stem from the state churches established during the reformation in the 14th century, the two later are the result of revival movements in the 19th century. The majority of respondents to the online survey had higher educational qualifications and lived predominantly in western Germany. As was to be expected, a large proportion were more interested in the topic than the average of their congregations. The data presented in this paper will therefore focus on participants who considered themselves to have an average or below average interest in these topics.

In the second step of the study, 13 focus group discussions were conducted as video or telephone conferences in congregations from the three denominations in 2021. They lasted between 49 minutes and 1:35 hours. Each focus group consisted of five to ten members of a particular congregation. The discussions were recorded and analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Reasons for Creation Care

The survey included questions from the representative study on environmental awareness by the Federal Ministry of Environment (BMU)⁴⁷, to assess the personal environmental awareness of the respondents. The results showed that members of Christian congregations are basically as environmentally aware as the German population as a whole.⁴⁸ In the online survey, a majority of 86% of all respondents were in favour of Christians and Christian congregations becoming more involved in nature conservation and ecological sustainability. A major focus of the online survey and the focus groups was for what reasons should Christians be concerned about these issues. Figures 1 and 2 show the topics most frequently mentioned.

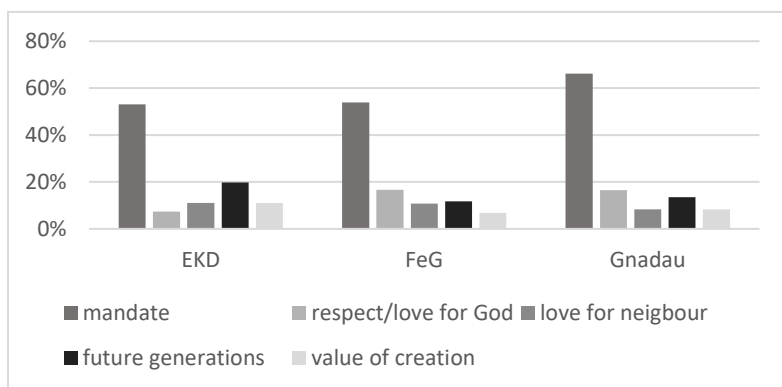


Figure 1: Reasons for creation care (survey, open question, respondents with average + lower interest)

⁴⁷ BMU 2019. *Umweltbewusstsein in Deutschland 2018: Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Bevölkerungsumfrage*. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und nukleare Sicherheit (BMU).

⁴⁸ Kroeck, Thomas 2021. Environmental awareness of Protestant youth in Germany: Perspectives from an empirical exploration. *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77(2), 1–7.

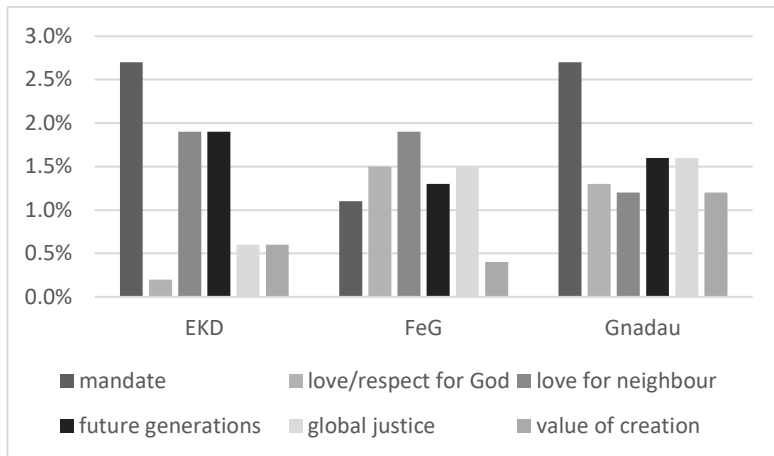


Figure 2: Reasons for creation care (focus groups, % of codings)

In the survey, more than half of the respondents mentioned in an open question the *mandate to care for creation* (Fig. 1). In some cases, the biblical mandate from Genesis 2:15 was explicitly mentioned. The discussions of the focus groups showed a similar picture (Fig. 2). This mandate was cited in all the congregations surveyed and, with the exception of the FeGs, had the most frequent mentions. The following quotes represent typical statements from the focus group discussions.

First of all, the creation mandate speaks for the fact that God has entrusted the earth to mankind (FeG2:33)

Frequently, care for nature was also linked to responsibility towards other people and the *commandment to love one's neighbour*. Especially the responsibility for future generations played a major role.

I must also leave the earth for the generation after me [...] so that they can also live in it. (EKD 3:21)

To a lesser extent the commandment to love one's neighbour was mentioned in relation to global justice. In the online survey, only a few respondents (5-8%) explicitly mentioned people in the Global South who suffer from climate change. In the focus groups, the argument of

global justice was mainly raised in the FeGs and Gnadau congregations (Fig. 2).

Nature conservation and climate protection is simply a global problem and also a question of social justice. (Gnadau 2:125)

Both in the survey (Fig. 1), as well as in the focus groups (Fig. 2), *respect or love for God* the Creator was mentioned as a motivation for protecting creation. In particular, members of the Free Evangelical Churches and Gnadau congregations, saw this as a reason for creation care.

For me, it is also [...] a kind of worship. So to express my gratitude. Somehow I find it important not only to consume what he has given us, but also to somehow appreciate it. (Gnadau 2:38)

This also relates to the value of nature. Nature was considered valuable because, according to the biblical narrative, it has been created by God and included in his covenant with Noah. Occasionally the need for redemption of creation and its importance in God's kingdom was also pointed out in the group discussions.

...we believe that nothing came into being simply by chance, but [...] that God simply thought up every living being and made it himself and that it is important to him ... (Gnadau 1:86)

Arguments Against a Commitment to Creation Care

When asked about reasons that would stand against a commitment to nature conservation and sustainability, 42% of respondents with average and weaker interest in the topic and 63% of those with stronger interest answered that nothing speaks against it. Sometimes, reservations surfaced later. The most frequent arguments mentioned in the survey and the focus groups are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

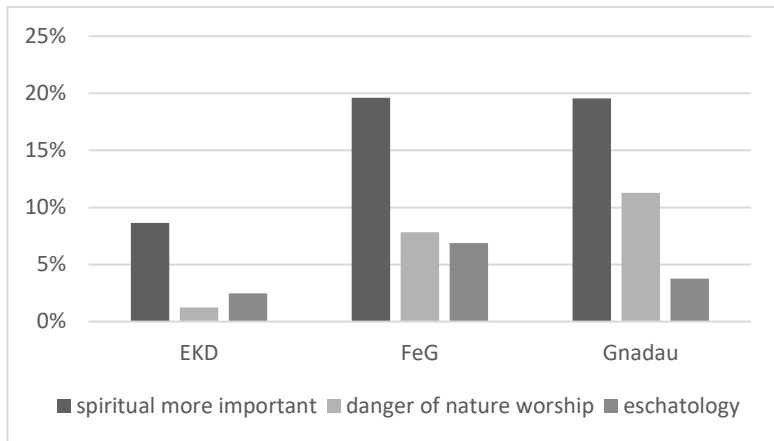


Figure 3: Arguments against creation care (survey, open question, respondents with average + lower interest)

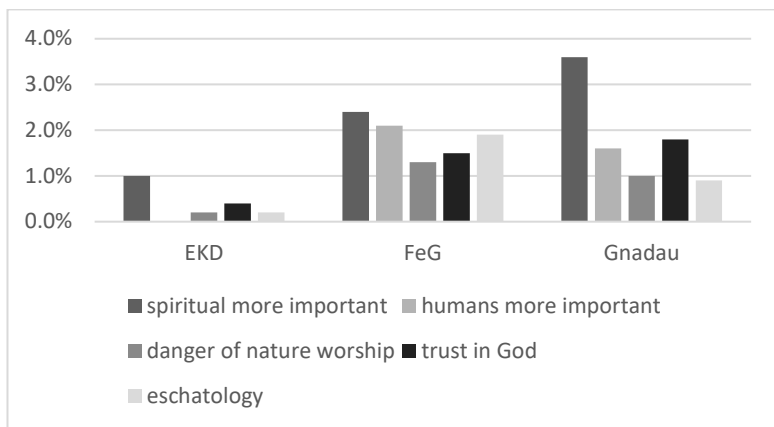


Figure 4: Arguments against creation care (focus groups, % of codings)

An important issue was the understanding of the *mission of the church*. Many of the interviewees stated that protecting nature is not the central task of the Christian church. Especially members of the Gnadau congregations and the Free Evangelical Churches pointed out, that spiritual tasks such as evangelisation were more important than creation care.

First of all, I would say that we as a church are responsible for other things, not so much for the environment. (EKD 1:94)

In the focus groups, it was also mentioned that caring for people should take priority over caring for nature. However, there were also voices that questioned this polarity.

a starving person or an exploited person seems more important to me [...] than fair trade coffee. And exactly there is a question of [...] priorities, that is, to actually see people first rather than, some global issue. (Gnadau 4:61)

This argument has to be seen against the background of the *views on human beings and nature*. In the online survey, the majority of those with an average interest in nature conservation see nature as a fellow creature (Fig. 5), but about half of them also believe that God has placed humans above the rest of creation (Fig. 6). As the figures show, there were differences between the denominations.

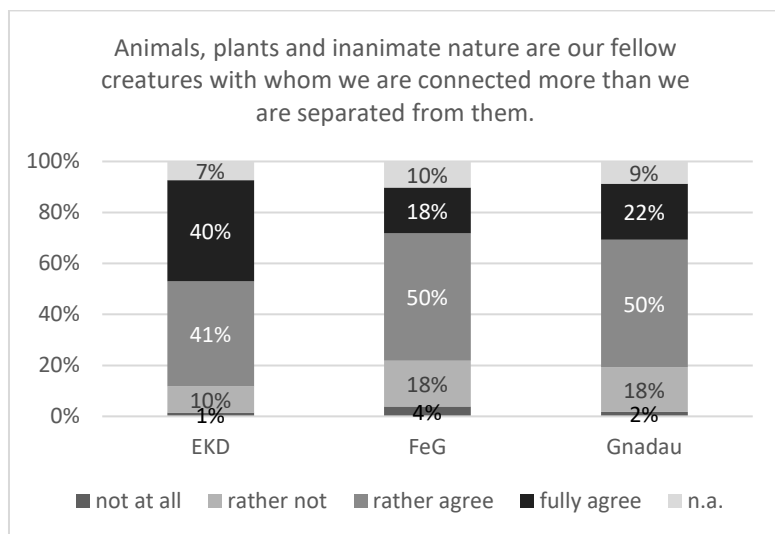


Figure 5: Consent with nature as fellow creatures (survey, respondents with average interest, n.a. = no answer).

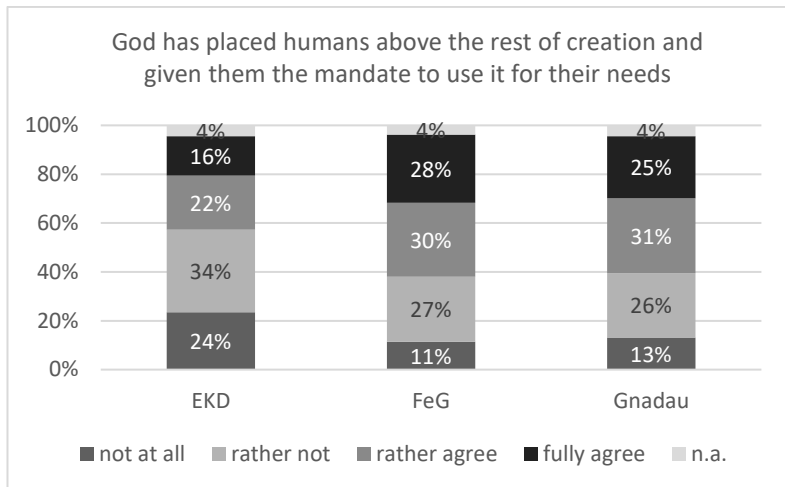


Figure 6: Consent with supremacy of humans (survey, respondents with average interest).

In connection with the prioritisation of spiritual concerns and the understanding of nature, there is also the fear that a strong commitment to creation care could lead to *nature worship* (Fig. 3-4, 7). In particular members of the FeGs and Gnadau congregations shared this fear.

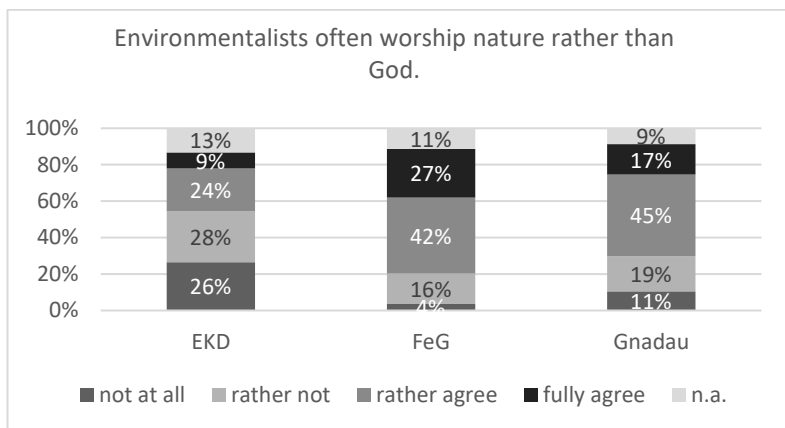


Figure 7: Consent with environmentalists worship nature (survey, respondents with average interest).

The *trust that God himself takes care of his creation* was discussed in the focus groups and queried in the survey. About two thirds of the respondents from FeGs and Gnadau congregations compared to one third of the members of the mainline churches agreed, that "because God is almighty, he does not allow his creation to be destroyed by humans" (Fig. 8).

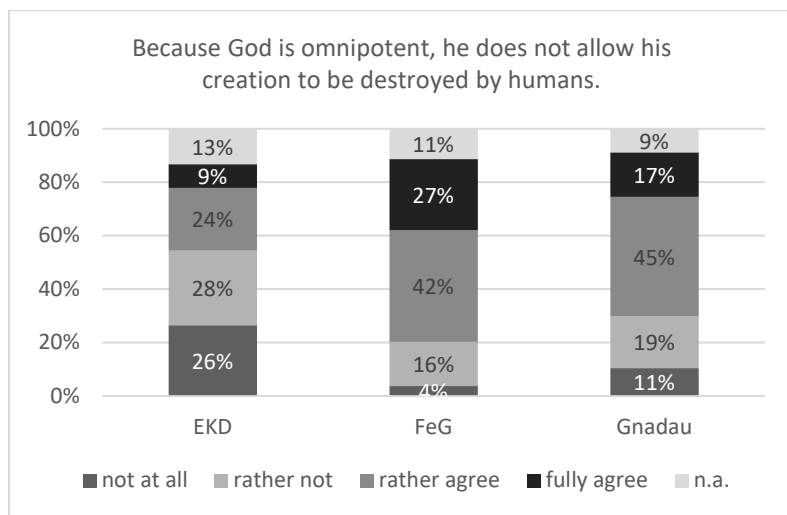


Figure 8: Consent with trust in God's omnipotence (survey, respondents with average interest).

The trust in God can be seen as a factor that contributes to personal resilience in the face of the ecological crisis however this should not lead to neglecting these challenges, as some participants pointed out.

If we are on the way with Jesus, we can know that we are confident [...]. And yet, of course, it is also a reality that can worry us. (Gnadau 1:34)

Closely related to trust in God is the *eschatological view* that the present world will pass away and God will create a new world. This aspect was mentioned most frequently in the discussions in Free

Evangelical Churches (Fig. 4). A question of the survey gave similar results (Fig. 9). Many participants shared the understanding of a discontinuity between the present and the new creation. However, many of them also said, that this should not be an obstacle to engaging in creation care.

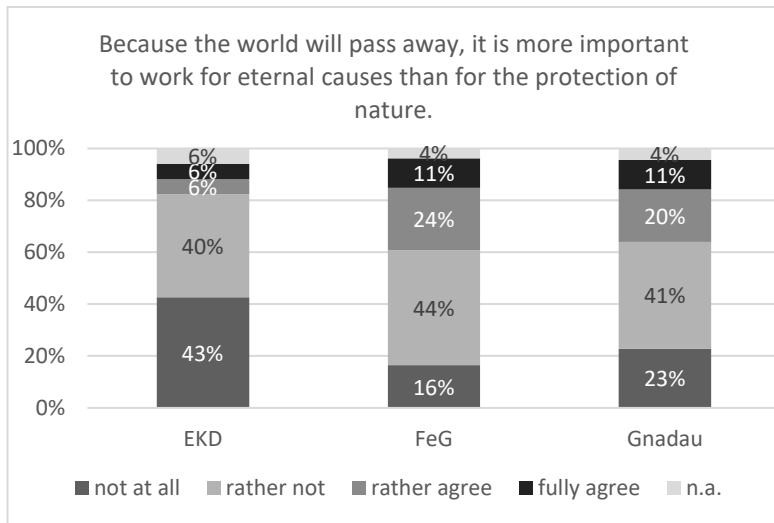


Figure 9: Consent with the world will pass away (survey, respondents with average interest).

Summary and Conclusion

The study showed that the overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) agreed in principle that Christians and Christian congregations should do more for nature conservation and ecological sustainability. The evaluation of personal environmental awareness also showed that members of Christian congregations did not differ much from the population in general. However, the study identified theological themes that can promote, but also may hinder, engagement in nature and climate protection.

Although most respondents agreed that there is a biblical mandate to protect creation, many had reservations about seeing this as a central *mission of the church*. In particular, members of the Free Evangelical Churches and Gnadau congregations stated that the church should primarily be concerned with the verbal witness and with the diaconal. This reflects the understanding of a distinction between the cultural mandate of all humans and the missionary mandate of the Christian community, which should not be mixed.⁴⁹ On the other hand, there were also voices that rejected this separation and pleaded for the integration of these mandates. The understanding of the mission of the church plays an important role in congregational practice when these concerns compete for human and financial resources.

The importance of theology also became clear in the tension between the *biblical mandate to care for creation* (Gen 2:15) and the *trust that God sustains the world* (Gen 8:22). Among the members of the FeGs and Gnadau congregations, trust in God plays a greater role, while in the mainline protestant churches the responsibility of the individual seems to be emphasised. In their extremes, these positions can lead to disinterest and inaction on the one hand, or to the belief that the salvation of the world depends only on us humans. If they hold this tension, the trust in God can be a resource that prevents Christians from losing hope and encourages them to work for the protection of creation, despite discouraging prognoses.

Many respondents seemed to have an eschatological understanding of a discontinuity, according to which the present creation will be destroyed and God will create a new heaven and a new earth. This may be an obstacle to creation care. However, there were also voices in all denominations that pointed to an understanding of continuity between

⁴⁹ Peters, George W., Egelkraut, Helmut 2005. *Biblischer Auftrag - Missionarisches Handeln: Eine biblische Theologie der Mission*. Bad Liebenzell: Liebenzeller Mission.

the present creation and God's new world, or were of the opinion that a view of discontinuity was not a licence for irresponsible handling of creation.

The creation mandate, the commandment to love one's neighbour and providing for future generations were all mentioned as central reasons for creation care. As obstacles, the one-sided spiritual understanding of mission and the fear of nature worship were identified. These views have an *anthropocentric bias*, i.e. they are primarily concerned with humans. Although the majority of respondents agreed that animals, plants and inanimate nature are our fellow creatures, this idea was rarely mentioned in the open questions of the survey and in the focus groups. Reading the stories of creation and the flood from this perspective could open up an understanding of the interconnectedness of human beings with nature. *Biocentrism* or ecocentrism, with nature at the centre, may be related by Christians to the fear of nature worship and radical nature conservation becoming a substitute religion. A third alternative would be *theocentrism* with God in the centre and humans and nature being related to him and receiving their meaning from him.⁵⁰ The statements that justify nature conservation out of respect and love for its creator can be linked to a theocentric worldview. A theocentric approach is also indicated in the discussion contributions, which spoke out against competition of creation care with other tasks of the congregation and wanted to integrate them into "a complex system" that is determined "from the centre of Jesus" (FeG 3:103).

The results presented in this chapter show how theology and worldview may encourage or hinder the willingness of Christians to engage in creation care. They indicate that besides practical steps of sustainable church management, theological reflection may be a key to

⁵⁰ Lowe, B., Lamb, R., & Padilla DeBorst, R. 2021. Reconciling Conservation and Development in an Era of Global Environmental Change. *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy* 2(2), 49-64.

more engagement in this regard. More theological reflection on these topics may be needed in the training of full time church workers, in worship services and small groups, as well as in the work with children and young people.

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PART 3: THE VALUE OF VALUES

WHEN THE EARTH BECOMES FLESH: TOWARDS AN EMBODIED ETHICS IN THE BROKENNESS OF THE WORLD

Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué

*Why is life so fragile?⁵¹
Why can't we find the words to make right what is wrong?
Why can't we touch with tenderness instead of force?⁵²*

– Lizette Galima Tapia-Raquel

Introduction

When I was a child, I remember walking through the forest of my West African home country to go to school*. We were always a group of children and the walk would take us around a quarter of an hour, but in my memory it seemed so much longer. This is not only due to the fact

⁵¹ An earlier version of this contribution has been presented at the Indonesian Symposium on Religious Life, 3 November 2020.

⁵² Lizette Galima Tapia-Raquel: *Crying-Out, Resisting, Asserting, Celebrating. Proclamation and Poetry*. Dasmariñas City: Union Theological Seminary, 2015: 171.

* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4146291> © Globethics Publications | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

that we literally took our time, but more importantly, that we walked, and by walking our feet touched the soil. During the rainy season the path through the forest would transform into mud, what for the remaining part of the year would be dry, reddish earth.

I cherished those moments, early in the morning, at midday and late in the afternoon. This was a time we had to ourselves, playing, chatting, and, over and over again, encountering nature. It was a spontaneous and intimate encounter, not one that was driven by a pedagogical agenda, like the one underlying our biology and experiential learning classes at school. We would pass by a mango tree, savor the ripe fruits, when it was the right season, and we would play all sorts of games with the kernels. We would also collect leaves, beans, corn, and different kinds of seeds to transform them into bracelets and hair ornaments, or display them on the soil in form of imaginary houses and landscapes, in which we would immerse ourselves. In my recollection, these early childhood exposures to nature were almost seem-less, we had the impression that we were genuinely part of the natural elements surrounding us, not only walking through or past them. How often did we fall over roots and used the leaves to remove the earthen traces on our knees or to conceal our wounds?

These experiences of living with and in nature were probably exacerbated by the fact that in those days material privileges and digital distractions were quasi-absent. Our parents insisted that we would walk to school and back home four times a day, and walking to school – at all seasons, while taking in, with all our senses, what nature had to offer – was our most joyful play time. When pondering on this experience, it dawns on me that *walking through the forest* may not be the accurate words to use, rather we sensed that *the forest walked through us*. There was an intangible physical extension from our bodies to the natural elements and from them to us.

Later my travels took me around the world, enabling me to observe how in different regions and countries people would forge material and epistemological repositories of such interrelations between humanity and the natural world. As a theologian and ethicist, I developed a keen interest in the way people make meaning of these and other connections within their respective religious symbolic systems. I discovered gradually that this meaning-making has not only a vertical dimension around human rationality and spirituality, but also a horizontal dimension, which hints to the *being-with*,⁵³ being in relation with others, human and other-than-humans in this world. Time and again, I would learn that people would describe this *being-with* – living and existing in communion with other living beings – as transcending the human comprehension and all aspirations of feasibility and control. Ultimately, this communion is embedded in the mystery and sanctity of life.

Locating the Theme

The topic I propose to reflect upon in this contribution has thus both a biographical and a scholarly location, which deserves to be acknowledged. In my research and intellectual inquiry in the field of religion and ethics, I begin to understand and to develop a conceptual framework, in which my attention to human and religious life is connected with a kind of *ecology of meaning-making*. It is about asking questions on how sense, meaning and orientation in human existence can be experienced and articulated in relation to all living, transcending the habitual boundaries of human/non-human, nature, culture and history.

⁵³ I am indebted to Efoé J. Pénoukou for his conceptual development and contextualisation of the notion of *being-there-with*, reminiscent of Martin Heidegger's *Mitsein/Mitdasein*, see: Id., "Christologie au village", in: François Kabasélé, Joseph Doré, René Luneau (eds): *Chemins de la christologie africaine*. Paris: Desclée, 2001: 79-111.

In the scholarly field, these questions resonate with a strand of inquiry in environmental ethics preoccupied with the destructive impact of human enterprise on the natural environment, urging to interrogate anthropological concepts. In the humanities, in general, there seems to be a greater awareness for the urgency of asking one central question afresh: *who is the human?* The responses to this question vary and depend on religious, cultural and epistemological standpoints, ranging from emphasising the singularity of the human being as the only being with moral status, encompassing a series of ethical consequences vis-à-vis the relationship to other species and natural elements, to positions attributing moral status to all living beings.⁵⁴ The pivotal point of this reflection is not only the critical introspection of human agency and responsibility for the destruction of the environment and the ensuing questions of justice in an unequally affected world, but more so the intrinsic connection between living on this earth in relation to others.

⁵⁴ See *inter alia*: Peter Singer: *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*. New York: Random House, 1975; Id.: *How Are We To Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1993; Id.: *One World: The Ethics of Globalisation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002; James Lovelock: *Gaia. A New Look on Life on Earth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979; Arne Naess: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: An Outline of an Ecosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; George Sessions (ed.): *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century. Readings on the philosophy and practice of the new environmentalism*. Boston: Shambala Publications, 1995; Bill Devall, George Sessions: *Deep Ecology. Living as if Nature Mattered*. Layton: Gibbs Smith, 1985; Andrew Linzey: *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology, and Practical Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; Satish Kuma/John Lane (eds): *Images of Earth and Spirit: A Resurgence Art Anthology*. Totnes: Green, 2003; Sally McFague: *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000; Id.: *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

More recently another research strand has emerged in social and cultural anthropology which can be made fruitful for an ethical discussion of the present subject. This research aims at moving the boundaries between the human and the natural world, dislocating the asymmetries, retrieving the hidden connections and investigating the nexus of humans, plants and other-than human species.⁵⁵ This interdisciplinary field certainly bears the potential for deepened conversations at the intersection of anthropology, religion, epistemology, culture, natural sciences, and ethics.

The theme of an embodied ethics⁵⁶ appears as a novel area of academic exploration from the perspective of care, empathy and embodiment. It is about asking questions on the moral agency from within a bodily experience and presence. This is not to say that there is a unique ethical approach that is informed by this perspective, nor that such an approach would be the only path to conduct an inquiry in applied ethics. However, it is about making fruitful the discourse on the body for revisiting an understanding of applied ethics in our current times. This is relevant not only for the areas of normative ethics and

⁵⁵ See Jane Bennett: *Vibrant Matter. A political ecology of things*. New York: Duke University Press, 2010; Eduardo Kohn: *How Forests Think. Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2013; Michael Marder: *Plant-Thinking. A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013; William Ellis: "A Tree Walks through the Forest: Milkwoods and other botanical witnesses", *Catalyst*, Vol. 5, 2 (2019): 1-4.

⁵⁶ See Maurice Hamington: *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004; John T. Leahy, "Embodied Ethics: Some Common Concerns of Religion and Business", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 5, 6 (1986): 465-472; Leonore Wadsworth Hervey, "Embodied Ethical Decision Making", *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 29 (2007): 91-108.

bioethics⁵⁷, but also for social, intercultural, interreligious and environmental ethics. In religious studies, one can notice a renaissance of the awareness for physicality and materiality in the analysis of religious practice and in the interpretation of its value for grasping more profoundly the meaning how a bodily presence and experience is connected to the social, economic and cultural milieus, but also the spiritual dimensions. In other words, the proposal to reflect upon ethics from the perspective of embodiment is a genuinely reflective – not an ideological – exercise, unfolded and explicated in the following sections. First, it is about unveiling the salient learnings of our contemporary times for ethical reflection and action against the background of the pandemic experience. Secondly, I will propose to embark on looking more closely to the implications for understanding of an ethics of ecological care in the context of a divided world. Last but not least, I will describe the contours of an embodied ethics in an uneven world.

Reading the Signs of the Time

Living in these times of a global pandemic marks all life in a particular way. It unveils, accentuates and brings to the fore societal rifts, that may have been there previously, but now appear in a new light calling for a fresh awareness for the unescapable entanglement of all life.

I would wish to begin my explorations with highlighting three dimensions – *space and time, vulnerability and resilience, divisions and relations* – as guiding threads for the subsequent stages of the reflection. These dimensions are selected because of their exemplarity and do not intend to represent an exhaustive list of aspects to be considered in this context.

⁵⁷ See Margrit Shildrick, Roxanne Mykytiuk (Eds): *Ethics of the Body. Postconventional Challenges*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2005.

Living and experiencing the current global pandemic impels to revisit some of the most pervasive assumptions about human existence. According to one of these postulations prosperity of human life would primarily be bound to economic growth, hence a series of economic and development strategies that would emphasize this vision. However, since several decades this postulate receives recurrent critique, and a major challenge has become obvious, namely, as Jan-Eirik Sørensen states: “how to balance the needs of the planet with the need to bring billions of people into the global economy.”⁵⁸ The international discourse on sustainable development goals has certainly contributed to a more broadly accepted consciousness and responsibility of state and civil society actors for working on overcoming the divorce between caring for present and future generations, the state of the earth and a global ‘green’ economy that caters for exact these needs.⁵⁹

This is by far not self-evident as any reassessment of habitual thinking or practice requires distance from the actual incidence. Therefore, the reflection on what occurs at this moment in history can only be provisional and intermediary. Simultaneously, immediacy and urgency become more readily available interpretations of how people make meaning of time in this unprecedented period. It is, however, not a detached interpretation of time that is at stake, but use time wisely to create and share knowledge built on insights we share with one another, and those which may differ across regions, cultures and religions.

⁵⁸ Jan-Eirik Sørensen: “The Role of the World Trade Organisation”, in: Lewis S. Mudge, Thomas Wieser (eds): *Democratic Contracts for Sustainable and Caring Societies. What Can Churches and Christian Communities Do?* Geneva: WCC, 2000: 74-80: 76.

⁵⁹ See e.g. the UNEP report *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication – A Synthesis for Policy Makers*, s.l., 2011. www.unep.org/greeneconomy.

From this fundamental dimension of space and time other implications relevant for an ethical conversation can be derived. It seems that our sense for time and space is exacerbated. Almost two years have passed, in which peoples' lives have been marked by an event that escapes all habitual categories. An invisible and intangible virus holds us in firm grip, disrupts interactions, mobility, and simultaneously the capacity to define space. The virus being a reality worldwide, it is literally *in* the space, it is everywhere, and at the same time it reduces the radius of personal and collective spaces and the movements within the social spaces. The shifts in social, cultural and religious life from visible movements across borders, commuting to work, being present in offices and encountering others on streets and in other public spaces, to disrupted and invisible lives with work in home offices, changed family and educational patterns with home schooling and distant learning are illustrations for the radical way in which the comprehension of time and space altered rapidly over a period of a few months.

There appears also to exist an ambiguous experience of *elongated time* – for example with the prolonged time necessary for medical research on a secure vaccine – on the one hand, and the observation that the elapsed time since the outbreak of the pandemic is experienced by many as an *accelerated time*. Social distancing measures to contain the spread of the virus are in contradiction to many of social practices and culturally coded conventions, and indicative of the altered experience of space. Living together is based on being able to come close within a space, to share it and to cooperate, and yet we realise how our presence in a space and at a given time, together with others, has changed and will most probably continue to transform societies, communities and modes of interaction.⁶⁰ Political measures destined to contain the spread

⁶⁰ See Richard Sennett: *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2000; Id: *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

of the virus further deepen societal rifts and questions around a possible normative consensus on what needs to be done. It seems that time is one indicator to be read more carefully in conjunction with proposed solutions. In other words, how does the experience of time as scarce and finite category influence, by way of illustration, decision-making and action vis-à-vis societal and environmental urgencies.

This leads to the consideration of a second dimension, designated by the notions of vulnerability and resilience. While these are not new as categories to describe the situation of dependency and agency of individuals, groups and natural elements on external influences and impact, the novelty in our time resides in the intensification of their relevance for ethical solicitation.⁶¹ It is in and through the recognition of *the vulnerable self* and the encounter with the face of the other, as Emmanuel Levinas named it, that ethical responses can emerge and be articulated: “In his (the other’s, A.E.) face, the human is most naked, is destitution. (...) The face looks at me and calls me. It lays claim to me.”⁶² These ethical responses are not thoughts or acts distorted by asymmetric relationships, but those sponsored by a generous, non-invasive and considerate turning to ‘the other’ out of a realisation of vulnerability calling for the responsiveness of the other. It may be

⁶¹ See Emmanuel Levinas: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969; Judith Butler: *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso Books, 2006; Id., Zeynep Gambetti, Leticia Sabsay (eds): *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham: Duke University Press; Martha Albertson Fineman: “The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition”, *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism*, 20,1 (2008): 1-23; Miroslav Volf: *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006; Heike Springhart, Günter Thomas (eds): *Exploring Vulnerability*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

⁶² Jill Robbins (ed.): *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002: 127.

interesting to expand on these lines of thought around the relationship and the encounter with the other in the context of nature and the experience of nature as the encounter with the other, which can offer strong impulses for understanding more thoroughly how humans are related to those who do not resemble them, or whom they want to resemble. Indigenous ritual practices in form of ecological rites, in which the connection of human life to nature or natural elements is celebrated, could serve as vivid illustrations for frameworks and practices built upon the recognition of viable bridges between culture and nature.⁶³

This is what these times evoke also about *divisions and relationships*, the third dimension deserving to be reflected upon more deeply. It seems that the virus in its effect on societal life, and life in general, reveals a double bind. On the one hand, it accentuates existing divisions between ethnic and social groups.⁶⁴ On the other hand, it shows the aspirations for experiencing and articulating more clearly identity and belonging in a broader web of relationships on earth.⁶⁵ It remains of importance to maintain and work on the tension that emerges from this tension: the societal divisions are results and reflections of imperfect and often distorted perceptions of the humane, and the relationships are marked by these divisions, in as much as they are simultaneously critical articulation and claims for correction. Ethics

⁶³ See, *inter alia*, John A. Grim (ed.): *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

⁶⁴ Eunjung Lee, Marjorie Johnston: “Resisting the Politics of the Pandemic and Racism to Foster Humanity”, *Qualitative Social Work*, 20, 1-2 (2020): 225-232, hint to these impacts of the pandemic.

⁶⁵ See Upolu Luma Vaai: “‘We are Therefore We Live.’ Pacific Eco-Relational Spirituality and Changing the Climate Change Story.” *Toda Peace Institute, Policy Brief. No. 56 (October 2019)*: 1-15.

cannot be thought and revisited without considering this provocative ambiguity.

What is an Ethics of Ecological Care?

How do we want to live together? What visions do we have for peaceful cohabitation, sharing of wealth, knowledge and worldview? That would be a set of questions one may wish to investigate upon from an intercultural ethical perspective. However, the primary task may consist in a rather unconventional mapping exercise not so much on how different ethical propositions are articulated from within contextual situations, cultural, religious and secular traditions, but by paying attention to the subtle intrusion of dominating patterns in the intercultural conversation on how humans can be better stewards of the earth. As Upolu Luma Vaai notes for his own context of the Pacific islands: “‘Shared stewardship’ and securing a future can only be credible, when the ways of knowing and being of the Pacific people are considered holistically and are integral part to development strategies, including climate change and conflict discussions...”⁶⁶ It may be worthwhile to investigate, to take conscious note of and to *describe thoroughly* the different understandings of human existence in and connection with nature across diverse cultural contexts in view of developing common strategies in full respect of divergent rationales.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Upolu Luma Vaai: *ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁷ A view that Upolu Luma Vaai, *ibid.*, 4, develops with regard to the climate change narrative, when he writes: “The dominant climate narrative is framed to focus on science alone, therefore emphasising only the physically tangible things. As a result, this fosters climate solutions from a secular perspective that may not touch deeply the unseen wounds of societies.”

Such a *thick description*⁶⁸ would enable to understand how ethics is rooted in cultural frameworks of meaning-making, and formulated from different standpoints and self-understandings. This would lead to a genuine intercultural conversation on normative conflicts, which demand a continuous exchange and dialogue. It is obvious how normative conflicts can weigh on societal relationships, but also how it can influence the manner in which human life in relation to other-than-human life is understood. To arrive at a normative consensus can be a cumbersome journey. Some of the most challenging ethical dilemmas in the field of medicine, international relations and environmental protection are dependent on worldview, ritual practice and normative foundations. Therefore it is of paramount importance to hold together the rationale for ethics – how people develop systems of reasoning, belief and ritual practice around their reflection and decision making – and the ethical practice itself.

What then is an ethics of ecological care? In this context, it is important to recall the full extent of the meaning of ecology,⁶⁹ as describing the relationships of all living to one another and to the environment in which they exist, including the full breadth of underpinning conditions and possibilities of articulation. In prominent contributions to the debate on ethics of care,⁷⁰ the juxtaposition of

⁶⁸ Clifford Geertz: “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, in: Id., *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973: 3-30.

⁶⁹ See Elizabeth Carolyn Miller: “Ecology”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 46, 3-4 (2018): 653-656, referring to Ernst Haeckel’s original reference to ecology as the relations of the organism to the environment in the broadest sense, including also all conditions of existence.

⁷⁰ See, *inter alia*, Carol Gilligan: *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; Michael Slote: *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*. London/New York: Routledge, 2007; Joan C. Tronto: “An Ethic of Care”, *Generations*, Vol. 22.3 (1998): 15-20; Id.:

justice and care has been underlined. Accordingly, an ethics of justice would emphasise the equal treatment of all under all circumstances, and, by contrast, an ethics of care would stress the interests and needs of other in view of nurturing and maintaining harmonious relationships.

It may well be, that this contrasting positioning of an ethics of justice versus an ethics of care describes the divergence in an overemphasized manner. The bridge between the two ethical approaches, particularly seen through an ecological lens, may be built by recognising the contextuality and intentionality – and as such a qualitative dimension – of turning to others and the earth with consideration for their needs as much as for their rights.⁷¹

One of the characteristics of our contemporary societies is that they constitute culturally, religiously and economically plural societies, in which the individual and the collectives forge their self-understanding against the background of disparate systems of normative plausibility. This prompts to approach an ethics of ecological care by way of engaging in a plural dialogue, a ‘megalogue’ on plurality, how to deal with it in view of normative consensus-building, and on the different ethical propositions themselves. Against this background, some have called for understanding an ethics of ecological care as an inviting ethics, which takes account of the plurality by developing an ethical methodology that stresses the convening character of ethics as a framework of believing, thinking and acting.

At the same time, such a reflection emphasises a critical introspection of human agency and anthropocentrism. Is it possible to

Who Cares? How to reshape Democratic Politics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.

⁷¹ An interesting new research currently emerges around the topic of plant/animal rights, see e.g. Jan A. Schulp: “Animal Rights/Plant Rights”, *Research in Hospitality Management*, 9,2 (2019): 109-112.

think about relating to the earth without resorting outside of the paradigms of functionality, usefulness, and greed? James Lovelock portrays the relationship of humans with nature with war, when he warns: “We are unintentionally at war with Gaia, and to survive with our civilization intact we urgently need to make a just peace with Gaia while we are strong enough to negotiate and a defeated, broken rabble on the way to extinction.”⁷² Lovelock’s scenario seems to set humans *against* the earth and vice versa.⁷³ However, there may be a potential for developing at least a consciousness for ways in which humans are both dependent, undeniably in need of nature and its resources, but rather from a position of contemplation or concentrated observation, not of dominion and exploitation. This would constitute in analogy to interpersonal relationship the necessary pause – allowing for a non-invasive, silent space of waiting,⁷⁴ experiencing, cognitively and non-cognitively, the integrity and dignity of all living beings and the manner in which they are interconnected.

It remains critical to think about the purpose of an ethics of ecological care in the context of brokenness. The very concrete markers

⁷² James Lovelock: *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back - and How We Can Still Save Humanity*. London: Penguin Books, 2006: 153.

⁷³ Lovelock is a climate scientist who understands the earth as a system that will return itself into balance, if brought into disequilibrium by human interference. He utilises as sematic figure the Greek deity *Gaia*, rebelling against her residents, if they dissatisfy her.

⁷⁴ See Miroslav Volf: *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, who in his poignant exposition of the “drama of the embrace” – opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms and opening the arms again – calls attention to the necessity of an interval to allow for a free, non-invasive act of response (or denial thereof) to happen. This space of interpersonal encounter may also serve as a line of thought to be deepened with regard to an ecological ethics of care and transposed to describe the non-functional interconnection with other living beings.

of societal divisions manifest themselves in various forms of economic, social and discriminatory disparities. The translation of the term division into *brokenness* is intentional. It relates to the proposal to describe the contours of an ethics of ecological care not so much from the perspective of its *contents* (i.e. the normative prerogatives), but more so from the perspective of *form and methodology* (i.e. what it enables to perceive in view of arriving to an informed ethical response). If we understand the world as broken it evokes a symbolic imagery that includes the reality of the societal divisions, but connects at the same time to a broader range insights that can be anchored in an intercultural and interreligious conversation on ethics of ecological care.

When the Earth Becomes Flesh: Applying an Embodied Ethics in a Broken World

This symbolic imagery of brokenness could be further unfolded. My proposal is to understand an ethics of ecological care as an ethics that takes seriously the embodiment as the capacity of humans to experience in and through their bodies something of the mysterious gift that sustains all life, not only human life, and by way of this participation can develop reflective and practical responses to ethical solicitations.

Two brief vignettes may illustrate this approach. The first vignette relates to the research work of William Ellis on trees as natural repositories of collective memory and human history. Ellis investigates milkwood trees, a species of trees in the South African region inhabited by the Khoi and San people. Ellis observes and asks: “..how this vast milkwood forest, which once covered the coastline from the Cape into the Eastern Cape, was and is part of a vast rhizomatic, vegeto-neural network that discursively, symbolically, and epigenetically retains

events and evidence.”⁷⁵ Through this research and the light shed an often underscored layer of connection between humans and plants, William Ellis offers a fresh perspective on how collective memories could be, in the most literal sense, kept alive, as living stories narrated and transmitted from one generation to another, not only by humans but also by plants, whose roots grow deep into the earth. Ellis pursues to state: “These trees are the true monument to Khoi and San because it is under the branches of these trees that they worked and played. (...) It would seem fitting that for these reasons the milkwoods (...) are really a marker of curated ‘Khoisan outside.’”⁷⁶ Could it be that these trees are not only repositories of human history but also autonomous bearers of meaning-making in a complex web of individuals, community and nature?⁷⁷

These anthropological endeavours to establish so called rhizomatic connections between humans and the plant world are thought-provoking. They lead to reflect upon ethical solicitation not only in terms of human-to-human interpellation and exhortation, which would repose primarily on the cognitive integration of what needs to be done or avoided to preserve the earth – for the sake of its own intrinsic value.

The second vignette deals with the physical experience of the ruins of a slave-owner’s house on the West African coast are the painful

⁷⁵ William Ellis: “A Tree Walking through the Forest: Milkwoods and other Botanical Witnesses.” *Catalyst* 5,2 (2019): 1-4.

⁷⁶ William Ellis: *ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁷ I am indebted to Jenne Jessica R. Pieter, who, in her unpublished research paper “Knowledge and Empathy: A fresh perspective from indigenous people on sustainability of Maluku in higher education” of 25 June 2020, offers valuable insights from her research in the Maluku islands on the holistic worldview of *Adat*, according to which “Maluku nature is manifested in the group and in every personal existence. Mountains, land, sea, all nature, and the groups are a complete picture of the Moluccan people.” (2).

reminders of a dark history. When walking on the soil surrounding this edifice, entering it to see the vestiges of the basement, barely one meter and a half high, where the enslaved were held in captivity prior to their deportation, it dawned on me that it is neither from the materiality of the building, nor the earth on which it was built, nor in the discourse, oral and written, about the ineffable and painful events of the past that the ethical solicitation would emerge, but from the 'space-in-between.'⁷⁸ The space, in which the material world, the natural and constructed environment, blends in with the intangible and yet ever-present collective memory. In this sense, not only the human beings, and the lineage of human beings through whom the trauma stories are transmitted, would play a central role, but the whole inhabited earth and through it all living beings.

It will undoubtedly constitute a rewarding task for further research from an intercultural perspective to unearth more of these examples at the micro-level and in different contexts that will assist in appreciating the permeability between human and natural life as a basis for ethical investigations.

This is valid for accepting a dual critical perspective for the way human agency has contributed to the destruction of the environment,⁷⁹ for the ethical implication of seeing humans in their interrelatedness with the created world as earth communities,⁸⁰ and, ultimately, for the way responsibility has to be built into the collection of stories on these

⁷⁸ Homi Bhabha's third space theory could be an avenue to be made fruitful in this context. See: Id.: *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.

⁷⁹ Ernst M. Conradie: *An Ecological Christian Anthropology. At Home on Earth?* London: Routledge, 2016.

⁸⁰ Larry L. Rassmussen: *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, 2000.

embodied experiences to form *world archives*.⁸¹ World archives, to develop Achille Mbembe's contribution further, of a different kind, whose primary role would not be to function as a relic and as an "instituting imaginary,"⁸² but could serve as living collections of cross-cultural learning on what it means to walk with the earth, as opposed to walk on the earth.

Conclusion

This exploration began with an anecdotal reference to a personal childhood experience of being-with others in nature. This served as an anchor and starting point for the subsequent explication of an embodied ethics, which takes both the material and physical experiences, as well as the cognitive dimensions connected to meaning-making seriously. The proposition brought forward is to read the signs of the time as an urgent call for overcoming divisions (not differences) and utilise the immediacy of the diverse bodily experiences as an opportunity for a cross-cultural investigation in an ethics of ecological care, an investigation which was exemplified with the categories of space and time, vulnerability and resilience, divisions and relations.

The plea is to consider that overcoming the divisions in our in many ways broken world would not consist in glossing over the differences, by way of a totalising or essentialising approach, nor to understand applied ethics as a possibility to develop a blue print for globally applicable solutions. Rather, as per our proposal, the recognition of the simultaneity of vulnerability and dignity of all life would lead into a

⁸¹ Achille Mbembe: "The Power of the Archive and its Limits", in: Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris et al. (eds): *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002: 19-26.

⁸² Achille Mbembe, *ibid.*, 22.

non-invasive and non-dominating considerateness for all life, human and other-than-human, from within an ethos of care and empathy.

An ethics of ecological care, understood as an embodied ethics, would simultaneously serve the need to build *world archives*, as Achille Mbembe suggests, and to foster the knowledge exchange and transfer between people in different cultural and religious locations.

At the same time, it is a propitious moment to ponder on the moral imagination and ethical practice, and therefore on the future of a world whose brokenness may not be mended completely, but can undoubtedly constitute the subject of a continued mindfulness from the position of an *ethos of vulnerable caring*. Vulnerable caring because one has experienced vulnerability *in oneself* and has turned to ‘the other’ in considerateness without succumbing to the fallacy of superiority. A moment of recognition that applying ethics is living our lives as social, cultural and religious beings in neighborhood, reciprocal relationship and in regard for the inner dignity of all living, from which flow all values and principles that shape our existence. This is not a once-and-for-all achievement, it amounts to a perpetual effort, until and when the earth becomes flesh.

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THE VALUE OF UP-HILL SKIING

*Walking with the Earth as a Serious Game.
Philosophical Notes on the Experience of Sport
and Wilderness*

Ignace Haaz

“[...] mountains are like people: To love them, you must first get to know them, and when you do, you can tell when they are angry and when they are happy, how you should handle them, play with them, care for them when people hurt them, when it is better not to annoy them. But unlike any person, the mountains, nature, and the earth are much, much bigger than you are. You must never forget that you are a speck, a speck in space, within the infinite, and they can decide at any moment whether they want to erase that speck or not.” Kilian Jornet, *Run or Die*,

Ch. 1. Velopress, 2013

Introduction: These Mountains which are Part of Our Experience

The great uphill runner Kilian Jornet argues that mountains are as persons from time to time angry or happy, and that if we would want to

play with mountains, and care for them when people hurt them, then we better learn to know them*.

This close contact with nature has been described by Lord Byron and it has had a critical reception by Arthur Schopenhauer, who is seeing in nature and in play one same principle at work the Will, as conative power unifying all living beings and the world as a whole. A metaphysical development of the “objectivation of the will” is leading into a modern concept of playful activity, and to a sophisticated comprehension of the subject as inspired producer of the work of art. It has been widely recognized that Friedrich Nietzsche inherited Schopenhauer’s attempt to give a great synthesis between Baruch Spinoza’s immanent system of the Nature as Will and Kant’s proposition of a transcendental access to the world as pure idea or representation. It is by thinking through the perspective of art, and not forgetting ethical principles and a religious philosophy, seen as evolutionary momentum out of these first ludic steps of life, that Schopenhauerian axiology is unfolding, with an individualist approach for the philosopher of Röcken, and a collective perspective with Eduard von Hartmann. In a collection of unpublished notes, Nietzsche wanted to refocus on the idea why should human being be so passionate about mastering a set of obstacles. As he sees gradually this habit redefined as characteristic of a “will to power”, the reception of this concept did not draw a relation between both concepts. It is much later, in the 20th Century that the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga first considered the idea of resistance to obstacles as central, in his great foundation of modern cultural theory, with, later, the American philosopher Bernard Suits, who readapted it to a so-called “lusory attitude”: a playful disposition, required to enter in the play of a game. With a large

* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4146292> © Globethics Publications | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

reception, these isolated chapters eventually inaugurated as a whole the new area of the philosophy of sport as a discipline of social and practical philosophy. Let us come back to Lord Byron and Kilian Jornet and see why there is a temptation to truly see the environment, the tree, the path in the middle of the forest being present as immersive experience and then see why we cannot agree on totally reducing the subject to the state of being immersed, introducing a reason-based understanding, or as we shall see propose a legitimate concept of the world as abstract representation of the subject.

Byron presents the idea of an aesthetical immersion of the individual into the environment when he writes: “Are not the mountains, waves and skies a part Of me and of my soul, as I of them?” The immersive character of the subject with the world is reported to the reciprocal character of the world being part of me and, the subject being part of the world. Instead of being a reciprocal and an unifying immersion, as a theocentric or metaphysical hand holding the world from falling below a limit: earth represented as ball, caught by a divine hand full of compassion, on the contrary, the earth could be also seen as multilaterally emerging from mountains, waves and skies with Byron. The romantic view of a return to nature can be interpreted as a result of Byron’s separation with Annabella his wife who could not tolerate anymore his way of life, and his leaving of Dover, under public opprobrium, which lead him to Geneva, after a tour around the battlefield of Waterloo. Looking with poetic inspiration at the beauty of the French Alps, the Lemman Lac, and the reflection of the Mt Blanc into the water, has helped him to release much of his melancholic disposition, and to find through art a therapy and new start in life, rather reaffirm a pure passion of love, mediated by the beauty of nature⁸³.

⁸³ We see the poet, Lord Byron in this occasion, pointing at a sentimental will to desire, a true passion, which is pure and authentic as the immaculate beauty of

Byron has also probably in mind to overcome a vision of the world of his time, what could be called the decadence of the British Empire after the battle of Waterloo, and the defeat of Napoleon who, for many as Byron, personified the defeat of the Enlightenment forces of modernization and democratization, against those of the Central European and British great colonial Empire. Back to nature means, in this second sense finding the inspiration to resist the literal physical aspiration by conservative political powers at that time⁸⁴.

Walking with the earth focuses on a desire and bodily activity, which will be described with much attention as “objectification of the will” by A. Schopenhauer, in his *World as Will and as Idea*⁸⁵, two years later in 1818. The German philosopher will also refer to the small poem of

the mountain. The metaphor of the mountain serves as a guide which would accompany the walker in his discovery of the hidden beauty of the world, and comfort himself in an existential joy of life as presence. Byron asks just a few lines below: “Is not the love of these deep in my heart With a pure passion? should I not condemn All objects, if compared with these? and stem A tide of suffering, rather than forego Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm Of those whose eyes are only turned below, Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not glow?” *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto III, §75, 710-714.

⁸⁴ Byron has written these lines as part of the poetry: *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto III, §75, 707. When he writes that the subject of perception has a reciprocal relation with the object of the perception, it is grounded on the concrete experience of his view of the mountain of Mont Blanc, the 3 June 1816, as he observes “for some time the distant reflection of Mont Blanc and Mont Argentière in the calm of the lake”. The image of the mountain is appearing through the window of the lake, which he is crossing in his boat. The distance of the Mont Blanc from their mirror is about 100km.

⁸⁵ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World As Will And Idea*, Vol. 1-3, transl. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp. Seventh Edition London Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. 1909. Gutenberg EBook 2011, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-pdf.pdf>

Byron, but with a totally different view from the view of a reciprocal emergence:

“Whoever now, has, after the manner referred to, become so absorbed and lost in the perception of nature that he only continues to exist as the pure knowing subject, becomes in this way directly conscious that, as such, he is the condition, that is the supporter, of the world and all objective existence; for this now shows itself as dependent upon his existence. Thus he draws nature into himself, so that he sees it to be merely an accident of his own being. But how shall he who feels this, regard himself as absolutely transitory, in contrast to imperishable nature? Such a man will rather be filled with the consciousness, which the Upanishad of the Veda expresses: *Hæ omnes creaturæ in totum ego sum, et præter me aliud ens non est* (*Oupnek'hat*, i. 122). 48 §35. In order to gain a deeper insight into the nature of the world, it is absolutely necessary that we should learn to distinguish the will as thing-in-itself from its adequate objectivity, and also the different grades in which this appears more and more distinctly and fully, i.e., the Ideas themselves, from the merely phenomenal existence of these Ideas in the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, the restricted method of knowledge of the individual.⁸⁶”

Part of the important benefit from reading Schopenhauer’s theory of the Will is his introduction into the idea of a will to resistance, which will be further essential to introduce the concept of play-element in various types of bodily activities that we would call nowadays sports, by answering from the perspective of history of philosophy to the *aporia* of sport and walking not fitting the research excellence. Let’s look into the possible objecting that a promenade on the Lac of Geneva and the

⁸⁶ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World As Will And Idea*, Vol. 1, p. 242

mirroring of the mountain in the water has no deep conceptual relevance.

Walking Not Fitting the Research Excellence Framework

In a short appendices to her review of a recent attempt of drafting a philosophy of walking (Gros, 2014)⁸⁷, L. Coupe proposes a fiction, to imagine the philosophy of walking “as if” it was addressing “fashionable issues” such as issues around innovation and impact. Are wise ideas on walking such as those great Ancient and Modern philosophers have attempted to transmit us, and as compiled by Gros, really proposing game-changing angle on the topic? If there is no doubt that we all should walk on daily basis, and that getting to the country side of a hike is good for us, celebrating the act of walking, as Coupe says rightly, doesn’t offer a way to understand the relevance of a written contribution on the subject. What is so impact relevant about walking? Defining walking in conceptual way might not reach the concrete impact of a research on concrete social problems such as, e.g. concrete current issues in the field of education and research as the prevention of plagiarism, for example, or deep systemic contemporary issues as the human impact on the environment, global disarmament and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

It is both reasonable and important to get to know the environment in order to witness something valuable beside the general crisis related to climate deregulation. Is a witness, namely a third person view on a

⁸⁷ Laurence Coupe, “Times Higher Education”, 10 April 2014, Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, Verso, 2014. Coupe’s research on the overlap between mythology and ecology, reimagining the Earth “recovering the sense of its sacredness” should be mentioned, in particular the Ch. “Earth” in: Coupe, L. *Myth*, London & New York: Routledge, 2nd revised Ed. 2009.

subject the best experience of it, if we want to convince about engaging in values?

Claiming a dialogue across cultures is interesting and urgent for global security and peace, this claim can only be done by real ambassadors of intercultural dialogue in practice. In the following text we shall apply this maxim. As we shall see walking, even in difficult conditions becomes a distinctively nature sport activity, distinct from taking a few minutes of exercise or a traditional contemplative walk in the nature *à la Rousseau*. Richard Schacht defines sport etymologically as deriving from “disporting”, being carried away, diverted: the activity aiming at overcome the sadness of existence by some sort of exercise based detour with Montaigne or diversion, thus a kind of amusement. If sport is a kind of activity which does not involve any useful end and which is a discharge of energy, for the sole end and need of working out, it might have only an indirect end, learning some basic motor and locomotor function, necessary for the development of the subject.

As we shall see, although this is partly true for sport as game in the sense related to the psychical and physiological development of the subject, some sports are constituting special categories of sport activities. Special technical skills are needed to assess natural risks as in sailing (wind surfing, kiteboarding, foiling, wing foiling, wave riding surf, ski touring, free style ski, base jumping, diving, rock climbing, ice climbing, cave diving (speleology), etc.). Is sport “a simple fact of civilization” as Huizinga has thought: an autonomous expression of some “agonal drive”, which does not have a clear function in any collective societal collaboration?

In some case, performance is primarily an issue of individual security, as adapting the level of skills to the level of risks. It is not about sensation. By contrast, adventurous sport could be seen as a

finality in itself⁸⁸. The aesthetical category is also relevant in the context of an interest for the wilderness, as a path for a more authentic self-knowledge.

A way of including walking into both sport and artworks is by demanding how are some play-element necessary for learning exploration skills. Perhaps the creative factor comes from high artistic self-realization. Is the violinist playing on a high artistic level, as we could say the priest in the accomplishment of the religious rituals? They are artists of the highest kinds, interpreting the sacredness as a particular type of seriousness of play. First as Hunzinger has brilliantly defined, the very essence of the play element should be expressing human freedom “vis-à-vis both nature and morality” (ibid., 7-8). Play, like beauty in nature and art, to which it is closely related, is disinterested, distinct from ordinary life, “it contains its own course and meaning” and presents itself as an “intermezzo, an interlude in our daily lives” (ibid., 9). Playing is “non-serious” in the sense that it is not characterized by our daily concern for food, shelter, and everything else fragile beings like us need in order to survive. Play takes place “outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life” (ibid., 26).

In order to be serious in a particular sense the play element needs to be beyond the profane seriousness:

⁸⁸ We think at the philosopher F. Nietzsche and his injunction to live dangerously: “The secret for harvesting from the existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously!” Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science*, transl. W. Kaufmann, New York, Vintage, p. 228. See for this reference and the nexus of adventurous sport and nature from the point of view of the affective life. Houge Mackenzie, S. and Brymer, E. (2018): “Conceptualising adventurous nature sport. A positive psychology perspective.” *Annals of Leisure Research*, DOI: 10.1080/11745398.2018.1483733.

However, this does not exclude the fact that the activity of playing requires total devotion from the player. Playing is not merely “fun”, but earnest, even “holy earnest” (ibid., 23). For Huizinga, this is not (merely) a figurative expression: “In all its higher forms the latter [human play] at any rate always belongs to the sphere of festival and ritual – the sacred sphere” (ibid., 9). In order to distinguish this kind of intrinsic, sacred earnestness from profane seriousness we might call it sacred seriousness (on the relation between spirituality and play)⁸⁹.

Artwork is often considered as entailing some imitation, improvisation or taking some joyful freedom with former plans and written conventions, as a philharmonic conductor plays in quickly combining different human interactions. But if we focus on a less sophisticated play, we can emphasize the relation to the wilderness, present in many sport activities and in walking in the natural environment.

How better promoting the crucial value of our mountains, rivers and forest than by being at the same time the creator and the creation of the beauty, which has the earth as place of performance? This is possible in some particular conditions, where the individual is reaching very exclusive encounters with the world (observing stones, wild animals and meteorological phenomena), as overcoming his own limits in being exposed to the dangers of the world outside there.

Alpine ascent on ice and immaculate snow fields combines perfectly on the one hand technical preparation needed for security and progression on icy environment and the breathtaking beauty of the

⁸⁹ Frissen, Valerie, Lammes, Sybille, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens (2015): “Homo ludens 2.0: Play, media, and identity” in: *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, Edited by Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 13.

mountain, covered by snow, a momentum of aesthetical contemplation and gratitude. Where no single track of human presence is visible, in the virgin snow across newly formed natural shapes in winter, the human being is placed in front of the unknown, it is an invitation for adventure. This adventure element is well incarnated in alpine guides, but guides are not only adventurous minds they are also responsible group leaders, moved by the passion of the play-element of mountain walking and sports. Other sports combine the mastering of technical skills with the beauty of an artwork such as the imaginary fighting of kata, a Japanese martial tradition. This art is supposedly carried out in secret, where elaborate techniques could only be passed through “physical dances fighting imaginary assailants”, “a memory tool that helped masters pass down the traditions to the next generations.”

All forms of sport activities realize at a certain degree of excellence, and many lead as we see in the last examples to the idea of a group activity, which entails caring for the security of the group in the first place. Let's come back to the play element present in sports in order to understand more precisely different concepts which give either an overall impression of the whole or give a combination of very different aspects under the same abstract denomination of “play-element”. We shall look as well into the tension between the need for responsible behavior under the heading “Playing not fitting the ethical excellence framework”, below. In a delimited set of critical observations, we would revise possible objections against the value of the play-element in sports. In particular, we may pay attention to these objections as they might lead us to powerful objections against considering play seriously and spreading this framework of thinking on the fields of education and cross-cultural dialogue. Finally, we shall ask whether playing in the nature impacts positively the environment by reenchanting it or if, on the contrary, it does not add new risks to ecological preservation.

Let's unfold the first proposed analogy and see how walking is engaging us in a playful way, which in turn may open wide further social functions. The Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga has first demonstrated, that the concept culture, as a type of social category has an originally play-element⁹⁰, very different from only seeing among cultural life tokens some playful elements in culture. The aim of Huizinga is not less than totally reframing "Western Civilization Sub Specie Ludi", and even comparing as global anthropologist various world views globally, against a prima facie view that the word and very notion of the game or the play-element could be related to a rather abstract notion, according to which ordinary language brings puzzling results.

Huizinga has well observed that "Nobody would expect that [the ordinary language] designates, in an equal manner, using the same term, a notion absolutely identical, as it goes in all languages to designate concepts as foot or hand⁹¹." The case is not simple: in some cultures, precise terms exist for forms of play but no unique precise term for all forms of play. This observation brings two corollaries: first, language may not have the right words to say the word "play", but it does not follow that we don't have in language as we speak, in any given language, a game structure at play as Wittgenstein sees speaking a

⁹⁰ Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*. Ch. 3, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. For a good synthesis in the German reception of the value of the play-element see: Jörg Neuenfeld: *Alles ist Spiel. Zur Geschichte der Auseinandersetzung mit einer Utopie der Moderne*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2005. Also: Sandl, Marcus (2014). *Homo ludens: Überlegungen zur historischen Anthropologie des Spiels*. IASLonline, 39(2):404-421. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl-2014-0022>; ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-100971>

⁹¹ Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens*, "Conceptions and expression of the notion of play in the language", Ch. 2, pp. 57-8. Our translation based on the French version: Gallimard, 1951.

language. Second, there is a far more critical approach, also related to the abstract character of the notion play, a view intending not to subordinate all sorts of plays to the competitive general category with R. Cailloix. It shows more than one would expect from the view expressed by Huizinga, the further categories: A1) *agon*: competition, A2) *alea*: chance, A3) *mimicry*: simulation, A4) *ilinx*: vertigo. B1) *ludus*: controlled play, B2) *paideia*: improvisation⁹². C1) *jocus*: the joke, or *joci* the amusements⁹³. Let's give an example of the combination of A3 and B1, the child can play to do as if, an imaginary situation was real, as if he was flying, running down a hill. A1) combined with B1) would correspond to mental or physical activities as a social practice, where there is observance of rules and where the joy is proportionate to the level of difficulty or constraint accepted by the competitors, often in order to gain social prestige. A2) and B2) relate to intellectual games more than physical ones, and where the combination of multiple factors and the computational power is important as for language games, playing cards, chess, etc.

We see from these few analyses of the concept of game that there are obvious reasons for considering the play as important, despite not considered as a serious pursuit. The playful attribute of any activity displays a dynamical overall impression, a changeability factor, and games are opening the intelligence and all models of explanation,

⁹² Cailloix puts already in his abstract in light the strongly contradictory elements embedded by a seemingly singular type of activity: "indeed, the game is both serious and frivolous, subject to convention and liberated by fantasy". Caillois, Roger (Dir.) : « Jeux et sports » in *Encyclopédies de la Pléiade*, No. 23, Paris : Éd. Gallimard. Also: Ehrmann, Jacques, Cathy Lewis, and Phil Lewis. "Homo Ludens Revisited." *Yale French Studies*, no. 41 (1968): 31–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2929664>.

⁹³ « Jeu », *Vocabulaire de la philosophie et des sciences humaines*, edited by L.-M. Morfaux, Paris : Armand Colin, 1980, 185-6.

instead of closing them into narrow system thinking. This is very important as it shows suddenly that an activity considered by many as not so serious, becomes a new benchmark of credibility for the human mind⁹⁴.

We understand it, playing can be a supra biological level of socially interacting, which is not necessarily proper to humans, but which gives a level of dignity to the creatures involved with it, and which cannot be reduced only to the satisfaction related to its various manifestations.

Walking in large inner spaces (as in monasteries, libraries, university buildings, in conference events, etc.) or outside in towns (as Kierkegaard

⁹⁴ Leibniz writes about the credibility of human mind, in his *Nouveaux Essais*, that “human mind” should be recognized as ‘paraissant mieux dans les jeux’ than in more serious pursuits’ (*New Essays*, Part IV, Ch. 16, p.466) Leibniz envisaged ‘a comprehensive study of games, dealt with mathematically’: first ‘all the games which rely on numbers’; next, ‘the games which also involve position, such as backgammon, checkers and especially chess’; and after them ‘the games which involve motion, such as billiards and tennis’. “What would be the point of this?” you ask. I reply: to perfect the art of discovery’. *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Ed. C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin, 1875-90, III, p. 667-8. Leibniz, G.W.: *New Essays on Human Understanding* Edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy) 2nd ed., 1996. Completing the line of the productivity of games, as spiritual phenomenon, Wittgenstein develops the idea of a compatibility of the possibility to refer to an autonomous system, internal to the practice of a game (including language, mathematics, etc.) and the possibility of a grounding outside of itself. Let’s think at things we say to one another, which should follow rules but which are also true or not true, depending on how things are in the real world, therefor also tied to the real world not only to the rules of chess of a given language, or a universal grammar of all languages. Games should on the other side keep the characteristic of being a world of things where in some ways nothing impinges on this world from the outside. Schwyzer, Hubert, “Autonomy”, in: *Wittgenstein A Critical Reader*, Ed. By Hans-Johann Glock, Oxford: Blackwell, Ch. 14, 2001, p. 295.

was used to assign himself adventurous walks in town), or in the wilderness, etc.

The positive appeal of the natural environment brings other values, “beauty matters to inspire respect” (Girardin, 2020). Not only playing matters, our environment is so magical and unique that the beauty of oceans, the land and the air can be an important factor bringing to our imagination the full capacity to stand-up for the prevention of the environment⁹⁵, Beauty can open our mind and help us reach a better balance in our life.

Playing Not Fitting the Ethical Excellence Framework?

Before carrying on with play, as central element in walking and sport, let us examine some objections against play.

- It is in the relationship between the baby and its primary caregiver, that the early human self develops as healthy and balanced whole. The first discovery of playing for the little child is observed as directly related to a process of compensation: in order to overcome the disturbing and inexplicable absence of the mother, the child invents ways of playing and eventually creates words and discovers language (as shown by Sigmund Freud’s “Game of the Wooden Reel”⁹⁶). By responding in a welcoming and reassuring way to the baby’s spontaneous feelings, expressions, and initiatives in all

⁹⁵ Girardin, Benoît (2019): “Beauty matters to inspire respect. A foundation stone for ethics” in *Blue Ethics*, Eds. By Girardin, B. and Fiechter-Wiedemann, E. Ch. 30, Globethics.net Praxis No. 13, p.223.

⁹⁶ Pascale Tollance, « Child’s Play? Graham Swift’s Shuttlecock and Freud’s Game of the Wooden Reel », *Études britanniques contemporaines* [En ligne], 41 | 2011, mis en ligne le 29 juin 2015, consulté le 26 octobre 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/2342>; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2342>

circumstances, in an invariable way, the child doesn't need to think too much about the maintenance of his true self, and create ways of overcoming the absence of the mother.

- Playing might refer to the capacity for being, instead of the capacity of doing. The playful element might be seen as the ability to feel genuinely alive inside. What if this capacity is kept for the self, as the autistic individuals do, immersing a great part of the presence of the individual in a solitary and incomprehensible indifference? Playing needs good delimitations from inside and outside, but is it not self-contradictory to the very principle of the play?
- Playing activity, as expressed in *gambling*, can be reduced to the potential to act as a simulation, as well as a projective play out of the imitation of social roles. Playing activity as gambling, notoriously described by Fyodor M. Dostoevsky in his partly autobiographical work, implies to change constantly masks and the hope and irrational attempt to change destiny⁹⁷.
- In playing we reduce external phenomena to be in some sort of service of our dreams. There is a psychological investment, in the psychoanalysis sense, a manipulation of psychic affective energy and drives, to adapt external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling. Playing gives the illusion of “all mightiness”, which is useful if we want to give self-confidence to small children, but dangerous if the need for the illusion of all mightiness is not balanced properly. A great care for internal

⁹⁷ Koroleva studies the phenomenon of gambling basing on Dostoevsky's novel *The Gambler*. See Koroleva, K. (2021). Deep Play. “The Gambler” by Dostoevsky. *Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics*, 5(3), 117-139. <https://doi.org/10.17323/2587-8719-2021-3-117-139>

needs and a sense of the reality of one owns desires, is as important as knowing the external constraints of reality. The British pediatrician Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971) distinguishes *the game* organized socially from *playing*, a more essential activity which is an act of transforming oneself into “a creator”, it is the invention of an individual which allows “an infinity of variations”, whereas games as socially limited. Games limited to the aim of education are as well considered as much more limited than play⁹⁸. Reciprocally, lack of feeling of that one is being creatively affecting the social environment with an activity involving a play-element, may lead to antisocial behavior, and retreat into delinquency. The institutional responses might also be mirroring the same deficit, such as when corporal punishment was seen as “action-reaction” type of education strategy⁹⁹.

- The playful creative element involves a permanent process of erasure, which makes every object available for a new purpose—a process shared poetic creation and humor.

⁹⁸ Winnicott, Donald W. "Playing: A Theoretical Statement." In *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott: Volume 8, 1967 - 1968*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016-10. <https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780190271404.001.0001/med-9780190271404-chapter-53>. Bailly, Rémi. « Le jeu dans l'œuvre de D.W. Winnicott », *Enfances & Psy*, vol. no15, no. 3, 2001, pp. 41-45.

⁹⁹ *The Chorus* (French: *Les Choristes*) is a 2004 French musical drama film directed by Christophe Barratier, which turns a model of education, without any artistic and musical play-element into a great comic satire. It shows how dangerous education becomes, when the hidden rules of the game, around the overarching principle of simplistic retribution of wrongs, replaces a collective play and musical transcendence.

- Rules of a game can be kept hidden and no longer shared. They can be constantly redefined by the person who silently proclaims them. Non-transparent games are often used to deprive other from power. Even a harmless retreat into inauthenticity is morally questionable. Is there a room for play when the mask cannot be teared away, in order to see the face of others and have true reciprocal empathy based communications?
- Mimetic play as imitation without reasons can spread violence (R. Girard). Desire to overcome obstacles and desires leading into obstacles, conflicts: psychology of early childhood.
- Performance is related to socialization and identity formation: risks and benefits.
- Play element may conflict with work: my work activity doesn't appear playful, is there a problem with my work? The importance of dealing with necessary/unnecessary obstacles vs. responsible leadership and agape. Is it possible to play-around in a positive sense with internet related communication technology? Play as language game: commutative power of human language and play element.

Life holds surprises, with health problems, epidemics, wars and death, I can't help but feel a little cruelly that we are lucky to witness misfortune, not to become a direct victim. The lottery aspect of life is perhaps scary, because when one plays a game of chance normally one expects to win or lose, yet in life the lottery happens without saying its name.

I love the element of play that makes life bearable, provided there is a lightness and innocence associated with a beauty of life and the world.

When reality turns grim, it takes moral, physical and mental resources to resist. For the moment, people may feel that they are spared, but hearing others worry can infuse a diffuse fear, an existential anguish.

What I praise in literature, philosophy and real encounters around questions of ethics and values is that these meetings are like announced feast days, because everyone wants to go beyond the original situation of existential angst. If this transcendence is done in a creative way, life is enchanted again and this enchantment and ethical hope is stronger than existential fear. Everyone wants to go beyond survival, life as a silent and unfair lottery. The impression of a change of scenery, of an endlessly renewed discovery that is offered by the true encounter, adds the tenderness and sparkling affection that is also part of life and which helps to transcend the real problems of this world, by bringing together two beings, affirming the metaphysical grounding in a principle of love.

The Philosophy of Walking vs. the Celebration of the Value of Walking

Another important objection against the value of a philosophy of the play and the value of walking is methodological and semantical. There is no problem if walking seems to be rather a first-hand experience of the natural world, and not a thinking in cutting-edge terms, provided that there is a concrete value. We find two radically opposite approaches among philosophers: the first as human being grows older is called “vespertinal” type by Thoreau, it considers taking a walk as “taking exercise”, in the sense of a daily duty, it should not exceed a moderate investment of time, but limited “as the sick take medicine at stated hours”. Kant is well known for exemplifying similar daily habit. Just before sundown, this attitude consists of getting “all the walk” that one requires “in half an hour” (ibid.). Reason being that the ability to stay active along indoor occupations grows with age and has to do with

temperament. Appreciating the beauty of an architecture which forever stands out through the window, with calm and philosophy is very different from barely not standing anymore to stay confined to one office the whole day, sitting there, in a power of endurance, “with crossed legs, - as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon” (ibid.).

On the contrary there could be a voluntary cultivation of a second type of attitude, that of “the camel”, a beast which “ruminates when walking” (ibid). As we may notice, the image of the camel does not need to be isolated from a larger process. Put in dialogue with the image of the lion and the little child, as later with Nietzsche, the camel is part of an interpretation of an inner transformation of the human being, which ultimately may aim at an aesthetical ideal, that of an “apotheosis of innocence” (Heller, 1973¹⁰⁰).

In his work on the walk Thoreau does not aim at a radical transformation of values, and he certainly has no intention to refer to the metaphysic of the art, as Schopenhauer may have inspired Nietzsche. Interestingly, the American essayist is more interested by a distance towards over-civilization *à la Rousseau*, and his immersion in nature Emerson’s recipe. “It is as if a thicker cuticle could grow, a roughness of character”, “as severe manual labor robs the hands of some of their delicacy of touch. So staying in the house, on the other hand may produce a softness and smoothness, not to say thinness of skin”. (ibid.). “Perhaps we should be more susceptible to some influences important to our intellectual and moral growth”. In this second type of proactive engagement with walking, we can either naturally go to the woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or a mall?” Some

¹⁰⁰ Heller, Erich, “Zarathustra’s Three Metamorphoses: Facets of Nietzsche’s Intellectual Biography and the Apotheosis of Innocence.” *Salmagundi*, no. 21 (1973): 63–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40547347>.

tried to import the woods to themselves, since they did not go to the woods.” “They planted groves and walks of Platanes”, where “they took *subdiales ambulationes* in porticos open to the air.” Here we touch upon the very idea of walking with the earth, the title of this book volume, if it is of no use to direct our steps to the woods, because they do not carry us thither, then we better call waking stepping in a garden, or even just hanging out in shopping mall. Thoreau nicely shows that we should be “alarmed” when it happens that [we] have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit.” We need “to shake off” the village, the thought of some work running in our head, and we are “not where our body is”, we are “out of our senses”. “What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?”¹⁰¹. We first need to make sure that our innocent activity is indeed harmless.

Walking and Harming the Earth

Walking can present serious risks or harmful-conditions in limited situations, which spread in modern society very quickly, and become important risks. As possible answer to the increase over the years of persons who are overweight, in obesity or in extreme obesity (73% of US citizens over 20 years old enter overall such criteria), physical activity has increased in the same proportions. As we like doing good things with friends, walking and exercising in large groups has become a new trend. Let’s think about marathon running, or running event in any form including over 50’000 participants, it is easy to show that caring for our health could have concrete an extremely negative environmental impact. In 2010 the New York marathon, runners find “1690 portable toilets, 40’000 PowerBars, 92’000 bottles of water [...] a total of 1’200

¹⁰¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*, Myers, and David Widger, The Project Gutenberg eBook, 1997. URL: <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1022/1022-h/1022-h.htm>>

vehicles are used during the race, 2.3 million of paper cups containing 62'372 gallon of water¹⁰²”.

Walking as a Sport and Sport as a Play

To qualify for being a game, i.e. having a minimal play-element as activity, waking (or mountain ascent) needs to meet three conditions. First, there should be “a goal that can be understood and achieved outside the game itself” as Hurka explains. This condition is simple but important, as we shall see, the ultimate desire which drives the first inspiration to participate in an activity has to be of some sort, - usually a pleasing perspective, and different from the means used to achieve that end. Take golf, for instance, as Hurka presents the issue: “a ball goes into a hole in the ground”, [...] chess where “the pieces end up in a checkmate pattern”, mountain climbing, as “you stand atop a mountain”. The finality of the activity is outside of the activity itself, which might imply sophisticated strategic route to something, the end point of the walk, which brings the activity to the end, with the intended object of the desire, the thing that is actually wanted (being together at the top of the mountain¹⁰³).

¹⁰² Sailors, Pam R., “Earth 0, Humans 1: The High Cost of Getting Healthy”, in: *Sport and the Environment: Philosophical Dimensions*, 2012, pp.71-72.

¹⁰³ We might observe some analogy between the condition of external aim in sport or chess, defined as playing a game, and sexual desire and activity. We don't want to claim that sexual desire and sexual activity should be considered as a game, but we find in Blackburn's analytic description of the sin of lust comparable views, a strong dichotomy between final aims which are exterior to the activity in question (orgasm in sex, reaching to the top, for mountain climbing). The general theory is that of considering drives and activities which aim at an ecstatic final, as orgasm in sexual desire, and for this reason it is fitting that these final aims should be wanted, “but neither is the ecstatic finale all we want, as if we could just make do with it, bypassing the rest of the performance.

Second, we need a minimal set of rules, which interestingly might entail to “forbid the most efficient means to reach its goal”, for Hurka. “In golf you can’t pick the ball up in your hand, walk down the fairway, and drop it in the hole. In chess you can’t make three moves to your opponent’s one, or move your pieces in ways that break the rules. In mountain climbing you can’t take a helicopter to the summit.”

Third, as a game an activity needs to be related to “a particular attitude”. “To play a game you must accept the restrictions its rules impose because you want to pursue the goal through the only means that the rules allow. Golfers don’t wish they could use their hands or chess players that they could move their rooks diagonally; a mountain climber would refuse a helicopter ride”. Hurka sums up as follows: “More specifically, to be playing a game you must accept the rules because they make achieving the goal more difficult and you want to meet that challenge.”

In fact, the question is do we need to necessarily see walking as a game or a sport? In fact a long tradition shows that on the contrary, walking cannot be defined with a simple set of conditions. As a consequence, ski touring which is a kind of uphill walking in the snow, could be seen as a subpart of a general philosophy of walking (as F. Gros), not as a sport. This view, along the line of Gros, sees philosophy as a proximity to great thinkers, as an itinerary or a walk in the metaphorical sense. This is about a philosophical conception of wisdom,

Nor do we only want the relief that follows the ecstatic finale, or the state of having been through it. I might not want to go to the dentist, but nevertheless want to enjoy the relief of having been to the dentist. I might be going to enjoy having been to the opera much more than I will enjoy enduring the opera. But this is because the processes are regarded as in themselves unpleasant, whereas [two persons who want sex] are anticipating nothing but pleasure.” Blackburn, *S. Lust, The Seven Deadly Sins*, Oxford, UP, p.15.

in the way walking on a path is a proximity to a surrounding landscape, not a straight relation between two points as travelling on a road, wisdom seeking is to technical science what walking is to travelling.

Kundera explains on this line that we have a living experience of a walk, as we move through inspiring mountain views which makes the overall experience of the walk very different from just moving from one point to the other. Walking is not having in the background some sort of fixed image of a mountain. On the contrary, walking needs in order to be experienced something very different from the notion of a transition, from point to point, with minimal interaction with the context of a mountain.

Considered as kind of sport, touring ski can still fulfil partly what makes out of any type of physical activity a sport, and before being a sport a kind of game. Being in the proximity of great wisdom could be done by walking, not necessarily sitting in a library. As Hurka points out, mountain ascent is a particular game and since “people around the world spent over \$109bn (£83m) on video games in 2017. They also spent billions of hours playing video games, and similar amounts of time playing or watching football, Scrabble, golf, and more.” Therefore we may like walking in the Alps because “We like games¹⁰⁴”, this doesn’t contradict praising surrounding landscape and being in the proximity of interesting persons and virtuous attitudes.

In *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Bernard Suits¹⁰⁵ devises a thought experiment using the metaphor of Aesop’s

¹⁰⁴ Hurka, Thomas, “From golf to Grand Theft Auto, why do we love playing games?”, *New Statesman*, 4 March 2019 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/2019/03/golf-grand-theft-auto-why-do-we-love-playing-games>>

¹⁰⁵ For some of B. Suits’ widely read articles on games and sport, in sport studies, as well as articles on Suits, see: The International Association for the Philosophy of Sport: <http://iaps.net/resources/suits/>

Grasshopper to grasp a concept of good life as being involved in a utopian sport activity of game playing which adds some conceptual thickness to what walking and ski touring might involve with regards to an ethical dimension of life, very different from what Gros envisages as a Kierkegaard related “moral style” or dimension of walking. We don’t intend to mean that no rule should ever apply to walking in the snow, but there is a wider scope where rule based activities are not displayed as main ethical deontological features, rules exist but as Kobiela point if out, the relation to ends in games, players’ attitudes and their limitative nature, as a whole place sport activities a following constitutive rules in a different way from technical activities or not-games type of ludic activities (Kobiela, 2018). As part of a lusory reason, backcountry skiing could exemplify some “lusory attitude that players have to adopt” in order to step into the utopic ideal Bernard Suits proposes, which revises in a positive manner the well-known symbol of the Grasshopper, becoming thus a radical utopian paradigm of an “voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles”, as we find in uphill mountain efforts.

“Sport is an extra-ordinary, unnecessary, rule-based, competitive, skill-based physical activity or practice where there is cooperation to fulfil the prelusory goal of having a competition, where mere sport participants endure or tolerate the implementation of a sport’s constitutive rules, whereas sport practitioners also aim at fulfilling sport’s lusory goal of winning, minimally not losing, whichever sport competition they partake in.”

To slightly moderate this view, it seems clear that mountaineering ski has to do with some very concrete obstacles, which are not pure fruits of our imagination, but related to real risks management. If crossing a frozen snow field is “governed by rules that create unnecessary obstacles to the achievement of stated goals, [...] rules [...]

accepted for the sake of the activity they make possible”, we could argue that some other reason may as well prevail, which should not be seen as the mere overcoming of some existential threat. Mountain obstacles present particular risks and require precise technical skills in order to be manageable, as sitting on a motorcycle require knowing how to ride. Taking a road to the office on a scooter, and accepting possible risks related to this mode of transportation is very different from entering a wild area of traceless snow, including the assessment of risks as of the quality of melting snow and correlative risks of avalanche. The resistance of the obstacles and the modes of experience necessary to tackle and overcome obstacles depend on the kind of activity we are involved in. Unless I stop my motorcycle on the side of the road and take some time to reflect on where I should ride next, it is unlikely that this kind of sport exemplifies, for the reason of the fluidity related to our engagement in motorcycle driving, as in some martial arts or dance. It seems that motorcycling differs from walking in dangerous and steep contexts as this later necessarily involves a division in sequences of the activity, when facing important obstacles the person needs to stop and try again before walking as a fluid state of movement is again available (as Benovski nicely observed with regards to rock climbing, 2021 *infra.*). The possibility to divide an activity into various sequences makes out of it a puzzle, and when bodily sensation and taste are involved, a particular kind of work of art, as we shall see now.

The Touch of Fresh Snow: Ski Mountaineering and Artworks

Despite technical know-how and precise information, the skier may be connected as part of his sport activity to some sense of the beauty of the environment, which explains why he is carrying the sort of game he is playing on that particular geographical space. If this assumption is true, walking with skis in the snow is a sport which entails an inquiry

that falls within the branch of aesthetics. The usual objection against this view is that sport has to do with winning much more than with a sense of the beauty, but as it is easy to see with some mainly individual sports that are not carried out for directly competitive aims, that that is objection fails for ski mountaineering¹⁰⁶. An excursus in mountain climbing is needed in order to understand the aesthetical and bodily experience, if walking with skis may enter such category at all. To do so, walking uphill in steep environments should not be conceived as only aiming at getting to the top of something, but rather as aiming at producing “sequences of perfect movements” (Benovski, 2021). Failure or success may neither be a matter of sheer strength, as a climber on a given route might be puzzled by it at first, and may need to mobilize mental and sensory motor resources, if he doesn’t want to get stuck on ice, snow or rocks in the middle of nowhere. As Benovski argues, there are good reasons to believe “routes are puzzles – for the body and for the mind”, and climbing should be considered as “hyper-intellectual” sports (ibid., Nguyen 2017). There is a same kind of experience in choosing a route in ski alpinism, where meteorological conditions, the quality and the speed of the transformation of the snow in changing temperatures, the exposition to steep avalanche areas, the management of time of ascent and decent in poor light conditions, not to mentioning the physical resources available for the whole tour to be completed safely. Taking a mountain trail by night, gives the impression, in a very limited range of clear perception, that the whole up-hill skiing is almost essentially a tactile experience. Not only with limited vision, as by night skiing, which resembles what a speleologist may experience in the dark, ski tourers need generally to solve a whole range of questions, which may in the first place even relate to the experience of seeing some routes as impossible. Trial and error, but also the time of reflection and good

¹⁰⁶ Ziff, Paul. 1974. “A Fine Forehand.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 1: 92–109.

planning, involving an inner experience of the ski climbing in one's body and imagination, is necessary to find precise positions in steep routes and in descend mode, riding in deep snow through unknown path, outside well-prepared ski station slopes.

The proper preliminary planning of alpine tours is not sufficient although a necessary condition, in resolving some of the puzzles of middle to high mountain trails. As for rock climbing, part of the puzzle solving is fully part of the activity happening in outdoor ever changing mountain conditions, as slow motion is compatible with thinking at what we do, a part of the contemplation of the environment. When access from one compartment of the terrain to the other is through narrow paths and the skier has to do quick conversions and moves on icy surfaces, there is limited place for error, and the inner perception of the movements as well realized moves, transforms the activity of walking into an artistic sort of dance. Once the harmony is found, "you dance your way up that wall" of snow, as Nguyen says applying to rock climbing. It is often noticed by ski alpinists that the shortest route is neither the easiest nor the safest, as climbing with skis on your feet is not only about getting up to the top, but about doing it in a nice and balanced way, thinking at the energy involved and focusing on an elegant progression, not just applying brute force, to finish a route in a clean way (Benovski, 2021). If this is true, it is not only by the beauty of the natural environment that we experience artistic qualities it is literally as producers of some sort artwork, as a solitary dancer in front of this mirror, or a martial art practitioner (many techniques involve individual exercise). It could be argued that the bodily experience, which the philosopher call "proprioceptive experiences", allows to count some type of activity as artworks, given we engage with our own body in some relevant way. Do we think while moving slowly on an icy slope between natural obstacles, trying to reach a peak before snow transforms into dangerous unstable avalanche zones, that our precise movements in

the snow are possessing “representational, expressive, and formal properties”, which would qualify these gestures for being artefacts? Many examples could be found of the instructional kind, while preparing a course, which quality for being representations of the environment, as snow analysis, weather prevision or topographic information, necessary to evaluate the time needed to do a ski run. But these are not typically artworks. Are human faces and gestures, by the fact of having expressive properties, when we unroll precise movement of progression, including stage-by-stage reflective puzzle solving phases, without being works of art? Are there artefact related formal properties or only formal properties answering utilitarian purposes?

Traditionally philosophers would seek to categorize any candidate human action who would want to apply for being artwork through these three conditions, some being more on the side of representation as classic mimesis related art, other on the side of expressive qualities (baroque painting, romantic literature), formal criterion such as perception related qualities of shape or colour, or non-visual or non-auditory perception related qualities as for the beauty of mathematical theorems. The subtle non-time-sensitive qualities, when the artefact is not primary object of vision or audition, the possibility of combing this intellectual component of the experience with taste or the sense of the whole body (not just the sense of touch), challenge traditional definitions. Touch as main canal of perception in some activities in the nature may imply other perceptions from the body, in addition to visual, auditory or olfactory ones¹⁰⁷.

First, as Benovski puts it, “not having a definition of something [as rock climbing or ski mountaineering as art] does not mean that this

¹⁰⁷ These bodily perceptions called proprioception, depend at least indirectly to the sense of touch, they are “often supplemented and accompanied by the sense of touch.” Benovski, *op. cite.* p. 18.

something is inexplicable”. “Indeed, if we keep in mind the ever-evolving nature of art, [...] we simply should continuously update our understanding of what art is, and allow ourselves to be surprised from time to time when new, challenging forms of art emerge.”

Second, it seems that we are not talking about the beauty of the natural entities, which truly deserve the attribute of being objects of aesthetic contemplation (sunsets, landscapes, flowers, shadows). We think about human beings, as having interesting aesthetic properties. If this is true, we would need to explain how far human intention and intervention take place in the process of creation of an artwork. We need to understand what makes out of the human being the artistic value, including the perception of a desire for overcoming an obstacle, a desire that we cannot hear as the piano player plays music. The desire to overcome an obstacle plays an essential role in sport. It is true that it plays a larger role in artistic activities and eventually can be recognized as a proto-moral principle?

Walking as Overcoming. The “Earthly Positive Eudemonistic Moral” of the Artistic Play

If the main common ground of the play element in sport is overcoming of obstacles, a moral psychological analysis of the motive and the aim can help us to understand the universal importance of sport and artistic creation in human life, as “proto-ethical” ground for morals¹⁰⁸. Schopenhauerian philosophy, which has been seen as some kind of irrational romantic eccentric thinking by scientific and analytic philosophers, gives us a precious psychological key, which is not at all related to a romantic praise of pessimism, *Weltschmerz* and a philosophy

¹⁰⁸ Von Hartmann, Karl Robert Eduard (1879): *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewußtseins. Prolegomena Zu Jeder Künftigen Ethik*. Berlin: Dunker.

of despair¹⁰⁹. The expression of “earthly positive eudemonistic moral” can be found in von Hartmann’s deep and extensive work on a hierarchical typography (or axiology) of ethical principles¹¹⁰.

The nature of desire and the paradox of a philosophy of the will, is as Reginster has showed twofold¹¹¹. The will, the tendencies (Ger. *streben, neigen*) or unconscious drives at work are oriented towards liberation as a possible aim of practical philosophy (Hedonism of Cyrenaic philosophers, Epicureans, Eudemonism of Aristotle and Plato, Eudemonism of Spinoza). From this first point of view, the aim of the will into suffering as resistance to satisfaction ends up with “a quite strange view” (Register, p. 133). It is though not at all ridiculous to consider overcoming of obstacles as an important aim in many concrete types of plays and in particular sports. Therefor a second view, which is based on the pessimist perspective of Schopenhauer and which would say that human beings are not seeking pleasure and avoid displeasure but to overcome obstacles become clearer. Nietzsche, who builds on Schopenhauer’s thinking may conclude:

“what human beings want, what every smallest organism wants, is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need something that opposes it – Displeasure, as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact [...]; human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it¹¹²”.

¹⁰⁹ A very different trend and recent rediscovery of the value of the so-called “German pessimistic philosophy”: Beiser, Frederick C. (2018): *Weltschmerz. Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900*. See Ch. 7 on Hartmann. Oxford: UP.

¹¹⁰ Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewußtseins*, First Part.

¹¹¹ Reginster, B. *The Affirmation of Life*, 2006, 133.

¹¹² Nietzsche, F. *The Will to Power*, 702.

The question remains if we are searching for obstacles, why should our view be “earthly eudemonistical”, as von Hartmann categorizes artistic activity in his axiology? If we are not searching for pleasure or joy but on the contrary, need to overcome obstacles and seek resistance, then lose sight with the *summum bonum*, the latest and most prominent end in our hierarchy of values: joy in life for eudemonist philosophers.

There cannot be resistance without *a desire for desire*, as Reginster shows very well, reaffirming the value of overcoming obstacles for life, but there cannot be desire for desire without a desire revealed in the first place, this first desire is also a measure of some sort, it could be the love of a given person (the invocation of an inspiring Muse as in Greek mythology¹¹³). It needs to be a common ideal, as first target of the whole process of creation and art. The revelation (a kind of religious epiphany as with Greek poetry), was traditionally understood as a language of the Muses, “a voice that the Muses literally ‘breathed’ into” the artist¹¹⁴. We see that a metaphysic of artistic creation can be seen as a positive ethics aiming at the joy of finding the common measure and breath of artistic production, including new ways of conceiving art as a sport.

Skiing as Dancing, from Contemplation to Active Participation to the Beauty of Corporal Movements

There are moral psychological reasons to think that many sports need to incorporate resistance and overcoming of obstacles, all the previous authors agree on this matter. As previously presented, in order to recognize that climbing in a mountain on skis is not only a sport or a

¹¹³ Greek noun *mousa*, *mousai*, the adjective *mousike* refer to the goddesses of creativity and the arts. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 31.

¹¹⁴ Nagy, Gregory (2010): “Language and Meter”, in: *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, E. J. Bakker (Ed.), Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, 370-387.

play but as well a set of movement which as for dance or karate katas, makes out of the whole a kind of art, we need to rely on further reasons beyond the analogy between recognized major arts and sports which should not be seen as artistic activities.

Ski mountaineering is conventionally or institutionally not seen as an art but as a sport. This first impression should not repeal us from seeing some aspects of this sport as artistic, given the psychological moral logic described above, and, as Benovski rightly suggests for rock climbing, other theorists for uphill running, there is no consistency issue in having both aspects. Martial artists are often divided between those explicitly aiming at preparing the practitioner to respond to life threatening risks in suburban contexts, without any view for the beauty of martial art, and many others who attach value to the more contemplative approach. A higher esteem for artistic deconstruction of movements can be based on Asian medicine, the Asian philosophy of health or the very aim of teaching traditional technics as artistic and creative process.

In the following section we attempt to answer to the more fundamental questions of what kind of object is a work of art, namely to show the very nature of artistic work. This ontological and epistemological approach must include, as preliminary stage of our understanding, a better specification of the mode of presence of an aesthetical object.

On way of doing this sort of basic enquiry is to refer to and expand the category of the figuration, which we found in the third person point of view of a spectator (not the creator of the work of art).

Second, the need to come closer to the reflection needed in this experience, where we think about the aesthetical object among other objects. The subject first realizes that the model of an outstanding dancer, Rudolf Noureev, or the extraordinary mountain climber: Ueli

Steck, are very different from us as subject watching their movements. Nobody would step himself on the scene of a theater, as we know what is being experienced is a fiction, and we neutralize mentally, or put into brackets the subject, us who are watching the theater play. By doing so, we start a quest for the meaning of what we witness.

A third aspect is important in order to show what type of aesthetical experience dance or mountaineering ski should have in common, distinct from the purely performance driven aim as for ex. swimming or long distance running. In ice-skating competitions, the criterion of the artistic value of the performance is explicitly recognized and valued. In some case, it might be difficult to decide whether an activity should only be performance driven, as jumping from a ten meter platform, where performance is not about force but more about precision, as Olympic champion Matthew Mitchamand describes diving as sport. If the performance in this case is represented by the difficulty of the dive, which multiplies the aesthetical impression, then diving is partly about creating a work of art, transmitting the impression of “not feeling gravity”, being very brief, as the movement takes only two or three seconds¹¹⁵. Diving shares with mountain activities the relation to lightness, but temporality is very different, as the tension of ascending differs radically from release of descending.

It is by the very fact of being a living work of art that sports which focus on style and aesthetical qualities of life, invite us to reflect on the value of the living, distinct from the natural life bios/zoe. Language could be seen as the model of the quality of the living being: a sentence, a discourse, a painting, a piano play, the style of a poet is very different

¹¹⁵ “Higher, faster and stronger” could be considered the mythic three pillars of the Olympic Games. As we see in some of our examples of disciplines, artistic creativity should not be a hidden non-Olympic second dimension (as the relation to the environment, human solidarity, gender fairness, etc.).

from the simple note taking of the clerk, or the minutes taking in an enterprise meeting. Objects seem to be animated for a child, and in the case of dance or rock climbing the visible is part of what is animated but knowing that not all objects are in movement and focusing on the movement. Mikel Dufrenne shows the importance of living movement in dance, and we can compare puppets with dancers in order to grasp the lack of intentional spiritual qualities in the former. The expressivity of dance, as for, Chi Gong, ice skating or ski mountaineering is a particular innocence and lightness which is called grace. It is life without the burden of worries. Grace, in slow progression uphill on snow, is as dance for Mikel Dufrenne¹¹⁶, it has the most central and specific aesthetical quality of life. For Erwin Strauss landscape is for the sight, what dance is for life, a symbolical space, different from a usual space, where utility and dependency are present. A mountain can be a space of experience of natural beauty as where anarchists might think to live, in order to better hide from the state authorities. Aesthetical qualities can be closely related to function related qualities as when a climber needs to adjust his movements to the natural convex inclination of the rocks, and avoid slippery forms of inclination, present on the other side of the mountain¹¹⁷. The natural object, the quality of the snow or the rock differ from the aesthetical quality of the style of ascent by the absence of neutralization of the object, in case of a purely instrumental approach. On the contrary, grace in the rhythm of the progression of ski climbers needs a difference of attitude, which is not only proper to the playing, and delimited by the conditions of that play, but as a contingency driven attitude, without signification as radical alterity, without any finality.

¹¹⁶ Dufrenne, Mikel, (1989): *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, trans. by Edward S. Casey, 1st publ. in 1953, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

¹¹⁷ First ascent of the Matterhorn succeeded from the Swiss side, and not from the Italian side because of the different inclination of the rock on both sides.

Grace in dance as in martial art or mountaineering is allowing to perceive an autonomy of the expression, as the truth of the perceived object for Merleau-Ponty, it puts away a cognitive and practical orientation but replaces it by a new meaning as movement in the whole set of movements done by the rock climber. This replacement of the functional expression resembles that operated by the painter who chooses a color in the whole set of colors in a painting, or a shape in the whole set of possible existing shapes.

Walking with Heaven: Style, Soft Power and Culture

In some countries as Tibet or Switzerland, mountains attract deep symbolic archetypes, which are universal but also contextually formed, as cultural expression of a collective, what we also call soft power.

Not only collective but also individual figures stand out in History and could be mentioned in a book around walking with the earth such as the founder of Tibetology: Körösi Csoma Sándor. Körösi shows that walking can be attached to scholarly inspiration and the living example of walking on foot, through Europe to reach Central Asia, up into the highest mountains in Tibet is a unique example¹¹⁸.

At a time when Yoga and Western Buddhism is widely diffused in enterprises, meditation centers, neurological experimentation on the value of compassion and meditation for health and its direct impact on the brain, we see on YouTube the French Tibetan monk Mathieu Ricard, launching his *Carnets d'un moine errant* (Allary: 764pp.). What is the relation between the experience of spirituality and Eastern Asian languages and cultures in a Buddhist monastery in the 18th Century, where winter season extends eight months long, and where there is not

¹¹⁸ Alexander Csoma de Koros was declared as a Bodhisattva (Buddhist Saint) in 1933 in Japan.

heat, which seems a deep sign of some ludic passion for research, which transcends all empirical contingencies, and the soft power of Buddhism and East Asian culture which we all know?

This leads us to reflections on the quality of the soft power of a group of individuals or a large community in our present time. This analysis is intended to be comparative with other historical periods, which already valued the soft power of different ways of living. It is worth noting a possible gap, between the symbolic figure of some authority, and the possible message that the symbol could take on, to launch a particular way of life. Without this often very comical shift, and the ridiculousness of which should be transparently accepted, there is no playful element meeting an excellency framework of quality. At best, there remains the semblance of play which is always childish. Without good play, there is no good culture, that is to say no culture based on jousting, competition and public comparison, and no sporting desire for fair play to prevail over the opponent!

In the example of Ricard, one sees the ludic gap between writing an autobiographic work of art, the pragmatic intelligence of promoting the work in the very select Société de Lecture of Geneva with expert journalists, and the ideal of life chosen by the person, who has committed to a Buddhist simple way of life. Let's come back to the importance of this seemingly point of detail.

In the advent of all forms of collective life, a playful element is crucially important as Hunzinger shows (chap. 11). "Selling a way of life", as marketing managers and communication experts might say, can be done as finding out intelligent popular cultures, as dynamical forms and distinctive types of behaviours. All entail some sort of proto ethics of the lifestyles (here what matters is much more taste, popular outlook, fashion, etc. than being a true representative of whatever a high form of

culture). This ludic emulation could even be seen as preceding cultures as impulsion for social life. On the other hand, once a culture is historically constituted, communities, nations or subcontinents can act gradually as political great global powers with similar symbolic vehicles, but it is not “as a living fruit, separated from the mother plant” from which it originated, following Hunzinger (ibid). On the contrary, culture as a soft power “deploys itself in the playful element and as a playful element”. From a political realist point of view soft power, as an elaborate capacity to communicate about a model of excellence, is as important as being recognized as a pole of high historical achievement.

Selling a culture abroad is crucial, all political great powers recognize it across the planet at all times. Let's see some historical examples in European history since the Middle Age.

The ideal of courtly love in the 12th century, where "a whole elite" conforms to "a mannered ideal of life and love" (ibid.) is a set of signs distinctive for that period. In general we could note that the very notion of the style and of fashion entails as such a play element, as the baroque style of the 17th Century will make very clear by some kind of exaggeration. Baroque is “associated with the vision of a conscious exaggeration, of something deliberately imposing, resolutely unreal”. Such as distancing from simplicity, around 1665, and from the natural and practical, "hits its climax with the wig" (ibid.). The century of the French Enlightenment of Descartes, of Port Royal, of overseas colonisation produced the wig. Until French revolution, the fashionable to wear a wig remains for a century and a half, despite being non-natural, cumbersome and poorly hygienic. It is not as a pure caprice of fashion but in a gradual stylisation related to the opposition with the natural hairs and with anything natural as imitation of the empirical reality. 18th century Romantic style suggests other ludic styles of life, they have in common a tendency for “self-transposition of artistic and

affective life into an imaginary sphere from the past” “where figures in order not to be perceived precisely were loaded with mystery” and anguish. Is 20th century's Western American way of life (blue jeans, rock & roll and driving a car) a similar chapter of a long list of ludic developments?

Compared to Chinese medicine, Indian Yoga or Swiss watchmaking we see a homogeneous conformity, which is a condition for the existence of a subculture, with collective narratives about holistic medicine, soft physical exercise or the luxury symbol of a small country's precision and exclusiveness. It is not very clear how far are these forms of culture means for accessing ludic forms of life, and human flourishing? In fact none of the symbols need to be reflecting a message, as the wig did not have any meaning but was only the occasion for exploring a new lifestyle which remained very productive of new forms. Since 19th century, the play element has undergone a process of degradation, following the Dutch historian, as communities have become “more aware of their needs and efforts” and “the spiritual and material organisation of the society became a hindrance against the manifest action of this [ludic] factor”. (ibid.) Let us remind us for the comparison that for Heraclites all human thinking entailed “an innocent” play element, which suggest the open space of a completely ludic but partially unconscious continent. On the other side, it seems that as soon as we touch the need to decide whether an action is just or unjust, true or false, of compassion and pity the very question of style and play loses its quality of being an innocent but creative force.

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HAIKU-EXPERIENCES OF WALKING WITH THE EARTH

The Natural and the Social Education of Poetry

Toyomi Iwawaki-Riebel

Introduction

Haiku is a metric verse originating in Japan and is one of the shortest poems in the world. In Japan, not only haiku but also poetry such as *waka* poetry and *renga* have been composed by all people, not to mention thinkers and poets. Even now, *haiku* is still used for Japanese language education. However, the greatest achievement of *haiku* is probably that it has lyrically expressed the culture of coexistence with others rooted in the four seasons and the nature of Japan.

Haiku is a short poem of 17 moras (5-7-5 moras) which was developed in the early modern period, and it is a rule to insert seasonal words called *kigo*. Traditionally, the theme also has a social element of travel and play. Momentary images of nature and everyday life are embodied as metaphysical poetry. *Haiku* were usually composed at banquets by minstrels but are nowadays written at home or in communities and are therefore more closely linked to human life.

In this era of globalization, many three-line poems called HAIKU are also written in various countries around the world, transcending the nature and language of Japan. The poets create a culture that cultivates a life-and-death perspective on the earth where humans and nature coexist. That is accomplished by the poets by using their own eyes and feet on the earth having the awareness of only being a traveler of the world.

In this paper, while first looking at the definition and practice of historical *haiku* such as in the works by Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), I will discuss the background of the *haiku* of travel and the sympathy for the emptiness of the world that are expressed in natural phenomena and social situations. I will examine the world view of travel in *Oi no kobumi*, in which Bashō called the *haijin* (haiku poet) *Fūrabō* (wayfarer), and in *Oku no Hosomichi*, which says that years are hundred-generation-old travelers passing through. Furthermore, I will reflect on the existence of nature such as the water, the moon, and creatures used in the *haiku* of modern poets. Thereon I will look at the historical development of *haiku* in the world.

The worldview of life and death, destruction, and generation in the Western travel poets Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Rilke may align with the worldview of *haiku* and Buddhism. On a global scale, there are differences in seasonality and natural phenomena, but the awareness of coexistence between human existence and the earth is stronger now more than ever, because all human beings are *Fūrabō* and the earth is also a planet with them. In addition, with the improvement of philosophy, science, and the expansion of our relationship with the world, we will further recognize ourselves and the earth in the universe. Lastly, I will explore the comparison of Suzuki Daisetsu T. (1870-1966) regarding the spread of Western science and the significance of nature from the perspective of (Zen) Buddhism.

Global Significance of *Haiku* Travelogue in Early Modern Japan

Drifting with Matsuo Bashō

In the sense of “Walking with Earth”, it was Matsuo Bashō in the Edo period (1603 – 1868) who established *haiku* and *haiku kikōbun* travelogues. Bashō was known as the “drifting poet”. His wandering began in 1666 with the death of his lord, Tōdō Yoshitada, who served as a *haiku* partner in his hometown of Iga Ueno. Bashō left his parents’ house to practice in a Zen temple and went to Edo (now Tōkyō) in 1672 at the age of 29. Later, Bashō was becoming famous as a *haiku* master, but he was not satisfied with the traditional humorous haiku. Around this time, Bashō sought the purity of *haiku* and turned his back on the world to try to gain peace while imitating the heavens (nature) like the philosophy of the Taoism.¹¹⁹ After his cottage called the Bashō-an was burned down due to the expansion of Edo and also the death of his mother in his hometown, he embraced the “heart of absenteeism” (Kikaku “Kareobana”)¹²⁰ and a Buddhist impermanence, so to speak. He became a spiritual Exile.

After 1684, he repeated various trips that were described in *Nozarashi kikō* (1685-86), *Oi no kobumi* (1688), and *Oku no hosomichi* (1689). The preface to *Oi no kobumi* beginning as follows,

Within the hundred bones and nine orifices of my body is a certain being; here I shall call him Fūrabō, “master Gauze in the Wind”– by which I mean a thin fabric easily torn by the wind. Since long ago this Fūrabō has loved mad verses, so much so that in the end I made them my livelihood.

¹¹⁹ Cf. AEBA Takao: *Bashō*. 2001. P. 43.

¹²⁰ Cf. NAKAMURA Shunjō: *Kaisetsu. Bashō no haifū*. 1984 (1970). P. 492.

Sometimes I grew tired of poetry and nearly cast it aside; other times I prided myself triumphing over other. In my breast a conflict raged, for which my body suffered.¹²¹

Basho is determined to make it his business to compose the *haiku* of *Fūkyō* (= *Fūga*) here not through the thoughts on nature and impermanence as an academic discipline, but through the journey he experienced with his own body.¹²² The first phrase of Bashō's travel diary expresses the determination of the traveler, who has even a sense of bodily ethics, to master the path of *haiku*, with a sense of companionship and gratitude for the early winter sasanqua flower,

A traveler –	<i>tabibito to waga na yabaren</i>
that is what I shall be called.	<i>waga na yabaren</i>
First rain showers.	<i>Hatsushigure</i>
Again, sasanqua flowers	<i>mata sazanka o</i>
for lodging, night after night.	<i>yadoyado ni shite</i> ¹²³

Bashō's impermanence stood on the spirit of affirming the present life, unlike that of the denial of reality in the Middle Ages of Japan. A single tree or blade of grass, all living things embody impermanence, and he discovered positive beauty with a pitiful heart. Returning to reality again, the unity between reality and art appears here, even though the body is secular.

¹²¹ MATSUO Bashō: *Oi no kobumi*. CARTER (Transl.) 2020. P. 49.

¹²² *Fūga* is to forget about your realistic daily life and devote yourself to literary arts and art. For several years after Basho left the city of Edo and moved to Fukagawa, he sought a new literary character for haiku, which was different from the graceful tradition of *waka* poetry. Cf. YAMASHITA Kazumi: *fūga, fūkyū*. In: *Encyclopedia of Modern Haiku*. 2008. P. 480-481.

¹²³ MATSUO Bashō: *Oi no kobumi*. CARTER (Transl.) 2020. P. 50.

The wandering of *Oku no Hosomichi* would have changed Bashō's own view of the world. In the preface, the fleetingness and wandering of life are captured in a metaphor,

The moon, the sun – these are wayfarers down the generations; so too the years are travelers that come and go. For those who bob their lives away on boats or lead horses as old age approaches, travel is daily life, travel is home. Many among the ancients died on the road, and I, too, for some years past felt the tug of winds that tatter the clouds, unable to put rambling from my mind. So it was that after a jaunt on ocean shores,¹²⁴

In the spring of 1689, Bashō (46 years old) left Edo with his disciple Kawai Sora, toured Ōu and Hokuriku, and traveled a total of 2,400km to Ise Grand Shrine. “Oku no hosomichi” is a haiku travelogue based on an about 150 day-long journey. In his life-long pilgrimage, Bashō felt the greatness of nature, touched simple humanity, saw the signs of ups and downs of life, and realized the fate of a merciful human being. Bashō was able to continue the painful journey, which had few lodgings and was dangerous along the way, and walked most of it without much pain, because Bashō had mastered the spirit of Zen Buddhist pilgrimage.¹²⁵

When the two *hajjins* stopped by Hiraizumi in Iwate prefecture, Bashō wrote, “The glory of three generations, gone in the space of a sleep. The place where the main gate stood was one *li* (ca. 4km) this side of site. Hidehira's fort was fields now, leaving only Mount Kinkei as it was.” After expressing the land, he wrote a *haiku*.

Summer Grasses:	<i>natsukusa ya</i>
all that is left to us now	<i>tsuwamonodomo ga</i>

¹²⁴ MATSUO Bashō: *Oku no hosomichi*. CARTER (Transl.) 2020. P. 97.

¹²⁵ Cf. HAGIWARA Yasuo: „Kaisetsu. *Oku no hosomichi* made no Bashō“. 1985 (*1979) P. 270.

of warrior's dreams. *Yume no ato.*¹²⁶

At Risshakuji Temple in Yamagata, which is said to be “I felt my heart being cleansed of all worldly concerns.” It suggests a moment of Buddhist enlightenment,

Such stillness! *shizukasa ya*
 The very rocks are pieced *iwa ni shimiiru*
 by cicadas' drone. *semi no oto*¹²⁷

On the Mogami River, which is depicted as “the waters were running high and were dangerous for boats”,

It gathers *samidare o*
 summer rains – flowing fast! *atsumete hayashi*
 Mogami River. *mogamigawa*¹²⁸

In Echigoji on the tanabata-day Bashō went together with his body and unconsciousness, “I suffered in the muggy heat and felt very low; then my ailment flared up and I stopped writing things down”,

Over rough seas *araumi ya*
 it stretches off to Sado – *sado ni yokotau*
 the River of Heaven. *amonogawa*¹²⁹

By visiting the grounds of *utamakura* (places that are often written about in *waka* poetry), Bashō recognized both aspects of the unchanging essence of the world and the flowing changes. He found the earth-loving thoughts of *fueki ryūkō*¹³⁰ of the *haiku*. The mind that sees life as

¹²⁶ CARTER (2020) P. 122.

¹²⁷ CARTER (2020) P. 126.

¹²⁸ CARTER (2020) P. 127.

¹²⁹ CARTER (2020) P. 136.

¹³⁰ *Fueki* means immutable, and *ryūkō* means change. According to *Kyoraishō*; *Ryūkō* that seeks newness is the essence of the *fueki* of *haiku*. The *fueki* is the

impermanent eventually leans toward the mind for the object with mercy. The emotionless *hijōshin* that means “everything is satisfied when you look at things quietly” has sublimated into a merciful heart and deepened into a beauty that adds sadness. Bashō named it *fūga no makoto*. Rather than crafting a lot of words there, *haiku* may be able to gain a state of coexistence with the earth by perceiving a *fueki ryūkō* through *ginkō* (composing poetry while strolling).

Masaoka Shiki and from the Bed of Life

In the Meiji era (1868-1912), Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) evaluated and practiced Bashō’s attitude of *fueki ryūkō*, while reinterpreting the *haijin* that were forgotten in the Edo period and leading to a new haiku reform insisting on reality-based poems by *shasei* (drawing from nature) under the influence of the naturalism in Europe in the 19th century. In *Haiku Taiyō* (1895) we read and understand the *haiku* and aesthetic sense of the four seasons using *kigo* (seasonal words),

It is arguable that those who are deep in *haiku* and poetry have naturally and precisely developed the atmosphere of the four seasons. [...] the poet should feel the beauty of the mountain-river-vegetation, and then for the first time, write about the mountain-river-vegetation. If you feel the beauty deeply, the phrase will also become beauty accordingly. If you have a deep understanding of mountain river vegetation, you will be deeply aware of the change of mountain-river-vegetation in time, that is, the feeling of four seasons.¹³¹

eternity of the value that the *haiku* should realize, and the *ryūkō* is its practice. It's not something else. It's just the name of the wind. The place where it changes is called temporary, and the thing that doesn't change is only *ryūkō*. Cf. *Fueki, ryūkō*. In: *encyclopedia of Modern Haiku*. 2008. P. 481-482.

¹³¹ MASAOKA Shiki: *Haikai Taiyō*. 1989 (*1955).

The subject who feels the beauty of the mountain-river-vegetation is the subject of *haiku* and even the subject of beauty. Shiki also defines the types of *haiku*, discusses the feeling of nature or landscape in parallel with paintings, and talks about the benefits of traveling. He is thinking of a pair of *haiku* “realism-sketch” and “fantasy” in the *haiku* learning course.

There are two types of *haiku*, fantasy and realism. Beginners usually use fantasy. When one runs out of fantasy, one must rely on realism. Realism has human resources and nature, and there is a coincidence and a cause. It is difficult to make a human resource, and it is easy to make a natural one. The accidental realism has less material, and the intent realistic depiction has more material. Therefore, exploring the natural scenery for the purpose of realism is most suitable for *haiku*. If you can make a pilgrimage for dozens of days, it’s possible. [...] ¹³²

Shiki recommends a trip in *haiku* education in this way, but in his later years, *Byōshō Rokushaku* (1902), he shifts to an impermanent perspective from the sickbed and takes a closer look at sketching,

Because sketches are a copy of nature, the tastes of sketches and sketch texts can change as the natural tastes change. Looking at the works of sketching, even if it looks a little shallow, the deeper you taste it, the more changes it has and the deeper your taste will develop. The effect of sketching is better than just imagining it. Metaphorically speaking, the one who imagines often tries to jump onto the roof and instead falls into the pond. The sketch depicts [...] something that cannot be uttered because it finds its splendor in the mundane. ¹³³

Nature changes, and the aesthetics of the images that capture it also change, thus eternal ideals in nature are fragile and difficult to realize. Inspired by paintings, Shiki must have used perspective of space and

¹³² MASAOKA Shiki: *Haikai Taiyō*. 1989 (*1955).

¹³³ MASAOKA Shiki: *Byōshō rokushaku* 45. 2004 (1998).

time, that is, in terms of the earth's history of culture. From the subjectivity of the *haijin* himself, the object is sketched in perspective, and the feeling of seeing the actual scene in front of him occurs. He develops a sketching theory that invites associations of places and times with *haiku* that "composes objective things that are reflected in the image as they are." Here is the underlying impermanence of subjectivity and objectivism, freed from idealistic perceptions and assertions. Also, in the same book *Byōshō Rokushaku* 87, it is written as Aphorism as follows,

When I put a branch of a flower on my bedside and sketch it honestly, I feel that the secret of the creation will gradually come to light.¹³⁴

A 35-year-old *haijin* who is fighting against tuberculosis feels the mystery of the earth from the perspective of the sick bedside through the sketch of a single flower. This *haiku* of his later years are not phrases of death poem, but he saw the sick self and the life and death in the flowers (August 7, 1902),

Daily routine	kusabana o
to draw flowers	egaku nikka ya
Autumn begins	<i>aki ni iru</i>
Raising my neck	<i>kubi agete</i>
I see now and then	oriori miru ya
Hagi in the garden	<i>niwa no hagi</i> ¹³⁵

¹³⁴ MASAOKA Shiki: *Byōshō rokushaku* 87. 2004 (1998).

¹³⁵https://www.city.matsuyama.ehime.jp/shisetsu/bunka/sikihaku/sikihakuriyou/shikihaiku_kensaku.files/aki.pdf No. 164 &5117. (Last accessed 30.09.2021)

Taneda Santōka and Going on an Alms Round

When considering “Haijin Walking with Earth” next to Bashō and Shiki, we cannot forget Taneda Santōka (1882-1940). Santōka got a priesthood in 1925 after several frustrations in his life. In 1926, he embarked on a journey of pilgrimage throughout Japan,

wakeitte mo wakeitte mo aoi yama

Even if I push my way, the blue mountain

hyōhyōtoshite mizu o ajiwau

I taste water aimlessly

massuguna michi de samishii

Loneliness on a straight road

*shigururu ya shinanaide iru*¹³⁶

Rain shower in late autumn, I'm not dying (all 1926)

Santōka's *haiku* style is a *free-form haiku* and is often non-seasonal. The style is also devoted to loneliness, abandoning the world of the ordinary. One of the things that influenced his *haiku* was Zen Buddhism. He respected the rhythm and walked around hills and fields and called it “Walking Zen”. His *haiku* is characterized by a simple rhythmic haiku of “Tat Tvam Asi”, which integrates the foreign object and the ego. In his diary on November 2, 1935, he wrote, “Self is nature immediately. Nature-discovery is Immediate self-discovery. Self-life, natural life. Life, a melody for life.”¹³⁷ He would say “to sing oneself through nature” between death and life, modern *haiku* must express “life emotions” and “social emotions”, but it must not be a “fragmentary record of life” or a “report of annoying incidents”. Haiku must portray

¹³⁶ TANEDA Santōka: *Santōka haikushū*. 2018. P. 38.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* P. 348.

thoughts and ideas through phenomena (natural phenomenon or personnel phenomenon). But the emotion of momentarily intaking in the natural and personnel phenomena must be expressed as a *haiku* rhythm.¹³⁸

jikan, kūkan, kono ki koko ni kareta

Time, space, this tree withered here

yuki no akarusa no shinenai karada

The undying body of the light of snow

yukiakari ware to waga shisō o egaku

Snow lamp draws me and my death

hitori tagayaseba utau nari

I sing when I plow alone.

saigo no ippiki to shite korosareru hae to shite

As a fly killed as the last one

*shi no sugata no mazamaza miete amanokawa*¹³⁹

The Milky Way to see a figure of the death clearly (all 1935)

According to the diary, Santōka also read books related to French literature and communism, and in the sense of “Walking with Earth”, we should also read Santōka’s global modern sensibilities. There is a sympathy for Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) Zaratustra in “The Fragment of life“,

Nietzsche, who screamed, “Write in blood”, wrote himself in blood. We write with sweat. Just sweat!¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Cf. Ibid. P. 332. Nikki (04.04.1935).

¹³⁹ Ibid. P. 133 f.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 435.

Nietzsche said, “Write with blood: and you will find out that blood is spirit. It is not easy to understand foreign blood: I hate the idlers who read.”¹⁴¹ Santōka recognizes that his haiku, which wanders between life and death, was written by sweat, the wandering of his life-threatening survival, in other words, that it’s not just a haiku by the idlers, that his work is the earth itself, which makes him walk lightly.

World Poetry and Haiku

First, the attitude of the *haijin*’s wanderer and coexistence with the earth can be compared to Western poets, especially romantic poets. But at about the same time as Shiki and Santōka, the meaning of Nietzsche’s wanderer and the earth related to criticism of metaphysics tradition becomes important.

Already in “Joke, cunning and revenge” Nietzsche said, “Write with your foot”. He envisions a free-spirited wanderer, pointing out nonsensical rhymes as “Poet’s vanity”, which is not real to nature or the world.¹⁴² Zarathustra says about the poet in the process of overcoming nihilism and affirmation of life and body: “Since I have known the body better [...] everything that is “immortal” is just a simile [...] The poets lie too much.”¹⁴³ It tells the falsehood of eternity as a poet’s perception of truth. “A lonely wanderer is Zarathustra, always on the move, but without a destination, even without a home”.

By eliminating “the belief in words and values and great names”, that is, by expressing the image of the moment in a poetic language, Nietzsche arrives at the conclusion “Nothing is true, everything is allowed”¹⁴⁴, which enables a deeper perspective of the wanderer’s

¹⁴¹ Friedrich NIETZSCHE: KSA Bd.4. S.48.

¹⁴² KSA Bd. 3. FW S. 359 ff.

¹⁴³ KSA Bd. 4. Za. S. 163.

¹⁴⁴ KSA Bd. 4. Za. S. 340.

perception. And with “to live on earth” and “to love the earth”, the landscape of the life is infinitely released from the epistemological point of view. *Haiku* was not yet known in Europe during Nietzsche’s time, but he develops a perspective on living in that space and time with the earth, which is also known from Bashō’s *Oku no Hosomichi*. Poetry of “transience” and “infinity” are written by all wanderers of boats floating in the sea,

For new seas
I want to go there; and I trust
Me from now on and my grip.
The sea is open, in the blue
Drives my Genoese ship.

Everything shines new and new to me
Midday sleeps in space and time -:
Only your eye – tremendous
Look at me, infinity!¹⁴⁵

The sea is where water, the source of life on earth, ends up in infinite parable. For *hajjins*, experiencing water diversity is a fundamental phenomenon, not limited to rivers, rain, fog, and the sea, and is the most favorite motivation. Water shows various ways of existence with different perspectives of space-time. In the so-called *Hyperions Schicksalslied* by Friedrich Hölderlin, the fate of the wanderer against the heavenly ones is the metaphor of “Water from cliff, water thrown to cliff”, which regards human anguish as “uncertain fate”. The third stanza of the *Schicksalslied*:

¹⁴⁵ KSA Bd.3. FW Nach neuen Meeren. S. 649.

Doch uns ist gegeben
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn;
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.¹⁴⁶

Hölderlin also wrote long poems with rivers such as *Der Rhein*, *Der Ister*, *Der Main*, and *Der Neckar* as Demigod. Is water the blood of the earth that connects the heavens and the earth? Heidegger interprets water as a basic mood in those poems as “Mittrauern mit den Strömen der heimatlichen Erde”.¹⁴⁷

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1925) is one of Germany’s earliest wandering poets who wrote *haiku* as Haï-Kaï. He wrote down his longing for the Earth = God in “Das Stunden-Buch”’s second book, “Von der Pilgerschaft” (1901): “But I want to understand you / how the earth understands you; / with my tire / matures / your kingdom.”¹⁴⁸ And the pilgrim is aware of the world of death and reincarnation.

As the earliest occidental reception of *haiku*, Rilke first sympathized with “Haï-Kaï” in 1920 and wrote both German and French. On a warm Christmas day at the time, he sent a life-and-death-conscious *haiku* to his beloved Baladine Klossowska:

Small moths tumble shuddering from the book;
they die tonight and will never know,

¹⁴⁶ Friedrich HÖLDERLIN: *Hyperion*. 1994. S.157.

¹⁴⁷ Martin HEIDEGGER: *Hölderlins Hymnen* 1980. 90 f.

¹⁴⁸ Rainer Maria RILKE: *Das stunden-Buch*. 1986 (*1955). S. 75.

that it wasn't spring.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion or the Earth from a Zen Buddhist Perspective

It is difficult, unlike other fixed verses, to have a direct relationship between global environmental issues and the method of haiku. This is because haiku is not the type of literary art that appeals loudly. However, by considering the background of the formation of haiku by the wanderers and the method of sketching, it is possible to review not only the lifestyle but also the (religious) view of life and the view of the universe. Zen Buddhist philosopher Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro (1870-1966) contrasts “the modern spirit of scientific analysis” with the drifting poet Bashō: The flaw in science is that it leaves no room for hunch, everything is laid bare and what can be seen is fully explained. Where science rules, imagination withdraws.¹⁵⁰

Suzuki later gives Bashō's haiku and Alfred Tennyson's (1809 - 1892) poem in connection with Psychoanalysis and Zen to compare the East and the West,

When I look carefully	<i>Yoku mireba</i>
I see the <i>nazuna</i> blooming	<i>Nazuna hana saku</i>
By the hedge!	<i>Kakine kana.</i> ¹⁵¹

Tennyson's poem here quoted has something very closely related to Bashō's,

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies; –

¹⁴⁹ Rainer Maria RILKE: *Widmungen*. 1986 (*1966). S. 205.

¹⁵⁰ Daisetz Teitaro SUZUKI: *Zen und die Kultur Japans*. 1941. S. 145.

¹⁵¹ D. T. SUZUKI: “Lectures on Zen Buddhism”. 1974. p.1.

hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
 Little flower – but if I could understand
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,
 I should know what God and man is.¹⁵²

Suzuki means that they both have the same elements, but the West faces nature with Intellect and the East with Feeling. In these poems, Bashō stares at the flower, Tennyson picks the flower with its roots, Bashō is silent, and Tennyson asks what are you? Bashō understands the secret of its creation without asking. The western mind is characterized by Suzuki as: „analytical, discriminative, differential, inductive, individualistic, intellectual, objective, scientific, generalizing, conceptual, schematic, impersonal, legalistic, organizing, power-wielding, self-assertive, disposed, to impose its will upon others, etc.” Against these Western traits those of the East can be characterized as: “synthetic, totalizing, integrative, nondiscriminative, deductive, nonsystematic, dogmatic, intuitive, (rather affective), nondiscrutive, subjective, spiritually individualistic and social group-minded, etc”.¹⁵³ The comparison of these unconscious tendencies suggests the science-and-religion-criticisms such as the German wandering poets’ philosophy.

Zen, on the other hand, guides the process of reaching the unconsciousness of enlightenment with *kōan* (question that cannot be logically resolved and is meditated on; especially in Rinzai Zen), that asks for earth’s nature. It tries to overcome conceptual recognition by understanding and intellect and to reach the border of immediate knowledge. The subject and nature are one. Drifting poets such as Bashō, Shiki and Santōka, who are often called Zen poets, are closer to

¹⁵² Ibid. 1974. p.3.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 1974, p. 5.

nature than any other critical poets. Their poems are not “about” nature. They ARE nature.

In Suzuki’s words I want to conclude: “Zen may occasionally appear too enigmatic, cryptic, and full of contradictions, but it is after all a simple discipline and teaching: To do goods,/ To avoid evils,/To purify one’s own heart:/This is the Buddha-Way.“ It is applicable to all human situations, beyond the time-space borders

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ON THE CONCEPT OF *OIKOPHILIA*: TOWARDS AN ORGANIC ENVIRONMENTALISM

Jakob William Bühlmann Quero

Introduction

One of the major issues we face as inhabitants of this common planet is the subject matter of environmentalism, namely the acknowledged need to develop *public and shared* strategies to avoid (or minimize) the noxious consequences of our footprint over the Earth*. In fact, even if it may be the struggle of this century, the normative layer of this question of solidarity with the world in which we live is not new. As we shall see, the history of philosophy brings precise concepts for the definition of environmentalism, but let's start by the *institutional* form, which almost monopolized all the attention and hope to bring sustainable development and care for the planet.

Today we assist at the 26th annual summit of COP (COP standing for “Conference of the Parties”) of the United Nations Framework

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Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow. UNFCCC established, yet in 1992, the urge “to achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner”¹⁵⁴. With the aim of achieving these goals, and trying to advance at each COP, the UNFCCC motivated two major milestones: the *Kyoto protocol* (arising from Kyoto’ 1997 COP) and the *Paris agreement* (as a consequence of the Paris’ 2015 COP).

The common trend of Kyoto and Paris agreements is that they draw clear dispositions for the UNFCCC Parties, being the 196 states and 1 regional organization under the 1992 Convention. Thus, we find that these protocols and agreements provide guidelines and responsibilities for states and regional organizations, namely the Institutional parts of the political and social sphere. At the individual level, the common citizen finds himself stranded and disoriented, without knowing much what to do or who to believe, as it appears that a gap has emerged during this quarter of century, between the political power and the concrete will or ethical engagement to act in accordance with the promise made in Kyoto and Paris. It seems that our representatives totally fail to carry consequently their mandate, or that their role is not fully compatible with a mandate which often is not part of their political agenda. It is puzzling to feel ashamed and responsible for a lack of engagement from our political leaders. In the end, does the common citizen have any responsibility at all?

¹⁵⁴ UNFCCC, *United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change*. New York, 9 May 1992. URL: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004-56%20AM/Ch_XXVII_07p.pdf

In this article we will assume that the shape, strategy and values of the mainstream environmentalist movement are the upshot of the 1992 UNFCCC, therefore relying on the bureaucratic and complex net of international treaties and interests as a way to engage both civil society and States to reach its goals. To contrast this view, called from now on *Institutional* —because it engages mainly the political and legal sphere—, we will introduce the opposing vision developed by the conservative philosopher Sir Roger Scruton, position we will call *Organic*. Scruton’s position will be called organic because it defends a person-based approach relying on the notion of moral, personal responsibility and stewardship. By introducing the organic view, we will present the concept of *Oikophilia*, the core element of his position on environmentalism, concept that fills the void left by the main tendencies. As we shall see, Scruton might help us to think in a more precise way about the defined role of, and how to engage with, civil society.

As we see, the Institutional environmentalism leaves an important gap when develops its strategies and positions, drawing a clear *Top-down* approach and depriving the basic collective of the environmentalist operation, the civil society, of any responsibility or chance to play a role at all: “For it is *we* in the end who have to act, who have to accept and co-operate with the decisions made in our name, and who have to make whatever sacrifices will be required for the sake of future generations”¹⁵⁵. Things being so, the common citizen does not feel impelled to partake neither in simple changes affecting his daily life nor in far-reaching and perhaps more deep solutions.

This is clearly a problem, and it is with the intention of overcoming it that this article presents a possible solution found in a different recipe.

¹⁵⁵ Scruton, Roger (2012), *How to think seriously about the planet: the case for an environmental conservatism*. Oxford: University Press, p. 2.

The Problem

First and foremost, what is the Scrutonian diagnosis?

In the case of environmentalism, it seems to us that Sir Scruton signals two basic problems that call for the solution provided by Oikophilia, the first being the intrinsic character of international politics, treaties and the dynamics of political life¹⁵⁶ —namely, the foundations of the Institutional approach—, and the second being the reason at the very origins of the environmental problem, “the propensity of human beings to take the benefit and leave the costs to someone else, preferably someone far away in space or time, whose protests can be safely ignored”¹⁵⁷. In what follows we will show the focal points of each leg of the Scrutonian diagnosis: the *political* problem and the *human* problem.

The political problem arises from a set of observations on *how, in fact, do things work* compared to *how, ideally, should things work* and, additionally, from general considerations on how could societies cope with problems more effectively.

On one hand, the Scrutonian conservatism is rather reluctant to accept great political initiatives, mainly because they develop control structures far away from the citizenship and are likely to lose its public accountability¹⁵⁸, thus developing secondary interests and secret agendas. History, following the Scrutonian view, shows us that politics,

¹⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Scruton, Roger (Tuesday, 14 February 2012), *How conservatives can help to tackle climate change*, The Guardian. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/feb/14/how-conservatives-can-fight-climate-change>

¹⁵⁸ Let’s see, for instance, the case of Scrutonian conservatism on the European Union and its Pro-Brexit position, which exemplifies a general argument against transnational political structures. For a Scrutonian presentation on the subject, see “Nexus Masterclass Roger Scruton ‘Brexit: yes or no?’” (URL: <https://youtu.be/Bvlg8YK3iSU>). For a written account of the Scrutonian general position of transnational structures, see: Scruton, Roger (2019), “Starting from Home”, *How to be a Conservative*. UK: Bloomsbury.

and great political structures, do in fact develop interests and dynamics that do not have anything to do with their initial purposes (in this case, the environmentalist policies) and are instead related to the common political practice and net of internal struggles of power. Furthermore, the logic of politics being its own instead of that of its projects, politicians are rarely likely to risk their own personal careers in the name of *necessary-but-unacceptable* reforms: “Politicians in democracies don’t sign treaties that will commit their voters to unacceptable changes in their way of life. What is the point of signing a treaty if you lose the election that would enable you to enforce it?”¹⁵⁹.

Thus, following Scruton, should we trust the search for a solution of the environmental problem to the hands of those that, as History shows, are likely to hold private interests that sooner or later will decide in their own favor? Do we have to trust in macrostructures of power that soon stop being accountable to citizens? The answer seems clearly to be that, as History shows us, *if possible, rather not*.

On the other hand, and following the political problem, Scruton explores the tension between two poles that seem to be rather opposing: social equilibrium and ecological equilibrium¹⁶⁰. In the case of democratic governments, we see that social equilibrium seems to happen only when there is a clear economic growth. “Periods of stagnation, rapid inflation or impoverishment are also periods of radical discontent, in which resentment and deprivation lead to instability. Hence, the first concern of democratic governments is to encourage economic growth, regardless of its environmental costs”¹⁶¹. Nevertheless, as Scruton remarks, there seems to be a limit to economic growth, represented by the environmental impact of the economic activity. Undeniably, to keep the ecological equilibrium in its place, at some point economic growth

¹⁵⁹ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How conservatives can help tackle climate change...*

¹⁶⁰ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

should stop, contradicting one of the basic needs of democratic societies and its classical governmental rule because, again, “Why should a politician put his signature to a treaty when the effect of doing so is that he will be out of office, and therefore unable to press for its enforcement?”¹⁶².

To exemplify this problem, Sir Scruton suggests taking a look into the *monkey business* of the US government regarding its withdrawal from Kyoto Protocols, driven by the potential economic losses (up to \$2.3 trillion, as estimated by experts¹⁶³) and by the Senators, that rapidly calculated the political consequences of such an agreement. Here we find a very clear example of the consequences of leaving into the hands of political structures, with secondary *agendas* like staying in power, such important subjects as the environmental struggle. In any case, it is not only democracies that fall into these internal tendencies that unbalance the scale towards social equilibrium and disregard the ecological. Following Sir Scruton, other political and moral systems do have their own flaws and unbalances, like the communist system has¹⁶⁴ with its more than evident environmental consequences, or the extreme dependence of some economies on natural resources that provoke deforestation, drought, or whatever kind of overconsumption of them. But, if History has shown us that great political structures and economic actors are not to trust to develop this kind of policies and reforms, who should take the lead and be the spear tip of the necessary change?

It is better to do it, Scruton says, with markets, understood as the “form of social network in which individual responsibility is the binding principle”¹⁶⁵, which is to be considered something positive both for the outcome they have when work properly and because they provide

¹⁶² Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ Again, for the original references quoted by Sir Scruton, see *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 138.

society with a sense of responsibility, necessary to protect future generations from greed and destructive actions. Markets, when they are well ordered and are efficient in its aims, do ensure that the costs of the actions are not exported to someone else and motivate, following Sir Scruton, the value of stewardship over the resources at stake —what rational agent would promote the degradation of his own work material, namely nature? The “Tribunal de les Aigües” of València, the Lofoten fishermen communities, the divide of rivers by the Columbian Native Americans, or the common share of the Swiss Alpine meadows, are some of the examples we easily find of this kind of co-operative usage and management of common resources based on the market, making them renewable, self-regenerative and able to accumulate the experience of past conflicts to reach the *best equilibrium* order spontaneously. This solutions, Sir Scruton says, “depend on the rational self-interest of essentially co-operative people. Much of the antipathy to market solutions has come from those who see markets as *competitive* arrangements, in which dog eats dog and the biggest dog survives. But competition in a market depends on co-operation, and it is only co-operatively disposed beings that can make markets work. Markets [...] depend on promise-keeping, conflict resolution and the punishment of cheats. They promote cheerful co-operation between their participants, who for the most part see themselves as engaged in a positive-sum game from which everyone can benefit”¹⁶⁶.

It is true, however, that markets can have bad consequences, and that not always these situations of best equilibrium do happen in our societies. Despite that, and as Scruton puts it, the State centralization is even more dangerous for it can undermine all and every reason the different actors in a situation have to cooperate. In the case of the American treatment of communal grazing rights, as provided by Sir Scruton, the regulation coming from the state provoked an economic

¹⁶⁶ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 144.

deficit in the management of the program and, furthermore, as it seemed to overcome the traditional relations between ranchers in a concrete place, the negative externalities became normal, and the malfunctions of the system were finally visible.

Having said that, and serving as a transition to the next point, we are forced to ask ourselves: what could help us, so, into building the conditions to ensure this kind of social co-operation?

We said earlier that the second problem Sir Scruton signals, the one at the origins of the environmental problem, is the human tendency to export the costs to someone else, far away in space or in time (i.e., future generations, or the inhabitants of other countries), and this is exactly what is done in the case of delayer politicians and *big businesses*. Nonetheless, as Sir Scruton reminds us, if we are reading his books we are likely to be living in a free market society, ruled by the laws of the *invisible hand* and the indirect power we hold as consumers. Being things so, it is our choices what, in the end, shape the market and the industry we hold as culprits of the environmental disasters we observe, hence “Whenever we travel by air, visit the supermarket, or consume fossil fuels, we are exporting our costs to others, and to future generations”¹⁶⁷. And despite that, some of us still try to keep the benefits of our lifestyle by passing on the costs of it to others, some of them still to be born.

Following the Scrutonian vision, the basic element that fuels the kind of undesirable trade of costs between the *us* and the *others* and the *living* and the *to live*, is the morals that disregard the future and prevalence of societies, based on the self-interest and the fulfilment of the *present* desires and satisfactions, one that cuts the chain of transmission between the past, the present and the future of our societies. This kind of morals is what makes it difficult to regard any kind of change arising from the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 17.

citizens as possible, and instead forces us to represent, as Sir Scruton puts it, the social interaction as a form of *prisoner's dilemma*.

To make the point clear, the picture of the society following from this morality is one deprived of the chain of responsibilities that could put apart the tendency of delayers or exporters of costs, based upon a theory of motivation we will call *rational self-interest*. In fact, as Sir Scruton puts it, it is the tendency toward this rational self-interest what opens the door to the scenario of the prisoner's dilemma, a situation in which various rational actors must take a decision ignoring what will others do and without communicating, thus probably reaching an outcome different from the best possible scenario. To exemplify the kind of society this self-interest moral creates, let us look into this dilemma¹⁶⁸:

Suppose we meet two friends, called Josep and Bernat, and we tell them to get into separate and uncommunicated rooms and play a totally unknown game for them. In this game, they are told, each will have to take a decision, 1 or 2, with a designated value. If Bernat chooses 1, he will earn 5, and if he chooses 2, he will earn 10; If Josep chooses 1, he will earn 5, and if he chooses 2, he will earn 10 too: so far so good. The dilemma arises when we are told that, depending on the decision of the other player, the outcome can vary: if Bernat chooses 1 and Josep happens to choose 1 too, they will both win 5; if Bernat chooses 1 and Josep chooses 2, Bernat will obtain -5 and Josep will win 10; if Bernat chooses 2 and Josep chooses 1, Bernat will win 10 and Josep will score -5; if both choose 2, both score a symmetrical result 0, thus not earning anything.

Knowing the information and the rules of the game, our position is such that we would expect them to coordinate and try to reach the

¹⁶⁸ Formulation adapted from: Shubik, M. (1970). Game Theory, Behavior, and the Paradox of the Prisoner's Dilemma: Three Solutions. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14(2), 181–193. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/173263>

general profit position, this is, both choosing 1 and earning 5. Despite that, the problem appears when, following their own self-interest, and even holding a clearly rational position—for they don't know the secret rule and, even if they knew, they could not trust the other since the most profitable option for them individually would be to choose 2 while the other player chooses 1—, they both choose 2 and end up not earning anything.

Therefore, social choice disparities, understood as the kind of uncoordinated action that gives rise to a situation like the dilemma's, have the chance to keep happening since the conception of morals and society is rather isolationist—namely, atomizes the public life and understands it as the interaction of separate non-cooperative parts that can easily, due to psychological and trust reasons, create up the worst common scenario.

On the contrary, the idea offered by Sir Scruton asks for a remodeling of our conception of motivation—the one we called “rational self-interest”—and recalls some of the basic principles of conservatism, this is, the look for “non-egotistical motives than can be elicited in ordinary members of society, and relied upon to serve the long-term ecological goal. Burke proposed ‘the hereditary principle’, as protecting important institutions from pillage or decay, and believed that people have a natural tendency to accept the limits that this principle places on their conduct. Hegel argued for the priority of non-contractual obligations, of the king that sustain the family, and believed that similar obligations could be recuperated and exercised at the political level. In similar vein, de Maistre gave a central place to piety, as a motive that puts divinely ordained traditions and constitutions above the temptations of self-interest”¹⁶⁹.

This concern, the look for some kind of deep association between individuals, is a recurrent preoccupation of Scruton's work. In fact, as he

¹⁶⁹ Scruton, R. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 19.

says, developing a conception of society involving some association inspired in those presented is a *conditio sine qua non* to overcome the kind of problem at the origin of the environmental issues, namely the human problem. We see, for instance, Sir Scruton starts sketching such a vision by recurring to Edmund Burke's philosophical analysis of political legitimation, based on some associative constitution of the political order: "Burke saw society as an association of the dead, the living and the unborn. Its binding principle is not contract, but something more akin to love. Society is a shared inheritance for the sake of which we learn to circumscribe our demands, to see our own place in things as a part of a continuous chain of giving and receiving, and to recognize that the good things we inherit are not ours to spoil. There is a line of obligation that connects us to those who gave us what we have; and our concern for the future is an extension of that line"¹⁷⁰. This framework, skeptical toward the artificial notions of political obligation, invites us to think, as Scruton thinks, that something similar to love, and not necessarily social contract, could show us the path of some sort of mutual attachment, which may not need a higher level of association in a contractual political form. Should we follow this orientation to build a proper conception of society in order to avoid the problems we have been presenting so far?

If so, a second question follows from the present exposition of elements: *thus, what should be done, following Sir Scruton's provisions?*

The Solution

Arising from this *totum revolutum*, we find the solution to surmount the difficulties of the two aspects of the ecological crisis: first, the weakness of the institutional orientation —with its dysfunctionalities

¹⁷⁰ Scruton, R. *How to be a Conservative*, p. 27.

which leave ecological promises without implementation —, and second, the human orientation —which, for the British philosopher, has a strong tendency to favor worst-case equilibrium, instead of creating constructive consensus. In what follows, we will be presenting the main points of *the love for home*, or *Oikophilia*, which may help us to overcome the two previous objections.

Yet in his preface of “How to think seriously about the planet”, Sir Scruton announces his will to look for the family of motives that could give birth to the kind of attitude we are trying to elucidate. These motives, mixed with the conditions under which *oikophilia* could arise, constitute the core of the Scrutonian call for a renewed *ethos*, one respectful with the environment, our past neighbors, ourselves, and the unborn. Regarding the concept, Scruton says¹⁷¹, *oikophilia* may be traced back to the Ancient Greek *oikos*, referring to the household, appearing in words like *economy* and *ecology*. In his sense, *oikophilia* is to be related to a more precise meaning, similar to that of the German word “Heimatgefühl”, something between the melancholic Stimmung of Heimatschmerz (homesickness), a love of one’s own country, and simply celebrating the fact and tender feeling of being home. As Scruton puts it: “Human beings, in their settled condition, are animated by *oikophilia*: the love of the *oikos*, which means not only the home but the people contained in it, and the surrounding settlements that endow that home with lasting contours and an enduring smile. The *oikos* is the place that is not just mine and yours but *ours*. It is the stage-set for the first-person plural of politics, the locus, both real and imagined, where ‘it all takes place’. Virtues like thrift and self-sacrifice, the habit of offering and receiving respect, the sense of responsibility —all those aspects of the human condition that shape us as stewards and guardians of our common inheritance— arise through our growth as persons, by creating

¹⁷¹ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*. p. 26.

islands of value in the sea of price”¹⁷². Hence the reason behind the name “Organic environmentalism”: this set of elements, that are included in the Oikophilia’ scope as things to preserve, are a basic part of our sentimental, social, and intellectual life, and do constitute the liveliest description of the elements than constitute our life and environment —nevertheless, they are commonly ignored, put apart and disregarded as important parts of life—, thus meriting to be called “Organic” in opposition to the cold, partial and somehow distant “Institutional” approach.

Oikophilia works towards the revaluation of three main elements: beauty as an intrinsic value; the sense of the sacred, which has suffered a strong backlash during this last century; and the power of *Habitat*. All three things are important regarding the objectives of the environmentalist movement and would serve the purpose of developing a moral rooted in the respect and the stewardship of the common heritage, from whatever kind, with an excellent example in the case of the environmental respect. Revaluating beauty, following Scruton, would open the door to see things as what they are and not for what they are useful for; “On the contrary, it is the intrinsic value of beautiful things that renders them useful”¹⁷³. The value beauty enforces, Scruton says, can be compared to that of friendship, being something valuable for the simple thing of being as it is and even helping in some cases with a functional value —giving us a hand in difficult moments, embellishing our daily life, etc. Thus, vindicating the importance of beauty in a world that has forgotten it would make it possible for humanity to retake the old custom of metaphorically lifting up some things to protect them of the erosion of common and negligent activities, the environment being one potential candidate. On the contrary, in a world without beauty as a basic value, the floor is open to the kind of environmental degradation

¹⁷² Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to be a conservative...* p. 32.

¹⁷³ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 254.

we are trying to avoid: when beauty disappears from the picture, the only thing left is forms and elements that mean nothing at all, namely the instrumental value as worth of things. If we are to find the main causes of environmental degradation, we will surely find the instrumental vision of the world as one of them, and therefore we know what Oikophilia can remodel as a privileged objective.

Sir Scruton underlines two main assumptions that have brought beauty to the subsidiary state nowadays has. The first “is that beauty is an entirely subjective matter, about which there can be no reasoned argument and concerning which it is futile to search for a consensus”¹⁷⁴. This assumption, which plays an important role in placing tolerance at the center of the ground—for if there are no *absolute* positions on aesthetics, we are never entitled to consider others’ positions as futile, absurd or incorrect—, can be partially dismissed, Scruton considers, if we pay attention to the role beauty plays in some spheres of our public and *shared* life. In some European cities, as Salzburg or Rome, we have seen strong movements of “aesthetic indignation”¹⁷⁵ that evidence a clear command into preserving the visual harmonies and aesthetics these cities have been growing during years, movements that targeted architectural reforms, aesthetically incoherent projects and the promotion of adverts and logos in the public space. Furthermore, we see that in our daily life beauty *already* has an established role in the inheritance we have received from our ancestors in the form of beautiful streets, amazing temples or astonishing castles; Scruton takes this to be the demonstration that beauty is not something entirely subjective, but rather driving us to some sort of communion with the collective body of persons that constitute our society or human group. Aesthetics seem to be, following the Scrutonian vision, something akin to the sort of thing we do when we celebrate our familial customs and rituals, or when we

¹⁷⁴ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 257.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

enjoy our communitarian life, or when we pray to our God: “Consider what happens when you lay the table for a meal. This is not just a utilitarian event. If you treat it as such, the ritual will disintegrate, and the family members will end up grabbing individual portions to eat on their own. [...] Everything is controlled by aesthetic norms, and those norms, freely obeyed and freely varied, convey some of the *meaning* of family life. [...] You notice another continuity too, between aesthetic values and piety, which is the recognition that the world is in other hands than ours. Hence the gods are present at mealtimes. Religious people precede their eating with a grace, inviting God to sit down among them before they sit down themselves. This is a use of religion that is very far from the crusading passions of the spiritually needy —religion as an outgrowth of Oikophilia, and a standing invitation to the gods to dwell among us. Such, in a word, is piety. That example shows the centrality of beauty to home-building, and therefore to establishing a *shared* environment”¹⁷⁶. And this, the shared character of beauty and its social and communitarian shape, is the best guarantee of the *not-so-subjective* character of beauty and its human relevance, being at the core of every environmentalist possible vindication. Furthermore, and attacking the main assumption in more theoretical grounds, Sir Scruton considers the divide between subjective and objective to be a rather imprecise one. In fact, as he considers, aesthetical judgments arise from a social and shared background individuals have, not expressing neither preferences nor simple singular points of view: “I prefer to say that our judgments of beauty are bids for a socially recognized *presence*. They do not express simple preferences, to be traded in the market of desire. They are bound up with the social identity of those who express them, and who wish others to acknowledge and endorse the choices that they make”¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁶ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 263.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

The second assumption Sir Scruton signals as the culprit of the decay of beauty as a social and shared value is the consideration that it does not matter and, therefore, does not have any right to place a limit to economic growth. The major proof, though an evident one, is the strict importance it has in every *aesthetic* conflict we introduced before, or the relevance aesthetics have when we file a complaint to police because our new neighbor is cutting all the shared trees that embellish the street, or the universal character of the aesthetic consensus among societies: “The Italian hilltop town of stone and tile is very unlike the Zulu village with its huts of mud and grass and its church of corrugated iron, but they both obey aesthetic constraints, in which individual differences are softened and made acceptable by a common style”¹⁷⁸. Thus, it seems clear to Sir Scruton that the importance of beauty, and the aesthetical life, is already present in our daily activities and that in fact *it does already play a vital role in economy, politics and, in the end, our public and shared life.*

Both assumptions being buried, Sir Scruton considers it to be proved that *beauty matters*, and it is in fact a vital element of human life and flourishing, thus deserving a special attention in our lives and even more when it comes to build a strong environmentalist moral. In any case, Oikophilia still need a basic part, the vindication and recuperation of the importance of the sacred, basic to develop the social value of stewardship and the respect for our environment as part of our familiar, emotional and personal life. This, the element of the sacred in nature, is an unperishable string that, following Sir Scruton, has manifested itself in human societies as far away in time as books and witnesses can show us, keeping itself alive in nowadays poetry, literature, diverse forms of art, and even in local protectionist movements. In fact, “This motive is a human universal, and as Simon Schama has argued, in his beautiful tribute to landscape art and to the myths and mysteries of settlement, land and landscape have been portrayed as sacred in all our human

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

attempts to belong in the world”¹⁷⁹. The cataloguing of our natural surroundings as sacred, for they represent our familial and personal *Oikos*, still is available to us to use, but we must thoroughly look for it in order to make it a possible social and shared value for a new conception of life to come.

The uses of this conception of nature as a sacred thing would open the door to treat our surroundings in a deeply responsible and serious manner, remembering the ways in which we treat some religious objects and calling us to its conservation and protection: “Sacred things have a peculiar status, being both removed from us and deeply connected to our wellbeing. That which is sacred cannot be touched by profane hands. But on special occasions, marked out by ritual and acts of purification, it can be bent to our uses. The priest, the acolyte and the initiate can participate in the communion and drink the Eucharistic wine. The uninitiated and the unbelievers commit sacrilege by doing the same”¹⁸⁰.

In the architectural case, Sir Scruton brings to the mind the sense of Oikophilia applied to the acts of *building* and *designing* future buildings by using the words of John Ruskin, romantic English writer of XIXth century and prominent defender of the aesthetics of architecture and the conservation of original structures and materials. In this sense, Oikophilia would prompt us to build and design our constructions as if they were a sacred reverence to the Eternal, forcing the builder or the architect to “detach himself from earthly interests and calculations, set aside material goals, and offer instead a gift to all creation, one that will outlast each fleeting function that it serves”¹⁸¹. We see here, as Sir Scruton puts it, a clear exercise of revitalizing the sense of the sacred and to make it take the entire dominion of what surrounds as in some sort of practice vindicating the material and immediate presence of the sacred.

¹⁷⁹ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 284.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

This, Scruton says, is the other basic element that is needed for the environmental movements to take as companion, sewing a new orientation for the ecological struggle that arises from the community and striving to protect what is beloved, what is valued, and what has shaped our own character and life.

The third element, basic in the development of a concept of Oikophilia, is the development of a notion like Habitat, that tries to close the reformist circle in favor of a society of solidarities and respectful with the famous *chain of giving and receiving* we introduced earlier, as well as the will to endow it to the next generations.

Society, following the Scrutonian vision, is a net of mutual trust and intimal relations that shape our own most basic emotions, skills, and interests, giving us complex and elevated moral concepts and sentiments. This net of rights, duties and obligations are the upshot, following Sir Scruton, of “the fact that we hold each other accountable for what we do”¹⁸². Following this picture, we find that our societies, in having moral constraints and dispositions, do consider their own members as responsible and non-determined subjects, masters of a conscience that develops within this net of particular qualities that is the collective human flourishing. In doing so, it seems there is at the least a slight-yet-deep fracture between *our* world and the *raw* animal world in the sense that we seem to be rational.

For some anthropological tendencies, from the rationality of human beings we can infer its completely unattached and individual character, branded as *Homo economicus*. This creature, “as described by theories of the market, is a one-dimensional creature, rational certainly, but with no conception of the ends of life, no idea that desires can be judged and found wanting, no ability to renounce what he wants for the sake of what he values”¹⁸³. Of course, Sir Scruton says, this is not the real

¹⁸² Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 212.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

human being, which is full of not-always-rational motives, motives that could never be explained by reason or science, and that are far away from our acknowledged and conscious interests, desires and expectations. It is in this sphere of things *that lie deeper than reason*, as Sir Scruton puts it, that the answer to the problem of the conservation of our famous *chain* is to be found.

The Scrutonian position, thus, gives Oikophilia a third leg by vindicating the importance of our natural affections towards our neighbors, families, friends... crystallized in the possibility of our moral life. "At both levels —the instinctive and the personal— the capacity for sacrifice arises, in the one case as a blind attachment, in the other case as a sense of responsibility to others, to the gods of to the moral law. It is in these areas, it seems to me, that we must search for the motive that will rectify our lamentable disposition, as rational beings, to inflict the costs of our pursuits on those who have not incurred them. The motive that emerges with full persuasive force as both levels is that of Oikophilia, the love of home, a motive that comprehends all our deepest attachments, and which spills our in the moral, aesthetic and spiritual emotions that transfigure our world, creating in the midst of our emergencies a shelter that future generations also may enjoy"¹⁸⁴.

We see, therefore, that Oikophilia would serve the purpose of seeing the importance of the invisible thread that unites persons under a same family, community or society, and would of course motivate its members to avoid, as we said earlier, keeping the benefits of whatever endeavors by exporting the risks and costs to whoever, be it a neighbor, another nation of the future generations.

At the start of the article, we introduced two main difficulties that, following Sir Scruton, obscure the path of the environmentalist movement. First, that it seems to extremely rely over institutions and political structures, and we showed that History and facts tell us this is a

¹⁸⁴ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 214-215.

bad idea. Second, that at the roots of the environmental problem there is an erroneous social and moral conception that manifests itself in economy, politics and social relations, namely the tendency to keep the benefits exporting the costs and to think societies are amalgamations of self-accounting rational individuals; Sir Scruton showed us both things are incorrect, instead placing at the center the importance of understanding society as a net of solidarities and collaboration between citizens that strive to protect the world —both social and natural— in order to pass it on to the next generations.

To solve both issues, Sir Scruton introduces the concept of *Oikophilia*. The basis of the environmentalism we called *Organic* is rooted in *Oikophilia*, a concept purporting to vindicate the importance of some relevant, perhaps old-fashioned, values that could still awake the sense of stewardship and responsibility that once kept humanity in a position of self-awareness. First, we see that the vindication of beauty as a value in itself would open the door to abandon the utilitarian point of view and instead place a natural worth over environment, changing the vision we have on nature and aesthetics as something necessary that appeals to our most inner needs. Second, reinstate the sense of the sacred and making it a social value would allow us to properly motivate respect and reverence towards concrete aspects of our shared life and space, as the environment, communal spaces, natural resources, etc. Third, acknowledging the importance of the net of human relations and bonds we trace among the individuals in a society would, following Scruton, valorize the importance of preserving the chain of transmission between generations as a basic social, and environmental, element.

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ECOLOGICAL CARING: AN ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS PERSPECTIVE

Ryan C. Urbano

We are facing an impending ecological disaster. How do we avert this catastrophic event? What should we do to save humanity from this looming tragedy? Laws, policies, and programs have been created to address environmental issues. But it appears that a legalistic approach is not enough to motivate people to care for the environment. Ecological problems continue to exist and persist. This paper will develop and promote a virtue approach to ecological caring to foster and cultivate the right set of attitudes, dispositions, reasons, feelings, values, relations, and actions to ensure our planet's survival. I will propose an account of environmental virtue ethics that employs the pluralistic version of Christine Swanton and Iris Murdoch's notion of virtue as "selfless attention to nature." By combining Swanton's view with Murdoch's notion of virtue as disciplined and patient attention to a reality outside of the self, this paper hopes for a moral change in human behavior that reduces egoism through an increased sense of awareness and attunement with nature.

Environmental Virtue Ethics: A Background

In this section, I will give a brief discussion of Ronald Sandler's book, *Character and Environment*, as a background to the kind of environmental ethics which I will develop in the next section.¹⁸⁵ Sandler advances an ecological ethics based on an ethic of character. In other words, he is proposing an environmental virtue ethics. Environmental virtue ethics is relatively recent in the environmental ethics literature, and Sandler has superbly developed a systematic account of this kind of environmental ethics. Most of the environmental virtue ethics that have been developed are those that propose either a *role-model approach* or an *extensionist approach*. Sandler thinks that these two approaches, though useful, have limitations and are therefore inadequate.

The role-model approach (or the environmental exemplar approach) identifies individuals (such as Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Rachel Carson) who possess the exemplary character and disposition for ecological concern. The virtues of these notable individuals then become the paradigm for others to follow concerning environmental ethics. But the limitation of such an approach, according to Sandler, is that, we may be mistaken in our beliefs as to who is environmentally virtuous and that environmental heroes differ from place to place and from culture to culture.

The extensionist approach proceeds from a notion of virtue in interpersonal relationships and applies that virtue to relations among and between beings in the natural environment. For instance, virtues commonly applied to interhuman relationships such as compassion, friendship, and benevolence are extended to our relations with animals, trees, land, and ecosystems. However, Sandler thinks that the

¹⁸⁵ See Ronald Sandler, *Character and Development: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia University press, 2007).

extensionist approach fails to address the issue "whether the bases or responsiveness of the virtue and the considerations that justify it as a virtue in interpersonal contexts are also present in some environmental contexts."¹⁸⁶ Friendship, for example, involves some degree of reciprocity where friends are mutually concerned for the welfare of the other. But we cannot speak of this same reciprocity in our relationships with the environment, especially those environmental entities which lack psychological capacities.

Sandler develops his own environmental virtue ethics to overcome the limitations of the two approaches in environmental virtue ethics mentioned above. He begins with a background theory of human flourishing grounded in ethical naturalism. Ethical naturalism, roughly described, is the view that the goodness or the flourishing of a species is, to a considerable extent, determined by how well its characteristic functioning and natural activities are realized. Sandler calls his virtue approach naturalistic, teleological and pluralistic. Specifically, he develops Philippa Foot's natural goodness thesis and Rosalind Hursthouse's neo-Aristotelian account of the notions of virtue and eudaimonia by merging it with Christine Swanton's non-eudaimonistic and target-oriented account of virtue ethics. He says that a person's virtuous character is known in terms of the propriety of his 1) emotions, 2) desires, and 3) actions from reason and inclination. The gauge of this propriety is determined by whether the person's emotions, desires, and actions promote the following goals: self-preservation, the survival of his species, freedom from pain and the experience of enjoyment, sociability and good group functioning, autonomy, knowledge, meaningful life, and the realization of other important noneudaimonistic ends.¹⁸⁷ These goals serve as Sandler's criteria in specifying the virtues conducive to environmental concern. Sandler's list of ecological virtues

¹⁸⁶ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 11.

¹⁸⁷ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 28.

includes land virtues (such as love, considerateness, attunement, ecological sensitivity, and gratitude), virtues of sustainability (such as temperance, frugality, farsightedness, attunement, and humility), virtues of communion with nature (such as wonder, openness, aesthetic sensibility, attentiveness, and love), virtues of respect for nature (such as care, compassion, restitutive justice, nonmaleficence, and ecological sensitivity), virtues of environmental activism (such as cooperativeness, perseverance, commitment, optimism, and creativity), and virtues of environmental stewardship (such as benevolence, loyalty, justice, honesty, and diligence).¹⁸⁸

However, it seems that Sandler fails to clearly establish how we could pursue noneudaimonistic goals such as recognizing the intrinsic value of non-human entities vis-à-vis his account of virtue and human flourishing. It appears that he assumes this in his version of virtue ethics without giving such a needed account. Though Sandler describes his virtue ethics as pluralistic because various forms of moral acknowledgment and responsiveness within a virtue's field are based on certain ends, values, properties, events, and relationships, it is not clear how his account may reconcile conflicts arising from this plurality of goals. However, he seems to suggest that this can be addressed through the virtue of prudence. Sandler acknowledges this difficulty when he says:

Nevertheless, the virtue-oriented approach admits a plurality of normative principles (virtue or v-rules), which are not reducible to a single principle and can conflict. Moreover, there is no overarching principle or strict order of apriority that in all cases provides a clear resolution to any conflict so long as the principle is applied properly or the order of priority is adhered to faithfully. So, although the various virtues and v-rules have common justification, there is irreducible

¹⁸⁸ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 82.

pluralism, uncodifiability, and an ineliminable need for good judgment to adjudicate in some cases where norms conflict.¹⁸⁹

There is also some kind of ambivalence in Sandler's definition of the intrinsic value of non-human entities. This ambivalence somehow magnifies the conflict cited above. On the one hand, in his pluralistic view, Sandler seems to say that aside from eudaimonistic ends, i.e., those constitutive of human flourishing, there are also other ends that he calls non-eudaimonistic. By this, Sandler refers to those ends that acknowledge the intrinsic value of non-human entities in the natural environment independent of human use and flourishing. On the other hand, Sandler also claims that "the intrinsic value of nature is not an additional human-independent value that grounds a distinct end in the pluralistic teleological account of what makes a character trait a virtue."¹⁹⁰ Here Sandler defines intrinsic virtue in terms of the natural environment's contribution to a person's well-being. As he says: "The essential contribution that the natural environment makes to the production of aesthetic value, biological and human flourishing, recreational value, and so on, constitutes its intrinsic value. There is no 'intrinsic value' beyond or behind this."¹⁹¹ So if Sandler construes intrinsic value in this way, it is not clear how his pluralistic account of environmental virtue ethics can accommodate his so-called non-eudaimonistic ends and evade the charge of anthropocentrism understood in the negative sense.

The possible incompatibility between human flourishing and upholding the inherent worth of the natural environment is not far-fetched. Indeed, it can be argued that this is a legitimate issue that needs to be addressed if Sandler's account is to become coherent. Resolving this issue is difficult because the theory presupposes that human beings

¹⁸⁹ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 107.

¹⁹⁰ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 170, endnote 9.

¹⁹¹ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 170, endnote 9.

and the natural environment are independent entities and, therefore, separate. This atomistic or individualistic account of human flourishing derails environmental moral theorizing and the effective way of resolving environmental issues. Brian Treanor, for instance, argues that for us to solve social problems like environmental degradation effectively, it is essential for us to emphasize "public virtues" (such as benevolence, self-sacrifice, care, sensitivity, and community concern) rather than personal virtues."¹⁹² Thus he concludes by saying: "It is true that we cannot fully flourish in a severely degraded environment, but the point here is different. We cannot fully flourish unless we flourish as members of a community, whether or not the community and environment in which we live is healthy. Flourishing cannot take place in isolation because we need social relationships, we need to contribute to a community, and we need to care for a place in order to fully flourish."¹⁹³

If we start from the fact of man's fundamental relational nature, perhaps there is a way to lessen the negative impact of the issue or even make the problem less significant. Here we can draw valuable insights from deep ecology without necessarily absorbing everything in it. Deep ecology emphasizes the interconnectedness of human life with the natural environment.¹⁹⁴ Deep ecology's basic tenet is the view that a human being is an ecological self. However, we need to avoid deep ecology's pitfall, which undermines the significance and integrity of the self since it is viewed as a mere part of the ecological whole. There is a need to address this weakness by focusing on man's relational nature and affinity with the natural environment. Through this, we can then stress

¹⁹² See Brian Treanor, "Environmentalism and Public Virtue," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 23, nos. 1-2, (2010): 9-28.

¹⁹³ Treanor, "Environmentalism and Public Virtue," 22.

¹⁹⁴ See for example, Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 1985).

man's responsibility and ability to recognize the value of nature. Perhaps we can draw some insights from the views of thinkers who emphasize an ethic of interconnectedness, such as David Hume's natural sentimentalism, Martin Heidegger's ethics of 'dwelling,' and Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of responsibility.¹⁹⁵ In other words, the virtue ethics that I propose and defend de-emphasizes the centrality of crude anthropocentrism and highlights ethical interconnectedness and responsibility for the other. Levinas, for example, claims that the biological self is naturally egoistic. But this natural egoism is beyond moral reproach because this is the self, enjoying the world in its innocence.¹⁹⁶ Moral responsibility arises when the self encounters another self. Bringing in Levinas's philosophy of ethical responsibility and some insights from deep ecology provide a panacea to crude anthropocentrism that may alienate us from our fellow human beings and the natural environment.

As background theory to virtue ethics, there is a need to develop the notion of a broader self than the anthropocentric account. The term 'ecological self' is already used by some thinkers, and the idea behind it can be used to develop and build a different kind of environmental virtue ethics. The term "ecological self" connotes a conception of a self that is relational and encompassing.¹⁹⁷ This notion of a self is open to

¹⁹⁵ Paul Haught, "Hume's Knave and Nonanthropocentric Virtues," *Journal of Agricultural Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 129-143; Christine Swanton, "Heideggerian virtue Ethics," *Journal of Agricultural Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 145-166; and Stan van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006).

¹⁹⁶ Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, second edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 68. See also Ryan C. Urbano, "Ethics as Optics of the Divine," *Prajna Vihara* 11, no. 2 (July-December 2010), 95.

¹⁹⁷ See Freya Matthwes, *The Ecological Self*, First Edition (London: Routledge, 1994).

and can accommodate whatever is relevant, whether empirical or ontological, in our understanding of the human individual. I think one advantage in starting from this broad understanding of human nature is that it provides wider latitude for incorporating other significant notions about human beings compared to an idea of a human being that is already substantive. For instance, Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, in his review of Sandler's book *Character and Environment*, points out the significance of how the environment may shape human character or virtue.¹⁹⁸ He claims that there is much to be learned from the human character shaped by the environment that could support a theory in environmental virtue ethics. In conceiving the human self in this way, we address the issue that divides human-centered ethics and ecological holism.

Despite the seeming limitations of Sandler's work, Sandler must be admired for trying to develop an account of environmental ethics that systematically explains the justification, bases, and forms of responsiveness of environmental virtues. His theory is a significant contribution both in environmental ethics and in moral philosophy in general. Indeed, he develops an ethical theory that accommodates and gives moral relevance to our relationships with the natural environment. For a moral theory to be sound and reliable, it must address and take into account our attitudes and actions as individuals and our relations with each other and the value of the natural environment in relation to human flourishing. As Sandler explains, "ethical theories must be evaluated according to their capacity to capture well, and provide guidance on, personal, interpersonal, and environmental relationships, actions, and practices."¹⁹⁹ If virtue ethics can adequately address such issues

¹⁹⁸ Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, "Ronald L. Sandler, *Character and Environment*—a Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics (Book Review)," *Ethics* 118, no. 3 (April 2008): 575-579.

¹⁹⁹ Sandler, *Character and Environment*, 142.

compared to other moral theories, then there is no reason not to embrace it for its inclusiveness and plausibility.

Virtue and the Preeminence of the Good

Christine Swanton defines virtue as "a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way."²⁰⁰ The items within a virtue's field or fields are those which make a demand on us²⁰¹. Swanton describes these items as the "demands of the world," which include those "which are in a position to make a claim on us, " the inanimate objects that do not make a claim on us, and those pertaining to ourselves for our self-improvement.²⁰² In other words, these items to which a virtuous person is expected to respond well are either "people, objects, situations, inner states, or actions."²⁰³ In the kind of environmental virtue ethics that I will develop, I will employ Swanton's pluralistic account of virtue together with Iris Murdoch's notion of virtue as "selfless attention to nature."²⁰⁴ I will defend an account of environmental virtue ethics that avoids the criticism, usually directed against a eudaimonistic version of environmental virtue ethics, that it is anthropocentric.

Virtue does not necessarily lead to the flourishing or the good life of its possessor. For some ancient Greek philosophers, this is not so. They

²⁰⁰ Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

²⁰¹ Some themes and ideas in this section and in the subsequent ones have already appeared in my previous article. See Ryan Urbano, "Virtue and Climate Ethics," *Philippiniana Sacra* XLVII, no. 147 (Special Issue, 2021): 501-506.

²⁰² Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, 21.

²⁰³ Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, 1.

²⁰⁴ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 41.

think that virtue is necessary and even sufficient for happiness. I will not challenge this issue, although I accept that one of the motivations for being virtuous is the desire to be happy. But this desire for happiness can be subsumed under a more general aim of attaining the good. What I mean by this I will attempt to explain in succeeding discussions. Although virtue is a good or excellent quality of a human being, it does not always benefit the person who exhibits this quality. Bad luck or misfortune could befall a virtuous person.²⁰⁵ The virtuous person's motive and reason for his action may also be a significant reason why there is no tight connection between virtue and the good life. A virtuous person, for example, may decide not to pursue a career in medicine or law that may provide him job security and comfort in the future in order to serve as a volunteer in an organization that does aid-work in many developing countries.²⁰⁶ Some virtuous people are willing to do something for the sake of the good even if there is no assurance that they will benefit, either in terms of human flourishing or attainment of personal goods, from their good deeds.

So, on my account, following Swanton, what makes a trait of character a virtue is not only that it is a disposition that leads to a flourishing life but also that it responds well to the demands of the world, which I will construe, following Murdoch, as instantiations of the Good to which we all aspire. The argument that follows encapsulates my preliminary account of virtue ethics:

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (London: Penguin, 1953), 21.

²⁰⁶ Of course, this does not mean that a person who pursues a career in law or medicine is less virtuous than one who volunteers for an organization that helps people in poor countries. The point of this example is to show that the former is more likely to enjoy job security and comfort than the latter and that there are virtuous people who are willing to help others even if it entails self-sacrifice.

(P1) *Virtue is a disposition that responds well to the demands of the world.*

(P2) *A disposition that responds well to the demands of the world aims for and is inspired by the Good.*

(C) *Therefore, virtue aims for and is inspired by the Good.*

The conclusion above does not imply that anyone who aims for and is inspired by the Good is already virtuous. Virtue is an achievement that one acquires through what Murdoch calls the disciplined and patient attention towards the reality outside of the self. There is something in the Good that commands our obedience to be moral which parallels this loving regard for objects. "Moral change," Murdoch writes, "comes from an *attention* to the world whose natural result is a decrease in egoism through an increased sense of the reality of, primarily, of course, other people, but also other things."²⁰⁷ This view is similar in a way to the idea of the French thinker Emmanuel Levinas, who said that "to think is no longer to contemplate but to commit oneself, to be engulfed by that which one thinks, to be involved."²⁰⁸

By the term "good," I am alluding to Murdoch's conception of it. Following Plato, Murdoch thinks that we all desire or love the Good. We discover the Good in our personal experiences, and it permeates our whole lives, whether we are aware of it or not. "That we can and do love Good and are drawn towards it is something that we have to learn from our experience, as we move all the time in the continuum between good and bad. This is our everyday existence where spiritual energy, Eros, is

²⁰⁷ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1992), 52.

²⁰⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?" in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4.

all the time active at a variety of levels."²⁰⁹ The Good is also that to which we give our attention to, directing all our time and energy towards it. Murdoch, following the German theologian Paul Tillich, refers to the good as "those matters of 'ultimate concern.'"²¹⁰

For Murdoch, there is no logical and empirical proof for the existence of the Good. In fact, it does not exist in the way that a tree or a horse exists. But it is there, "real as an Idea, and is also incarnate in knowledge, work, and love."²¹¹ If the reality of the Good is to be proven, it can only be done by way of morality and love.²¹² Intuitively, we know that it exists as an object of our desire and love. Murdoch thinks that there is some resemblance between the reality of the Good and the notion of God as a perfect being in the 'ontological argument' of St. Anselm. Just as the ontological argument proves the existence of God from the idea of a perfect being, so Murdoch posits the reality of the Good from the notion that it is an object of our desire and love. If perfection implies existence, then desire and love imply the reality of the good. If Anselm says that we should believe to understand, Murdoch says that we should love in order to be good.

For Murdoch, the Good is not an abstract concept and "an empty receptacle into which the arbitrary [human] will places objects of its choice," but it is "something which we all experience as a creative force."²¹³ In desiring the Good, we are transformed and become more like it. "Our emotions and desires are as good as their objects and are constantly being modified in relation to their objects. What is good purifies the desire that seeks it, the good ennobles the lover. There is no

²⁰⁹ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 507.

²¹⁰ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 512.

²¹¹ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 508.

²¹² Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 509.

²¹³ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 507.

unattached will as a prime source of value."²¹⁴ Thus, to desire the Good is also at the same time to respond to the demand that we be virtuous.

Virtue and the Intrinsic Value of Nature

Recognizing the value of and caring for nature elicits and enhances excellence in our character. Nature enriches our lives. Through our recognition and respect for its value "beyond concern for utility, resource conservation, or self-development," we come to understand ourselves better.²¹⁵ This is what Holmes Rolston III means when he writes:

A human virtue is generated, actualizing a uniquely human capacity and possibility, when a person respects a wild animal's life for what that life is in itself, a different and yet related form of life. This triggers awareness of otherness and feeds back into our own sense of identity and dignity. So we are figuring out who we are as a consequence of figuring out who they are.²¹⁶

Rolston says that virtues are not endowments. They are achievements reached through human effort and practice aided by

²¹⁴ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 507.

²¹⁵ Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole" in *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, eds., Ronald Sandler & Philip Cafaro (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 68.

²¹⁶ Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," 67. This does not mean however that if someone cares for his dog, feeds him regularly and gives him cuddling, then he becomes a virtuous person outrightly. There are people, for instance, who are very caring for their pets but treat their workers cruelly. If a person is to be truly and ecologically virtuous, his care is not selective, whether the object of care is a person, an animal, a plant or the whole biotic community. I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Sheilalaine Romulo, for bringing this matter to my attention.

"upbringing and community encouragements."²¹⁷ Virtues are, therefore, cultivated by their possessors with the support and sustenance of the community to which the persons who possess these virtues belong.

In showing concern for nature, however, Rolston claims that the motivating force should not be the acquisition of human virtues. We care for nature not because we are in the "search for a personal virtue" but because we recognize its intrinsic value.²¹⁸ Nature's value, as Rolston claims, should be seen as independent of human flourishing and virtue. "To be truly virtuous one must respect values in nature for their own sake and not as tributary to human flourishing."²¹⁹ We do not really care for nature if our motive is simply to realize the virtues.

As already noted, Rolston claims that nature's value is not tributary to human virtue. Nature, he says, must not "be seen as a source of personal transformation."²²⁰ On his account, virtue ethics' treatment of environmental concern is incomplete on its own and is even dangerous. Respect for nature could not simply be viewed as arising from the concern of our own flourishing. To do so would be to degrade nature, and when there is a conflict between human flourishing and respect for nature, virtue ethics tend to favor the former over the latter. This is why Rolston is wary of an environmental ethics that makes human virtues the starting point and entwining nature's intrinsic value with the quality of human life. For him, there is a need to disentangle the value of natural entities from human interest and make their intrinsic value the primary focus of environmental ethics.

²¹⁷ Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," 69.

²¹⁸ Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," 69.

²¹⁹ Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," 70.

²²⁰ Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," 69.

I concur with Rolston that nature's value should be seen independently of human flourishing. Nature has intrinsic value that needs to be recognized and respected by human beings. The presence of human beings as valuing subjects does not necessarily diminish nature's intrinsic value. Virtuous human agents will always strive to respect and promote nature's inherent worth. But they do this not only for valuing nature itself but also for the sake of goodness itself, i.e., virtuous people do the right thing because goodness itself inspires them to be so. To ascribe absolute value to certain things would deprive others of their value. These other things deserve moral consideration, too. Absolute value must not be identified with any particular entity in order not to relegate others to the periphery. In this way, there is room for moral agents to broaden their moral vision and enlarge their concept of the moral community.

There has to be a metaphysical background (and this is certainly open to challenge and dispute) that virtue ethics must presuppose to be coherent and plausible as an approach in morality. This background, according to Murdoch, is "properly some sort of mysticism... a non-dogmatic essentially unformulated faith in the reality of the Good, occasionally connected with experience."²²¹ That which we must also presuppose is the idea that we humans desire and are attracted towards the Good. Plato and Aristotle have bequeathed to us this valuable insight from antiquity. What this Good is remains beyond our complete grasp even though we experience it in the world. Individual things like natural entities, art, and the intellectual disciplines somehow instantiate and exhibit this goodness. These things, however, do not fully exhaust it. That is why the Good, as we experience it, is not singular but plural. There is a plurality and diversity of goodness in the world. According to Murdoch, it is this Good that enables us to transcend the narrowness of

²²¹ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 72.

our personal concerns to embrace and give significance to other things we consider good.

The Good, which Murdoch compares to beauty in nature and art (and with the intellectual disciplines like mathematics and the sciences) and which she considers as a "kind of goodness by proxy," "transcends selfish and obsessive limitations of personality and can enlarge the sensibility of its consumer."²²² Murdoch is convinced that "enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue."²²³ She illustrates her point through this example:

I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage

²²² While for Murdoch beauty in nature and in art moves us, she nevertheless says that the former, following Plato, we love by instinct and the latter does not always and immediately provoke this inspiration in the sense that we are able to overcome our self-centeredness. She explains it best when she writes: "It is so patently a good thing to take delight in flowers and animals that people who bring potted plants and watch kestrels might even be surprised at the notion that these things have anything to do with virtue. The surprise is a product of the fact that, as Plato pointed out, beauty is the only spiritual thing which we love by instinct. When we move from beauty in nature to beauty in art we are already in a more difficult region. The experience of art is more easily degraded than the experience of nature. A great deal of art, perhaps most art, actually is self-consoling fantasy, and even great art cannot guarantee the quality of its consumer's consciousness. However, great art exists and is sometimes properly experienced and even a shallow experience of what is great can have its effect. Art, and by 'art' from now on I mean good art, not fantasy art, affords us a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent. Both in its genesis and its enjoyment it is a thing totally opposed to selfish obsession. It invigorates our best faculties and, to use Platonic language, inspires love in the highest part of the soul. It is able to do this partly by virtue of something which it shares with nature: a perfection of form which invites unpossessive contemplation and resists absorption into the selfish dream of life of the consciousness." Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 85-87.

²²³ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 86.

done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important.²²⁴

Murdoch anticipates that the example above could be taken as a self-directed activity, deliberately done "in order to clear our minds of selfish care."²²⁵ She is convinced that despite the risk that her views could be construed as a kind of romanticism, such experience can happen and is realistic in some sense. She uses beauty as an example to illustrate how the good can morally transform us "not because it is the most important place of moral change, but because . . . it is the most accessible."²²⁶ The kind of attention that Murdoch would like us to have is the one that follows the meaning given to it by Simone Weil. This is how Weil describes it:

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of... Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.²²⁷

Murdoch says that loving and patient attention to nature leads to humility – "a selfless respect for reality."²²⁸ This is so because the more we attend to something outside the self, the more we forget our own "self-centeredness." She further claims that attention is an "exercise of *detachment*" where "real things can be looked at without being seized

²²⁴ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 84.

²²⁵ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 84.

²²⁶ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 85.

²²⁷ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 62.

²²⁸ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 93.

and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self" (64).²²⁹ It is this detachment, this space that separates us from the object of our attention that makes us revere that object in its independence and purity. Things in nature can be valued as they are and without being altered by humans in this kind of attention. The attention that is not imposing, but just "receiving" the good in that moment of experiencing a natural wonder. Hence, a "close attention to and careful observation of the natural world often help trigger an understanding of other living things as pursuing their own goods in their own unique and fascinating ways."²³⁰

The Virtue of Selflessness

Murdoch's view of nature is akin to Rolston's. As already noted above, beauty in nature has the uncanny ability to transform human consciousness and behavior. She also thinks that "more naturally, as more properly, we take a self-forgetful pleasure in the sheer alien pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones, and trees."²³¹ But unlike Rolston, whose environmental ethics presupposes a kind of metaethical realism, Murdoch's view points to the reality of a metaphysical good which is somehow embodied in things. And it is this notion of goodness, not merely the goodness or value of things themselves, that inspires and attracts us to the virtuous life.

Western moral philosophy's extension of the notion of moral community that now gives due moral weight to the value of non-human entities exemplifies this 'restlessness' in human psychology. We, humans, seek and strive for this Good not only because it benefits us in

²²⁹ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 85.

²³⁰ Marion Hourdequin, *Environmental Ethics: From theory to practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 70.

²³¹ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 83.

terms of our flourishing but also because of its very nature. The Good is valuable and desirable in itself. All other goods that we find in nature are desirable and valuable conditionally and extrinsically, either because it serves human interests or by virtue of their relations to each other.²³² Only this kind of good is considered ultimate and unconditional. We pursue other goodness for the sake of this Good. However, this account of goodness does not imply that we cannot value other things as ends. We ought to value persons, for instance, as ends in themselves. But this value that we ascribe to persons is not fully commensurable with the kind of value referred to in the metaphysical notion of goodness explained above. The goodness of things does not have the character of ultimacy and absoluteness which the good itself has. To illustrate this point, one can value human beings, for instance, as ends. But in cases where this value can conflict with other environmental values, such as the value of trees, animals, and even ecosystems, then there is a need to consider, weigh and think through this conflict for the sake of the good itself. So if virtue ethics can accommodate this insight, then it can surmount the self-centeredness issue raised against it by its critiques.

Literature in virtue ethics suggests that there are virtues that are not necessarily self-regarding. Such virtues as benevolence, kindness, compassion, and self-sacrifice are instances of other-regarding virtues. A mother's unconditional love for her child, I think, best illustrates this kind of selfless character and conduct. A virtuous person is always willing to make some personal sacrifices for the sake of the Good. Obviously, when a person does a virtuous act to another, he is concerned

²³² I would like to build on Karen Green's very insightful distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value to ground my meta-ethical environmental virtue ethics. Though she ascribes unconditional goodness to the biosphere as a "precondition for life and value in general" (p. 38), I will go beyond this and instead ascribe unconditional goodness itself to the kind of meta-ethical good referred to by Iris Murdoch. Karen Green, "Two distinctions in Environmental Goodness," *Environmental Values* 5 (1996): 38.

for that person's good. It will sound strange if the reason why a mother loves her child is for the sake of this 'metaphysical' good. Her love would not be genuine at all if this is the case. But the point is that this metaphysical good is always there in the background, as a goal and ideal, motivating and inspiring us to attain moral perfection. In her book, *Intelligent Virtue*, Julia Annas discusses this notion of virtue as striving for perfection.²³³ She says that cultivating virtue is like acquiring and learning a skill. But unlike some skills, virtue is neither routine nor mechanical that automatically predisposes a person to a virtuous act. Virtue, as Annas suggests, is dynamic. Acquiring a virtue presupposes a 'need to learn' and the 'drive to aspire.' And I would like to add that the force behind this need and drive is this notion of the Good that I am proposing as a metaphysical grounding to virtue ethics.

Why cannot goodness be totally left to and located in the pure rational will of man as in Kant? In Kant's ethics, only the goodwill is unconditional so that the rightness of an act arises from our duty to do good regardless and without consideration of the consequences. Kant thinks that his categorical imperative is universal because it is what a rational person would consistently do in every morally relevant situation. This explains why we cannot treat other persons as mere means to our own ends because they are also rational beings like us capable of having their own ends. To treat them as mere means would be to exempt ourselves from and breach the categorical imperative. Hence, for Kant, only persons can become members of the so-called "kingdom of ends." But when goodness is viewed as arising from and solely residing in the autonomous goodwill of moral agents, the worry that the will could end up being self-absorbed and runs the risk of being exclusive, unbending, and even tyrannical can hardly be dispelled. This ethical narrowness and self-centeredness would have difficulty recognizing the goodness of other beings. That is why Kant thinks that

²³³ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

we do not have direct moral obligations to animals. For him, we must avoid cruelty to animals not because we recognize their intrinsic value but because of the possibility that our cruelty might spill over to our fellow human beings. But if we construe goodness as something we strive for that we cannot fully possess, then there is a way out of this difficulty. The notion of goodness that I presuppose to ground environmental virtue ethics can recognize the value in rational moral agents and natural things.

Rolston has a point when he says that nature's intrinsic value has some force in shaping and influencing human character. But based on the metaphysical account of goodness which I propose to underlie virtue ethics, nature's value and human effort are not the only forces that help build our virtues. The attraction of the good also comes into play in the formation of our virtues. Rolston's critique that virtue ethics as environmental ethics is dangerous because nature is construed as an instrument of human flourishing could only be directed to a eudaimonistic version of virtue ethics. But this criticism could be evaded if one maintains that the cultivation of human excellence and flourishing enables one to recognize values or goods other than human values or goods. The cultivation of the virtue of prudence, for instance, helps us balance our interests and those of other natural entities.

Proponents of eudaimonistic virtue ethics try to closely tie the possession of virtue with the good life understood in terms of human flourishing. But the good life is not always a flourishing life. The person lives the good life if he or she pursues the good for its own sake regardless of the benefits he or she may derive from such a pursuit. The life lived by a martyr-saint or a hero who foregoes personal benefit is an example of this good life. This is the moral life Murdoch referred to when she said: "The good life becomes increasingly selfless through an increased awareness of, sensibility to, the world beyond the self."²³⁴

²³⁴ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 53.

This is a selflessness achieved through what Murdoch calls "unselfing" that leads one to care for others, including nature.

The Virtues of Ecological Caring

How then should we respond to the demands of the natural environment? Murdoch's notion of virtue as "selfless attention" can be employed to develop an ecological virtue ethics. By giving focused attention to the state of our natural environment, we can temper and control our selfish tendencies often expressed in our consumptive habits and materialistic lifestyle. This lifestyle relies so much on using non-renewable resources and fossil fuels to produce the material things we need. Through "selfless attention," we realize that nature is not something that we dominate and manipulate to satisfy our selfish cravings. This teaches us, for example, the virtue of simplicity, temperance, and humility, among others. The virtue of simplicity helps us to avoid a consumerist lifestyle. Temperance helps us overcome our greed and control our unnecessary desires. Humility makes us appreciate nature for its pristine wonder and beauty. It also makes us respect its independence and intrinsic value. Our pride makes us disregard the value of nature as if they are just for our consumption or garbage where we throw our wastes. Science and technology are not to be blamed for the present ecological crisis. It is the mindless use of them that will spell the destruction of our already fragile planet. Murdoch has already told us that science, just like art, mathematics, and other intellectual disciplines is a training in virtue. We can use science to help us attain a virtuous life and a stable, healthy and conducive natural environment.

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CONCLUSION

The authors gathered around the theme of *Walking with the Earth* were invited to submit contributions on the understanding of *ecological caring*, notably focusing on three lines: first on concrete practice, *the value of doing*, as it is indisputably true that theoretically set complicated rules are useless, if walking the talk is not done concretely in some ways. Each and every person, concerned by our shared destiny on the planet, and collectively in concrete wide scale coalitions, we need to be formed to tackle a better balance in our way of living on the earth before addressing any more technically important ecological concerns.

There is a wide variety of ways we can individually refuse to harm the planet, or care about each others, while collectively environmental risks are being recognized and put in the middle of the agenda. One simple way of refocusing on ecology of personal individual life is to remind us that each new generation needs to learn how to appreciate the immense gift of world's beauty and generosity, as much as be informed about the announced collective disaster, if we don't do anything to change our lives. It is our responsibility to teach ecological care, proximity to the value of respect of the natural environment, and get smart ways to interiorize for each generation, virtuous habits toward the natural world, ecological philosophy and spirituality.

World religions indicated the path of a great "poetical travel" unveiling the unique charms of mother Earth as Buddhist, Christian, or African traditional wisdoms shows. If we take for instance the Amorji in Nigeria, who relate their religious philosophy to their ecological care, we see that traditional religious practices in rural communities of

Western Africa have well understood, since centuries, the need of extending the living community to include all living beings. Beyond the surface agreement on the importance of caring for nature, when this care is linked to responsibility towards other people, and the commandment to love one's neighbor, moral dilemmas and tensions appear, even in faith-based communities, as these values may be seen as either overlapping or entering in competition²³⁵.

The *value of doing* something, even very symbolic, has a crucial importance. It could be reducing one's own carbon footprint, reducing airplane ticket consumption... but thinking about carbon impact is not sufficient if caring about others is not added with crucial priority, as we show in our second part: *the value of caring*. Affirming the need of walking in the world, and witnessing the beauty of nature, has come paradoxically from the fact that we as human beings benefited a long period of relative peace, and economic stability over the last three or four decades, not only in many geographical contexts in the North, as the historian Y. Harari, or the political scientist J. Mearsheimer have demonstrated, but globally.

The development of a unipolar world after the Cold war, between 1990-2014, until the Crimean crisis, was a period of undisputed hegemony of the international liberal order lead by North America, seen as "the end of History" as F. Fukuyama pointed out. But this period saw almost an unlimited development of materialism and market economy dependency on the global scale. It was not only the time of the smart development of international institutions and rules-based models of building of coalitions on regional and continental levels, addressing the possibility of a jointed and peaceful global development. The increase of economic and industrial and communication and media interactions

²³⁵ As shown by Thomas Kroeck, in his survey analysing through his empirical study, the perception of the Protestant Christians in Germany, ch. 9, 139.

contributed in heating up dangerously the world system, which some identified not only as an Anthropocene but a Capitalocene. Models of modernization, such as W.W. Rostow's economic model during the Cold War period, transformed a possible solution for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, with modernization, into a model not fitted for countries from the global South. Not only is an irrational addiction to growth seen as the economic stage of maturity by many (related to dependency of structural economic distortions on the global level, with regards to developing countries), but behaving in unashamed consumerist ways is harming the planet in an irreversible manner.

The principle of reality soon reminded us of the hard ground under our feet as natural catastrophes hit us on the global scale. In times of transformation of the Covid-19 pandemic into endemic contamination, Jes Colding sees the glass half full: "Coronavirus has exposed the dangers of bigness and indiscriminate use of technology in the pursuit of power and profit²³⁶." A planetary eco-theological point of view, in the Christian religious tradition, can further be presented as transcending the obstacles of an unbalanced Christian religious faith in economic miracles in the "age of high mass consumption" (Rostow, 1960). In some ways, it is as if religion helped to legitimize secular ways of dealing with Earth and sanctifying the superiority of the human, over the other natural species. Prosperous life and maximization of profits can be seen as virtuous following M. Weber and the world of international liberal order, who made possible the false impression that business as usual will remain, and other cultures and civilizations missed the train, although they all bring an equally plausible light on fundamental values in our world and shared destiny. It seemed that the great narrative had frozen the liberal type into the truest crystallization of our stage of historical development, bringing the understanding of common good and

²³⁶ Ch. 8 above, John Mohan Razu, "Earth's Future and the Futures of Humans", 116-117.

international cooperation closer to the values of the global North. This whole picture of a North American and Western European centric world, has been exposed to considerable opposition and to constant transformative challenges, as a consequence of the end of political hegemony of the US and the Northern part of the planet. Slowly, each region of the world with wealth and demographic advantage has started equally to consider itself as actors of History with P. Huntington, resisting to the idea that being hooked on capitalism is sufficient to describe accurately a world order, viewed as a system in tension across cultures and civilizations. From 2014 onward, the world order changes into a multipolar world order. China and Russia are adding their influence to the US, closing definitely the historical period of post-cold war and unilateral hegemony by Western powers.

Passing from a widely liberal and human right based model of international development, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to a multipolar world order after the Crimean crisis in 2014, the balance of international values came closer to consider the aim of solidarity as caring for other values and interests, instead of simply imposing one single agenda of international world order. This situation which is yet not fully acknowledged by many, justifies a third point of view in this book, the perspective of questioning the value of values²³⁷. It is not the aim of this book to compare further the political and philosophical-legal fronts, which appear as consequence of the shift from the dominant world view. Nevertheless, this axiological change would deserve a proper conceptual attention. It seems that moving from liberal-democratic and legal conceptions with H.L.A Hart, or from a liberal

²³⁷ Christoph Stückelberger's *Globalance. Ethics Handbook for a Balanced World Post-Covid* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2020, 608pp.), is the only great attempt in my view to grasp this new plurality of a multipolar world order, based on a possible common "balance of values" (and powers), as third way beyond great power influences.

consensus related set of values with J. Habermas and J. Rawls, as top-down guaranty for peaceful and fair human development in society, to the reassessment of the value of sovereignty, and national interest, in the application of rule and principle-based set of norms, should not make the importance of international regulations and alliances weaker, but only the appearance of the whole large picture of the human interactions less holistic, but as positive consequence more pragmatic, and perspective oriented/contextual.

Saying that at the end of the day the *value of values*, or the right balance of a multipolar system of powers at play, of cultures, world views and morals is what would bring harmony –including a harmonious proximity to nature–, is only the expected consequence of this evolution of the world. Axiological commitment and knowledge entails to question our capacity to grasp the balancing nature of values on the one hand. Are we ready to see the difference between a reason-based action, on the ground of a set of secondary reasons qua value attachments with J. Raz? This critical and rational realist move on the level of the theory of the values, is putting the pragmatic ground of action and practice on hold, when equally important options are available. Suspending judgement is a way of escaping a possibly dangerous situation, caused by a total immersive dependency on a set of values (from psychological stress, to moral disagreement, and the diktat of local traditions). Focusing on the value of values should not be reduced to a complicated stance, because it is by nature theoretical. A long philosophical tradition which goes up to the Scottish T. Reid, turns Cartesian doubt about external world, and thus the criterion for belief in favor of common-sense. We can also consider the aesthetical dimension on the margin of ethical values and understand how we are pulled into a set of norms and values, in dynamical ways, how we are deeply attached to some value-based reasons to act in our daily life. This observation can be used to bring a better or more playful view on the serious matter of

competing values, as we think about general-principal based evidence for values.

The pivotal influence of some values over others, as in the very serious circumstances of Great power politics, should not make us over pessimistic and lose hope if we consider ourselves as a small unit of influence on the global scale. The complex of the interplay of different geographical worldviews, of incommensurable requirements of exceptionalism and the renaissance of nationalistic tendencies globally, shows that there are more and more situations where understanding of nature can bring us together, as we all should see climate deregulation and human careless exploitation of natural resources.

Do we really need to realize under conditions of risk, and considerable pressure from the environment, new ways of entering in dialogue and the principle of sharing on values²³⁸? As Jes Colding rightly points out:

“To accept that there must be a balance in everything and everywhere in the Universe as everything is bonded and part of the same. To get to this realization from within rather than under duress from the burning platform created by the natural disasters around us, [is] (...) preferable²³⁹.”

As conclusion we therefore would want to highlight two axes: first, we underline the new and growing value of the play-element, which is an honest way of adding a realist perspective on value interactions and international cooperation. As education should always prepare the ground for the future, caring about making cultural and educational

²³⁸ See the early 2012 30pp. Globethics.net declaration, *Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions*, Texts Series No. 1, Geneva: Globethics.net.

²³⁹ “Is” is our comment, above Ch. 5, Jes Colding, “What Kierkegaard missed (...)”, 84.

matters more joyful and concretely more effective is indeed an appropriate way of opening our conclusion. Second, we show the importance of intercultural dialogue on the ground of theology and the care for the world, in four sections: “Weaving the threads of a frail fabric”, “Language and the entanglement of cultures”, “How to share experiences of encountering creation across cultures and religions – The task of an intercultural theology and ethics” and “Writing and reading books – A contemplative act of walking with the earth”.

Caring about Making Cultural and Educational Matters More Joyful

Walking as dancing or playing music has a play-element, as one key conceptual central part. Education as fair play is what makes learning a participative common interest and something always rooted in transforming the world. Culture and the environment both have close intrinsic relation to what makes the world a joyful place to live.

Student’s life will be fruitful and plenty of exciting moments when work hard is compatible with playing hard, but this does not mean necessarily to go out, party and drink alcohol. Working in a campus library, doing what is needed to realize a promised intellectual collaboration with persons you like and admire, are possible while having pleasure in doing that. Being part of a community or network of learning institutions is partly valuable because it makes your academic life easier. The basic elements and ingredients for intellectual play are simple from the outside.

One needs to delimitate an intellectual home: *oikos*, where you can keep careful control of what you consume as you might do for food, sport activities, your religious life, etc. It does not mean that this intellectual space should not be an inspiring playground for a creative use of resources, let’s say on ethics, philosophy or theology, if it is your

interest. It should be a delimited space of freedom, a catalyser for aspiration to learn and self-develop together with others.

In the present work entitled: *Walking with the Earth. Intercultural Perspectives on Ethics of Ecological Caring*, (Publisher: Globethics.net) we may find the word “walking” unusual, if not surprizing. It is as a play-element would have been invited to a serious programme. Is it some kind of casting error? We would like as conclusion to give some claims in favour of the seriousness of the walk, which is a metaphor for the play element in education as well as an empirical reality. We consider walking as a play and would want to position it in the semantic field of education and culture.

The play-element in sports, walking, culture, education can be defined as a cross-cultural, environment friendly perspective, which is not directly related to ethical or religious values, but which introduces an out-of-the-box thinking, and which is essential in fostering collective participatory attitudes. As such, the play element complements nicely the ethical layer of our reality but, how does this fruitful dialogue happen? As preamble, a suite of proper names should come to our mind, from the most recent to the most venerable and ancient: Suits, Winnicott, Huizinga, Nietzsche and Schelling, –all having affirmed the crucial importance of playing for the personal development.

When we focus on education, we should not forget to mention Humboldt’s aim of education, as a human formation and communication in *action*. For Humboldt the aim of education as “formation” (Bildung), is conceived in a very broad sense. It is aimed not merely to provide professional skills, but to realize a human full potential (sensory-motor, intellectual, moral, metaphysical/religious capacity). It means, if we place education on the ground of the language, not as work (Werk, Ergon) but as performance in action (Tätigkeit, Energieia).

Let’s narrow down the playful performance which is easy to understand on the level of communication, to our key role as *Homo*

Ludens. The property of being a playful performer of our actions should not be seen as an antagonist combination of four perspectives in the human capacities. *Homo Ludens*, *Homo Faber*, *Homo Sapiens* & the *itinerarium mentis in Deum* are all parts of one whole, as we are a whole as person. The human being can be perceived as a holistic and integrally harmonious being and at the same time we can also be presented as a psycho-physiological system of cognitive, linguistic, affective dynamical potentials, which in turn is in great tension, as the cognitive sciences present it. One of the basic structures of our behaviour is craftsmanship, which is at the core of most technical disciplines:

“A craft serves an inner satisfaction or an external benefit. So it either drives away the sadness or distress, either useful or pleasant.” (Bonaventure, Anonymus, *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, §2. translated as *Der Aufbau der Wissenschaften*, English: *The Structure of the Sciences*.)

But *faber* and *ludens* are not so far from each other: they are all related to the formation of the external parts of the human being. Bonaventure/Anonymous writes further:

“If the art of handicraft is to provide comfort and entertainment, then it becomes the art of acting. It is the art of Games and includes all kinds of playing, be it singing, instrumental music, sculpture or the theatre. If this art has in mind the benefit or cultivation of the external man, so clothing or food can be the procurement of both” (ibid.)

University is traditionally seen as being a serious place *par excellence*. The play-element is not challenging the claim that university should be and remain a serious business which must fulfil services to the community and be a knowledge provider, and a place of exemplary values. Still, there is place for different human levels in the person:

- *Sapiens*: Conceptual knowledge without existential commitment (and grounding into ethics/religion). Possible side effect of unbalanced intelligence: science without conscience makes life not desirable (melancholy, *akrasia*).
- *Faber*: Doing is as important as seeing external results of what we succeed to realize. Crucially, learning and knowing without doing, might not meet some important needs. It is of no need to have the most beautiful cover on a book, if we have not opened it and read it concretely. Is there any lesson to be learnt from the theory? Similar questions show the importance of doing and practice for life.
- *Ludens*: Knowing and doing the right thing, with relevant commitment, but without any play-element, we might not reach far enough towards other persons (communicative power, soft-power). Joy in our life.

Our focus: we dare to take a closer look at education within the play-full element of life as there are obvious reasons to see as valuable the playful element in becoming who we are as human being. Schiller praises play as an aesthetical education which is not to be confounded with learning artistic activities:

“For, to speak out once for all, human being [man] only plays *when in the full meaning of the word he is a human being [man], and he is only completely a person [man] when he plays*. This proposition, which at this moment perhaps appears paradoxical, will receive a great and deep meaning if we have advanced far enough to apply it [...]” (our italic, we replaced “man” by some more appropriate and general terms).

Playing cannot be an all mighty absolute analysis of life, as play remains a limited facet of life, even if the meaning of the whole life remains partly encapsulated in this facet. Consequently, there should be another

side, distinct from the performing actor, a kind of mirror image of the play, when the player becomes spectator:

“The human mind cannot refrain from the fact that he himself is the tool of knowledge”, even if the human person thinks he/she is “both the origin and the recipient of knowledge.” We are not only a tool of knowledge but a limited part of a collective collaboration, which is not always a game, should we say. To be more precise, the more a play element in education tends to be a collaborative attitude, the less we can avoid taking into account a *strategic* kind of play element, designed to benefit higher interests. It is not simple to escape a purely instrumental perspective and being part of sophisticated system, distinct from the view of the lifeworld, as Habermas saw it well. Perhaps it is never totally the case, but dependencies can be counterbalanced, weakness once acknowledged transformed in a larger set of combination of values. Adding the ethical relevance of six different dimensions of how we enter in relation collectively to collaboration, as equity and reciprocity, sustainability, solidarity, responsibility, unity and diversity, and peace and security shows, the important human need for values/metaphysical grounding, and/or religious commitment. Some part of the hexagon of these six dimensions of collaborative interaction, may at some point be dominant, over some other, but a holistic view would always mitigate any strong disequilibrium²⁴⁰. Contrary to pragmatism, negotiation and playing around to get the best deal in a collaboration, grounding individual or collective action on an exclusive non-utilitarian basis, different from means to an end relations, implies searching a grounding on the reality of truth and reason, as simply value-based claims are by essence relativistic and subject of discussion. Both views are complementary: exploring difficult moral problems can only be done in

²⁴⁰ “Ethical Frame of Reference”, *Ethics in Higher Education. A Key Driver to Recovery, A Globethics.net Discussion Paper*, Texts Series No. 7, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2022, 13.

an interesting way by affirming the equal importance for the cognitive value of the play element in an intellectual enquiry. Who can say that no concealment or spinning ever played any role in building education as a truth-oriented and reason-based educational enterprise?

Some important objections against the play element:

In education but also in public information, the narrative dimension of the human activities (storytelling, art, journalism) can enter in competition with the discovery of reality, the difficult and long way of learning in all different disciplines, across different methods. Teaching and honest communication should not be a way of trying to embellish or hide reality. Spinning is putting in priority best arguments in the balance when telling a story, but an honest pretention for truth should try to moderate exaggerations and half-truths. Our mind seems to mistakenly think of a fundamental dichotomy between play and learning or the formation of knowledge. Concealing, which means preventing something from being known, is not exactly a lie and therefore wrong, but it is playing with the fair balance of objectivity, focusing on a strategic profit over a more balanced reflection of all open options. Any uneven equilibrium can backfire and represents some risk. The unfair play with the balance of powers in presence represents always an ethical challenge for education professionals. On the one hand, trust between the parties is questioned when unfair games are discovered, and honesty is in danger if nothing is done to respond. On the other hand, we need a capacity for comprehension and empathy, as psychodynamic defence mechanisms as well as symbolic enactments are present on the unconscious inner world level, which then are mirrored or projected onto the social world²⁴¹.

²⁴¹ For a good recent study on the benefits and also the challenges professional ethics may encounter in the practice, not only in academia but all sorts of different economic sectors, when exposing deep emotions and tendencies at play see: Cécile Rozuel, "Psychodynamics and the Field of Management, Spirituality

The distinct dialectic between the play element as creative power which may also be present as psychological compensation of a loss has been well described since Freud (See in particular Freud's game of the wooden reel). As Rozuel shows well: "The [...] interaction between individuals and systems, shaping one another in constructive or compensatorily destructive ways, therefore becomes a critical dimension of management thinking", "to manage effectively and responsibly, it is essential to account for the various conscious emotional patterns at play, the unconscious (compensatory) motives and needs unveiled, and the capacity of the organisation to respond to these conscious and unconscious dynamics²⁴²." Analogous desires and aspirations exist for the collective ideal of a harmonious living with nature, and the organization in applying new rules in the education sector acting on the agenda of the environment.

Constructive or related to disruptive affects, the inner play of non-dual views of human nature relate directly to culture as we stand as players and spectators, passionate and active or moved by deep emotional resonances as part of our being. Are we not players and spectators in the process of being? These aspects are reflected in the manner in which knowledge is formed. The education methods and ethics in education show one thing: the need to have a good balance, as abstaining from excess; excess of action, excess of contemplation.

On the psychological side, there is not only the temptation to reduce the play element to a side effect of an episode of negative hedonistic experience; it might also be seen as an extraordinary but artificial positive hedonistic stimulus. As excess, even as an innocent

and Religion: Deciphering the Unconscious, Mapping the Soul" in: Altman, Yochanan, Neal, Judi and Mayrhofer, Wolfgang, *Workplace Spirituality: Making a Difference*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022, Ch. 20, 292-4. See also in the same volume: Laszlo Zsolnai, "Ethics and Spirituality", 75ff.

²⁴² Rozuel, 2022, op. cite 293.

accentuation of the positive sides of life, play should be accompanied with a *caveat* narcissism: there should be a special attention given to the illusion of all mightiness. Up to some degree, our naïve playing is part of a tendency to reduce external phenomena to be in service of our dreams. There is a psychological investment, in the psychoanalysis sense, a manipulation of psychic affective energy and drives, to adapt external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling. Playing gives the illusion of “all mightiness”, which is useful if we want to give self-confidence, but dangerous if the need for the illusion of all mightiness is not balanced properly with a large set of virtues and with the sense of justice and respect. We may hope that play is a joyfully resonant way of empowerment.

The second objection is somehow related as it is also against the play element as challenge towards virtue and authenticity. Is there no obvious risks related to playing with chance? Gambling is often based in simulation. Projective play, out of the imitation of social roles, occur when the spectator view from the point of view of the Reason or of reasons is missing. Playing activity as gambling implies to change constantly masks, to be always in the driver’s seat. There is a hope, that by being smart enough, we change our destiny, even at the cost of irrational attempts. On the international level, security competition between large nations often appears as very serious games. Play as part of a set of rules transforms into taking active part in a game, but let’s be aware about the interplay of complex political conditions, bounded powers, structured and finely lead alliances. Here may be introduced a third objection which concerns as well some kind of non-transparency. The rules of a game can be kept hidden and no longer shared. They can be constantly redefined by the person who silently proclaims them. Non-transparent games are often used to deprive others from power. Security competition should aim at peace, it should not allow fearmongering,

exaggerated tragic predictions or half-truth based narratives, as non-transparent public campaigns.

Given all these risks of abuse of power: why do we value and keep the play-element anyway?

The answer is obvious and simple: education, culture, work place, spiritual life... all these aspects of human life need a serious basis as soft power. Playing should not anymore be seen as childish regression, or as having a tendency towards elitism: not only rich people should afford leisure and good life as luxury. Play concerns power relations, therefore wealth and demographic data matters, and in order to be visible and dominant players usually don't hide much. Having said that, some good understanding of structural realism is wise in uncertain times, it is different from narrow-minded cynicism. The play-element should be refocused on the needs of those who don't have basic goods, as we live since a decade in a non-hegemonic international political order, in a wider world, across different cultures, spiritualities and religions. Driving constructive power and preventing destructive fears demand, in order to remain creative and transformative, –and in order to be able to spread and be convincing!– the fundamental need to be seen as a soft-play, a ludic structure of the civil society related to participation (soft power). Do note that participation is not simply communication, you don't master a sport, piano or even cooking by being given a mere recipe. Soft power is shared action in practice; it is playing by the rules. Fair play means different things that we shall list as final observations:

- Ethics, morals, truth, reason, justice, religious life and peace-building are all possible good delimitations of the play-element in education.
- Implementing ludic education needs both just peace and fair rules in order to focus on the humaneness necessary for fair play. It is even more important in situations of economic tensions, health crisis or political corruption.

Intercultural Dialogue on the Ground of Theology and the Care for the Environment

Weaving the threads of a frail fabric

Cross-cultural engagement is like a frail fabric. In the best of all circumstances it is translucent, and allows the light shine through for all to see more clearly how the threads of what life holds together are interwoven. In the advert case, it may tear easily into pieces or reveal holes. Similarly, the relationship between people of different cultural contexts are often tied to very subtle, yet fundamental nuances. This finds not only expression in communication and the necessity to translate from one language to another in order to facilitate understanding, but more so to lay accountability about the way cultures condition language, and vice versa.

Language and the entanglement of cultures

It may be possible to translate a word from English to Bahasa (Indonesia), and from Kiswahili to English. However, it is valid to pose the question if one will ever be able to capture the full semantic spectrum of a word translated from one language to another. What may be lost in the process? We may understand the Kiswahili noun *kanga* as signifying ‘a piece of colorful cloth’ in English, but the full depth of its meaning related to its functionality and symbolism may escape in this translation process. Sometimes, people too can become lost in translation as they endeavor to get closer to one another. This is true because languages and cultures are intimately entangled with one another. Therefrom both the vulnerability and the immense enrichment of intercultural encounters emerges. Translation never ends; it constitutes a perpetual duty of active listening and mutual learning that needs to be renewed time and again.

How to share experiences of encountering creation across cultures and religions – The task of an intercultural theology and ethics

How can this duty be achieved, and in which manner are experiences of encountering creation translatable across cultures, religions and worldviews? It is probably in this domain that intercultural theology and ethics, with their attention for the permeability of narratives circulated in cultural contexts and beyond, can play a critical role. Their consideration for the processes of translation –of decoding cultural meaning– is not only bound to cognitive or spiritual dimensions, but also to the material world, for example how people in different cultural settings make meaning of their being-with nature. Christian Theology, by way of illustration, offers a normative approach to these encounters with the environment within a framework of a divine and lasting encounter (*creatio continua*) which shapes all other relationships – humans among themselves and humans with all living beings. The consequence of this specific normative framing, embedded in a unique story of self-offering, is that creation, with all life therein, appears as a gift.

This gift demands to be responded through free acts of considerateness and responsibility. Intercultural theology and ethics fosters sensitivity for the manifold versions of responses to this foundational story of understanding all life and creation as a divine gift to be preserved and cared for, and not only utilized. Intercultural theology and ethics also cultivate the respect for other foundational stories and interpretations, and endeavor to develop hermeneutical lenses, keys to understanding the rationale virulent in diverse cultures. The plurality of the responses to the leading question of how life and creation can be preserved gives testimony to a decisive intersectionality: On the one hand, there is the recognition of a shared space that becomes intellectually accessible through narrating, perhaps also documenting the stories of encounters with creation –and the possibility (not the claim)

that the stories become mutually intelligible, that shared values, interrogations, visions and moral imagination would emerge. This would constitute the strand of universality, of which a universal consciousness of and ethical solicitation of the preciousness of life/all living beings and the created world would be part. On the other hand, there is the observation that the encounters with creation *are* not only different, but that they are *bound to be* different, as it is the encounter with the particularity of the engagement with creation in other cultures, or through the lenses of other cultures, that one can engage one's own cultural approach to creation.

Writing and reading books – A contemplative act of walking with the earth

Could it be that people have something to say to one another across cultures and worldviews that is not only a matter of narrating, understanding and interpreting creation and ecological care, thus cognitive arrangements and re-arrangements? The variety of the contributions to this publication project may be seen as such an intercultural project of opening the horizon widely for recognising the full range of responses to the question of what an ethics of ecological care may mean and look like. From the Pacific islanders' holistic and wisdom-oriented *we-are-therefore-we-live* relational spirituality, and ethics to South Indian activist approaches for a political ecology and earth stewardship projects in South and Central America – a wealth of vistas on how human lives are related to all living beings would escape our attention, if we would not tell these stories, write about them and thus initiate a kind of continuous and dynamic process of exchange across cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, economic and social boundaries. Simultaneously, it can be perceived as a contemplative act of walking with the earth: free, non-invasive, discursive, and open for the mysterious discoveries of what we can learn from one another on caring for our common home – the world in all its beauty and frailty.

May the collection of contributions to this book represent for the readers such a contemplative act of walking with the earth and of rapprochement between people of different cultures.

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Geneva, January 2022

EPILOGUE

A Gift To Share – A Sonnet For the People of the Way

When we are walking together,
The rhythm of our movements reverberates and animates us.
Our bodies become the living symbols of our aspirations, embodiments
of our hopes, sometimes our sorrows, more often our shared longings –
the soft sounds of our steps and the gentle, scintillant contours of our
silhouettes are the transient signposts of our passing.

When we are walking together,
The multi-tonal echo of our voices amplifies into a colourful chorus:
Indelible vocal imprints leaving traces for us, and all companions on our
path, to collectively remember and hold fast to our journey's destination.
Verbal tattoos as keepsakes for what guided us yesterday, today and
tomorrow:
Responding to the cries of the earth, of the invisible and voiceless.

When we are walking together,
We may be carried away, inhaling the fragrant winds from further afield,
Attracted and pondering on the best suited route to take, while realising
the sand and the pebbles beneath our feet only seemingly inhibiting our
advancement.

And on our way,
Moving on serpentine roads winding uphill,
Forward we march, joining hands and carefully watching one over the
other.
Through turns and twists, resisting the accustomed gaze, we gain a
broader sight on the lands beyond the swirling waters.

And on our way,
As we are walking further inwards –
Visiting one another at the brink of our wounds and at the sources of our
joys –
We see a narrow path, scarcely cleared, yet promising and inviting.
Whispering words of wisdom,
sometimes pausing, waiting and then – moving forwards,
determined, and yet carefully pursuing our journey, with dignifying
gestures and elevating affirmation, for all to hear the chants of our hearts
to amend the wrong,
to sow the seeds of hope, learning, dreaming, resisting,
and dreaming again.

And on our way,
not too far away from where we left,
It may dawn on us, the gift is not imprisoned in an endless chain of
obligated reciprocity.
The gift given to us – from a world both within and beyond –
arises from our free and tender acts of considerateness for one another.
In these gentle caresses, sometimes also forthright articulations of pains
from our open wounds, resides the mystery of sharing gifts freely,
requiring no returns,
free of expectations,
as solemn and vibrant icons of the way we marched together,
engraved in our souls.

And if it were that we became errant on the way, it is these icons –
emblematic for our quest to remain truthful, upright and caring –
that will keep us on course,
weaving our stories with those of others,
knowing that only these interwoven tapestries of seeing the world,
of being in it as resident-sojourners –
people of the place and people of the way, both at the same time –
only these vivacious, living fabrics will create new spaces of encounter,
of seeing oneself and those around us afresh,
of carrying one another through, and of imagining and forging what
could be.

A world entrusted to us, a life-time of discovery and wonder, of
suspension –
just long enough to keep us expectant,
just profound enough to let the silence speak to us –

Listening to ineffable and yet perceptible words:

A gift to share, graciously given to us, and from us to others,
priceless, free and without any returning obligation.

A gift to be found not in what we have,
but in who we are,
and in who we wish to become for one another –

When we are walking together.

Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué

Geneva, the 15 December 2021

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WALKING WITH THE EARTH

It is commonly believed that considering nature different from us, human beings (qua rational, cultural, religious and social actors), is detrimental to our engagement for the preservation of nature. An obvious example is animal rights, a deep concern for all living beings, including non-human living creatures, which is understandable only if we approach nature, without fearing it, as something which should remain outside of our true home. "Walking with the earth" aims at questioning any similar preconceptions in the wide sense, including allegoric-poetic contributions. We invited 14 authors from 4 continents to express all sorts of ways of saying why caring is so important, why togetherness, being-with each others, as a spiritual but also embodied ethics is important in a divided world.

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