

Crown of Creation?

The Earthling and his Shared World

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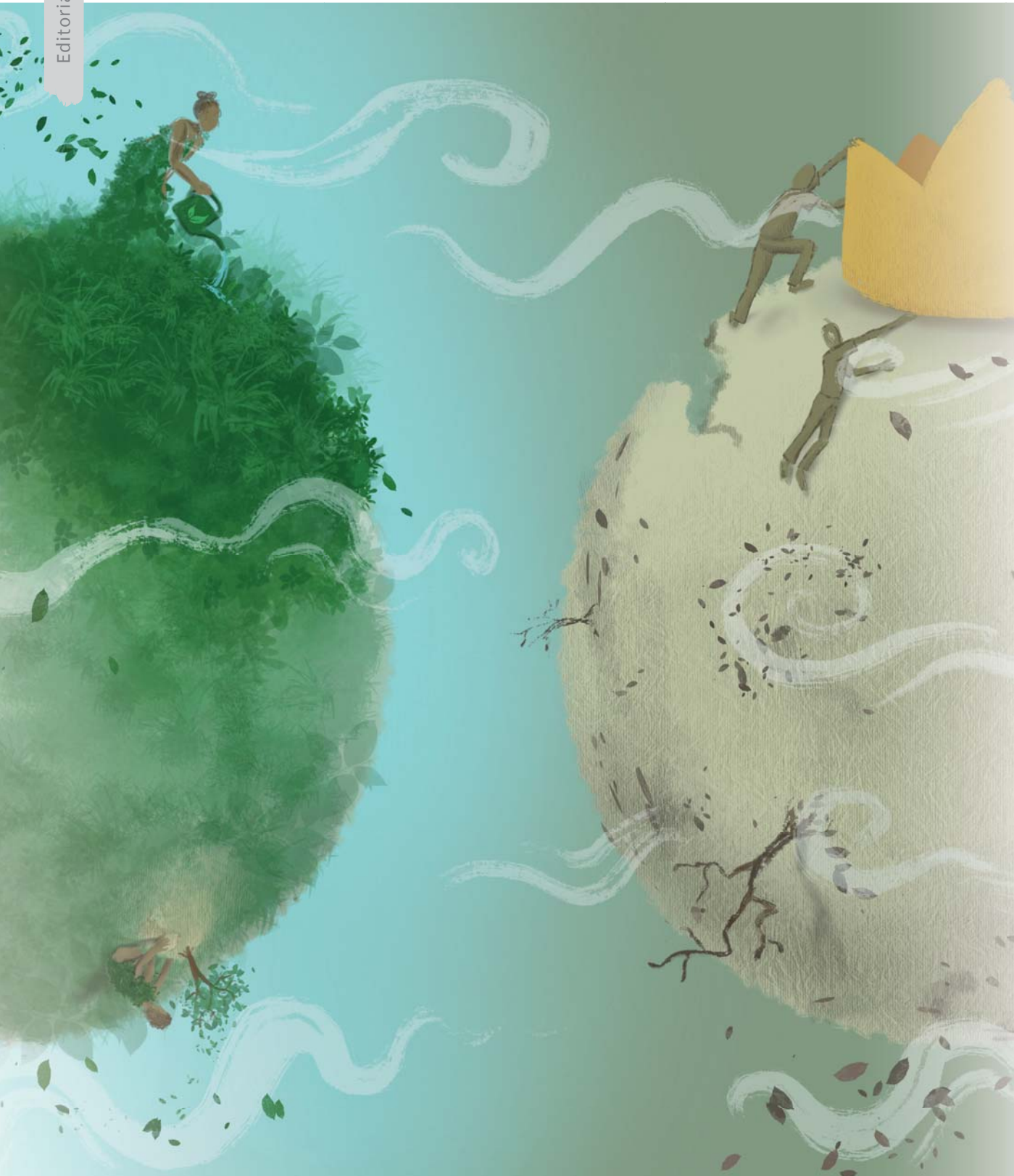
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EDITORIAL

Enormous heat and widespread forest fires in Europe and North America – two of the most recent consequences of the ‘environmental crisis’. What we, humanity, must do today is tackle the spiral of this crisis – and with it our own future as the ‘*crown of creation*’. This expression and the conceptual separation of humans and nature associated with it is already rooted in the philosophy of Aristotle.

The Christian thinking of the Middle Ages, based on the Biblical Jewish tradition, on the other hand, was still aware of humans as part of Creation. For scholastic philosophy, humans were indeed gifted in thinking, but nevertheless only an ‘animal rationale’, a rational animal. For the Franciscan philosophers, such as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure or Duns Scotus, a relationship with God was inconceivable without a nurturing responsibility for Creation. In their interpretation of the incarnation, they saw the whole of Creation as also being saved because Jesus Christ had accepted the flesh of Creation. It is only with the beginning of the technological age and the beginning of humans' alienation from faith that the hubris is born that humans can, must and may make nature available and subjugate itself for their own benefit.

Even today's efforts to tackle the climate crisis through more modern technologies remain tied to the harmful thinking patterns of domination and availability. In addition to technical progress, a different attitude and a new self-image is required – one which is also expressed vocally, because the way we talk about ourselves shapes our behaviour. Biologically, nothing separates us from ‘nature’; we are made of water and dust “and to dust we will return”, as stated in the biblically founded liturgy. In this regard, instead of talking about the environment, it is helpful to take the shared world into consideration. Recognising nature as a shared world gives it the dignity it deserves and takes a realistic view of us humans as responsible fellow creatures. What this can look like in concrete terms is dealt with in the articles in this issue which, from different perspectives, shed light on humans' self-image and their relationships with their shared world.



P. Johannes B. Freyer OFM and Jakob Siegel, editors

FELLOW CREATURE AND SHARED WORLD INSTEAD OF CROWN OF CREATION AND ENVIRONMENT. INDIGENOUS JEWISH IMPULSES

Deborah Williger

Plant physiology teaches us that energy gives way when structures grow. Plants “lignify” when energy sources such as plant sugar are converted into cell wall building materials. Dogmatic guidelines and expectations for fulfilling religious laws also favour a climate of spiritual immobility and the insistence on soulless outwardness in Jewish communities. Hierarchical structures lead to the immaturity of believers and to forced allegiance. Jewish scholarship, the Talmud and rabbinic literature were exclusively male domains until the 20th century. The lessons on forgiveness, loyalty, reconciliation and unity are primarily for men. This also applies to the great message of peace in Genesis. From Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers, the brothers' stories in Genesis show the learning process: conflicts should be resolved without violence. But to this day, machismo, which, just like weapons, is experiencing a boom again, has to be fought. On the other hand, the parental values of care, attention and mercy seem to be disappearing. From today's point of view, in particular, mechanisms of the Jewish tradition that continue to strengthen patriarchal structures must be criticised. In Germany, gender segregation still exists, even in liberal communities.

In addition to the trauma of the Shoah, Jewish communities are being worn down by daily efforts towards integration, the Middle East conflict, the delicate use of power in Israel, everyday anti-Semitism and increasing secularisation. Avraham Burg recently wrote that there is a rule of thumb for understanding Jewish history: wherever conservative forces readjusted the horizons, our communities dwindled, but wherever there were heated debates,

Jewish culture created great things. The quality of the forthcoming discourse between old Europe and the new Europeans will determine the future of the entire West. Will nationalism prevail and marginalise everything that is not German, or will an open and conversational culture be born that will be able to cope with the challenges of the climate catastrophe? Burg continues: “The absence of Jews, especially German Jews, in this discourse is a terrible shortcoming.”¹

Talmudic open-mindedness is the original indigenous teaching of the rabbis. All ritual and ethical commandments must be continuously reviewed and vitalised by rabbis. In the Mishnah, it says: the revelation was given to Moses not as *חרות* (charut: inscription), but in *חירות* (cheirut: freedom) (Pirke Avot 6.2). Religions that offer freedom of succession have great potential to unfold their supra-individual, intergenerational, unifying healing powers and to “deliver” humans from idols such as ego, greed, chauvinism, Mammon and trauma.

Healing the divine world – Tikkun Olam

In the current discourse, there is the realisation that what we do to our fellow world, we do to ourselves and the following generations. Ecology encourages us to deal with existing resources economically, i.e., thriftily. It opposes the exploitation and depletion of natural resources. The term environment shows our anthropological self-image. Humans are in the middle and the environment around them. Distance to the environment made the manifold destruction of our shared world possible. This distance must be overcome. Since time immemorial,

¹ BURG (2022).

human beings have endeavoured to bring all natural forces, internal and external, under their control. The cultural evolution of our created world of growth took place from the making of tools, through the use of vehicles, to the development of thinking things (computers)². But it is only the development of healing things that can dress the ever-deeper wounds cut into Creation by our system of excessive growth. A paradigm shift must be made to counteract this evolutionary impasse and the self-destructive forces. Without spiritual reconnection to the gift of life, disaffection from nature will increase and individual consciousness will disappear from society. "It remains unrecognised that, under total control, subjects also dissolve that ultimately are missing in societies in order to be able to stop undesirable development. Therefore, the spirit and everything that is good in its origin and existence are helplessly entangled in this horror. As a result, it makes virtually no difference whether animals or humans become victims. If nature is to be remembered and recognised, an urge of existence can only develop after its peace."³

Indigenous American author Sherrie Mitchell writes: we must stand up for the Earth, protect it. We must demand justice for the Earth before the consumption of luxury and the pursuit of profit.⁴ Today, about 80% of all remaining animal species live on only perhaps 20% of the Earth's surface. These 20% are areas that belong mainly to indigenous peoples. The West must act urgently and reflect on its own indigenous roots. For centuries, the Hebrew Bible was misused in cultural appropriation to legitimise imperialist powers. When Jewish inheritance is spoken of today, it refers to the Hebrew Bible, which is regarded as an inheritance and divided among self-empowered heirs. The religious matrix served as an ideological instrument, and thus the consolidation of authoritarian, secular power interests. In doing so, the works of living rabbinical Judaism of the last 2000 years were mostly ignored. At least since the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah about 200 years ago, this knowledge has been largely ignored even by the

Jewish majority. Hardly anyone knows, for example, the Mishnah Order Seraim (seeds) with its harvest levies for the needy or the Talmudic Order Nashin (women), which created legal security for women in the ancient world.

Jewish knowledge encompasses not only religion, rite, social issues, nutrition, commerce, law, education, but also agriculture, animals and our entire environment. It can be said that much of the Jewish tradition is based on indigenous knowledge. Jewish texts hold great potential, especially for matters of current environmental ethics. It is knowledge that has been acquired from spiritual proximity between humans, animals and nature since pre-Biblical times. The continuous handing-down from generation to generation provided knowledge about useful properties and skills, about natural knowledge and knowledge from observations and experiences about changing environmental conditions, knowledge about nature and its biodiversity. This is evidenced by the countless Jewish sources related to natural processes, such as the many "green" examples and metaphors in the narratives and verses, in the books, psalms or wise sayings of the Hebrew Bible. Likewise, Kabbalah, the mystical tradition, deals with spiritual connections between creation and life. Jewish tradition focuses on living and acting in the here and now and on believing in a moral evolution. There is no law outside of justice and no justice outside of law. Zedek u Mishpat: justice and law belong together (Proverbs 2:9). Emet, the truth encompasses everything from beginning to end. Just as the Torah encompasses all life and contains all truth. The Torah is an oral and written revelation. It is on Earth, not in Heaven, and serves to guide humans. In Jewish ethics, the bad has no metaphysical meaning. It does not seek out humans from the outside, like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, but is in every human being, just as everything good is. Thinking, feeling and acting form a unity and do not oppose each other. In Judaism, possible questions about God, guilt, life after death, or individual salvation of the soul play a lesser role.

² LÜKE (2006): 32. - ³ HORKHEIMER/ADORNO (2013): 11. - ⁴ MITCHELL (2020).

Indigenous Jewish knowledge

The Garden of Eden is both origin and destination. The creation of reality was God's good work. The Kabbalists see the divine spheres, called ten Sefirot (numbers), as vessels filled with divine light. On the creation of the world, seven Sefirot burst apart and divine light was scattered. Bad deeds fill "divine light" with darkness. Darkness reigns secluded from the light of God in the divine universe. Good should outshine evil. Good deeds can collect scattered light and energy again and assemble the fragments of the vessels. As with the Japanese kintsugi, where the adhered edges of a repaired vessel are decorated with gold, that what is repaired shines completely new, even more beautiful and valuable than before. This process is called "tikkun olam" (healing the divine world). Tikkun olam is our life's work.

Arthur Green listed ten "best" Jewish ideas:⁵ 1: Joy: cheerfulness as a religious principle. 2: Creation in God's Image: what are we doing here? 3: Going the way: a community of makers. 4: Healing the world: being God's partner. 5: Shabbat – escaping the treadmill. 6: Repentance: trusting in human change. 7: The people and the Book: text and interpretation. 8: The role of education. 9: To life! Acceptance of death, promotion of life. 10: Hear, O Israel: there is only One.

It is clear from the example of the Sabbath that these indigenous Jewish ideas contain universally valid references. Sabbath means: sitting down, taking rest, relaxing. Rhythmic peaceful assembly involves phases of inner purification and renewal. The community draws strength on the holiday for the next six working days. On one day in the week, all work should stop in order to protect the shared world. The commandment "Shmitta" states that every seventh year all fields and vineyards should remain unworked. A year of not working the fields, a Sabbath year. During the Shmitta, attachment to material things is cast off. Shmitta recalls that God moves humans to do worthwhile deeds beyond

their own needs. Earth is not the property of humans. Paying attention to Shmitta leads to humility and points to sustainable management.

Following God provides the moral compass to serve the preservation of creation. The succession in good. The possibility of turning round, of a change of direction, is based on hope and faith in the human capacity for change, Teshuva, return, repentance. The Talmudic tradition trains our dialectical thinking, puts multiple solutions in place of simple answers and results, offers support with human failure, and clearly rejects the pursuit of earthly perfection. There are ideas about simultaneity and discordances of times and spaces, process thinking, or concrete requirements to protect the weaker through rights. The Halacha shows how to avoid greed, debauchery and luxury consumption by voluntarily limiting them, in line with the Commandments. The Commandments are like a training course for the good. They guide us. Lessons must be learned from failed attempts and defeats. The legal restrictions provide guidance. They lead us to gradual, moral development and away from black-and-white thinking. With their help, dualistic thinking patterns can be widened and hierarchical thinking broken down.

The Torah says that on the third day of creation, the Earth produced grass. The third divine sphere is after the Kabbalah Tiferet. Tiferet is splendour, equilibrium, balance. Tiferet is placed in the middle of all ten Sefirot. Tiferet appeared between Chesed (love, grace) and Gevura (power, law). Tiferet ends their dispute. Judaism has always been about maintaining the right balance between love and law, between infinite flow and setting limits. Tiferet extends to the transition to the material world, the world of action, our world, called Assia. The divine sphere of transition is called Malchut (kingdom) or Shechina (divine presence).

We are far removed from divine presence today. In the last hundred years our society has developed in a secular direction (in Latin *saeculum*), which today

⁵ GREEN (2004): 43-47.

makes it necessary for us to stand up for our sphere of life in a way that is protective and regenerative. In our secular and growth-oriented (Western) consumer society, nothing seems sacred to us anymore. Moderation is only a material dimension. "To be in salvation", to be healthy and to let life be complete and "holy", to acknowledge and respect it are all interconnected. This makes it possible to recognise our existence in a shared world of sanctum, which must be preserved. By looking at the spiritual heritage, new spaces of thought can be opened up in the Anthropocene epoch. This is not a new realisation, but is rooted in communities in almost every part of the world. Recognising the non-human world and letting it be as it is, not using it and respecting it, that is what makes us as humans and as part of nature simultaneously whole or "in salvation". There are "sacred forests", those untouched forests that are protected for cultural and religious reasons. Forests that have been known as "sacred groves" since ancient times. Cemeteries, for example, are still Jewish spiritual places today. They are called Beit Chaim, House of Life. It could be argued that God is omnipresent, and therefore the entire planet is automatically holy. But God's presence only becomes real when humans perceive it. In Jewish tradition, God's presence sanctifies places. Otherwise, they are abandoned by God. God's presence in the burning bush changed the place where Moses stood to holy ground, "adama kedoshah". Moses had to take off his shoes. Being naked reduces distance. Muslims take off their shoes before entering a mosque. In many cultures, it is respectful to leave your shoes outside the front door when you visit.

In the Torah, midrashim, narratives, are often already transmitted with naming. In this way, the builder Bezalel built the foundation tent in the desert. Bezalel means "shadow of God." Boundaries become blurry in the shadows. Transcendence becomes possible as soon as boundaries become permeable and transitions are created, truth breaks ground. In the twilight between day and night, in the grey area, truth flares up at the peak, at the border to light. Light follows shadow. At dawn, Jacob the Liar wrestles with the all too human and divine truth with Ish (man). Jacob can be translated with "heel".

At birth Jacob took hold of the heel of his twin. On this side of Eden, heels became the weak spot of men, where snakes can injure them. Jacob did not let Ish go, but received his blessing. Jacob was given his new name: Israel. The name of the ancestor of the twelve tribes. Israel is the name of the only Jewish state in the world. The name Israel is generally derived from the verb "sara," which means "to fight." El means God. Thus, Israel is translated as "warrior of God." Sar also means leader. Israel becomes the leader. Also Jashar, upright, could indicate the name of Israel, like Sara. Cain had lowered his head before God after killing his brother. Jacob, on the other hand, lifted himself up. He now stood with his head up in front of Ish. Upright, opposed, anti tropos, anthropos, human. Standing as an equal, he demanded to be blessed. He would try to settle things peacefully with his brother. Jashar also recalls Yeshurun, the biblical leader, and at the same time contains a warning to Israel. For Yeshurun became complacent and forfeited the power that had been newly bestowed upon him. Even Shir, the song, could also be associated with the name Israel. Israel, a song of God? Jacob had proven himself and was now to become an upright warrior of God, a singing leader like Miriam, who led the Israelites to freedom while singing and dancing through the bitter sea (mar jam).

Jewish anthropology: acting in the image of God

In a theology of ecological healing, the interpretation of the verses (Gen 1.23-28) "Let men be created in the image of God" (b'tselem elohim) comes to the fore. It is important to remove notions of creation in the "image of God" from anthropocentric interpretations of texts and to develop an understanding of a fairer relationship between humans, animals and nature. Animals and nature follow their own purpose of existence and their falling prey to human hedonism runs counter to this. Modern and traditional theology has interpreted "God's image" as raising humans above creation and separating and isolating them from the rest of creation. The adopted belief of anti-physical theologies that body and mind are in opposition also supports, in Jewish thinking,

a humanistic set of values that sees the ideas of God's image, of soul and infinite value as exclusively united in the human being. Midrash texts define sexuality and reproduction as traits that humans have in common with other creatures, but were not created b'tselem. These include "tselem" interpretations that humans see through intellectual, physical, ethical, or behavioural characteristics as being the essence of the divine image. This results in dualisms between humans and animals, between humans and nature, between humans and their own nature, and between mind and body, which puts the mind above the body. In fact, people around the world behave according to this interpretation. They multiply disproportionately and require more and more natural resources for their consumption alone.

Does the Hebrew Bible actually instruct Adam to subdue the Earth and control the fish in the seas, the birds in the sky, and all the seething swarms on and in the Earth? Were primaeval humans in the Bible seriously called upon to rule over all creeping things on the Earth, that is, to build a worm empire? Or can the development of human power over birds and fish ever reach into all the expanses of their elements? These are superhuman assignments. They were much more suited to highlighting human weakness in the face of the complexity of creation. Moreover, it can be assumed with certainty that human sovereignty should not be used to poison animals, water, land and air, to exterminate whole species or to consume the more-than-human world.

Adam as God's sheep

An approach to the biblical concept of ruling in Genesis is offered by the verb *memshala* in verse Genesis 1:16, which in modern Hebrew also means "government" and is translated with ruling: "The sun rules the day and the moon and stars rule the night." This "ruling" has nothing to do with hierarchy or oppression. The stars are part of the cosmic equilibrium. They move into their positions in steady rhythms. They merge into each other and

into a larger unit. They are not dualistic, conflicting systems. Day and night, heaven and earth, water and land, humans and animals are phenomena of our dual reality, i.e., demarcations are not necessarily divisive.

The verb "kabash" in verse Genesis 1:28, which means to occupy, oppress or rule to this day, is translated into German with the much-quoted negative formula "subdue the earth". About 1000 years ago, rabbinical scholars, the Masoretes, established vocalisation and punctuation for the consonantal alphabet of the Hebrew Bible. This linguistic convention still determines how the Torah is to be read today. The definition may have resulted in differences in meaning. If the same three consonants of the verb *קָבַשׁ* *kabash* are not read masoretically, but as "keves", their meaning suddenly changes. *Keves*, a noun, translates as "sheep." Williger was the first to make this discovery⁶: sheep is hidden in the root of the verb. This could have been etymologically significant for the pastoral people in the Bible. A possible translation of verse was then: be fruitful and multiply on the Earth and "shepherd" it. Shepherd as a created verb. Be like sheep or like shepherds of a flock of sheep. They shall not be lords, but shepherds of creation. The verse would then fit perfectly into the context in terms of content. For in the Garden of Eden, in Chapter 2 of Genesis, Adam is commissioned to cultivate and guard the garden, that is, to use and tend it as shepherds do their flocks. A possible new understanding of the indigenous Hebrew vocabulary itself, which hitherto only reflected oppression. Without knowledge of sheep, modern interpretations worked on the conventional concept of ruler⁷. Sheep are still considered pioneers for new grazing grounds, because they have so-called golden hooves, with a perfect ratio between body weight and hoof support area. They spread their manure evenly on the ground, gently trample the soil, compact the turf without breaking it, make it resistant and ensure that roots are connected to groundwater and plants receive nutrients.

⁶ WILLIGER (2019): 105-128. - ⁷ Pope Francis (2015).

The second verb in the verse, “rada”, literally means they occur, dominate or suppress the animals and, depending on how the following preposition ב (be) is translated, the local, temporal, causal or modal meaning that could be interpreted from it changes. Usually, the translation is that Adam is to rule the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea and the animals of the Earth. But even an early rabbinical interpretation relativises this one-sided interpretation (Gen R 8.11 – 8.12). The rabbis can imagine the passive verb form ירדו (yeradu) and attach dominance to the “correct” use of human characteristics, i.e., to Adam's behaviour. If Adam acted in God's image, they would ascend, otherwise they would descend below the animals. For Adam, the relativistic interpretation means that they can only ascend to the previous creation through good actions that are in God's image. When will this occur? “Acting” in God's image made humans into fellow creatures. Adam is part of creation and not alone in God's image. A more complete conception of likeness then included not only Adam, but also the more-than-human world, the entirety of Creation.⁸

The “Bagel Theory” on the genesis of the world

According to Kabbalistic Bible interpretation, humans are not the crown of creation, but the di-vine sphere in the genesis of the world called Keter (crown). Keter is considered to be the crown of creation. According to Kabbalah, in the genesis of the world, God withdrew with infinite grace and love (chessed) from divine omnipresence in Ayn Sof, infinity, and thus created space and time for creation. A creation from nothing into nothing, like the hole in a bagel. This Bagel image simplifies the extensive presentation of the Tzimtzum, the complex philosophical Kabbalistic literature on the genesis of the world, and can be described as the “Bagel Theory”, a Jewish equivalent to the complex “Big Bang Theory”. The process of creation triggered by this resembles a maternal

act of becoming, when a woman creates space within herself for new life. This process is called “Tzimtzum”. Tzimtzum was triggered by an irritation, a “giggling in the universe”. What caused this irritation remains a mystery. Equally unknown is also the trigger for the Big Bang. Compared to the Bagel Theory, astrophysics chose a qualitatively different conception of the genesis of the world. The Big Bang sounds comparatively violent and has a male connotation compared to “giggling in the universe and Tzimtzum.” The Big Bang changed a state of absolute density, which cannot even be assigned using the general theory of relativity. After the Big Bang, mass in the universe continues to expand to this day. This made time and space measurable. Temporal determination to about 13.8 billion years ago amounts to the quantitative difference to Tzimtzum. All natural evolution began with a chemical and physical process and became a biological evolution.

If we do not close our minds to the realisation that the story of creation essentially clings to the theory of evolution, this opens up a more complete view of the world and also offers the possibility of interdisciplinary understanding. We look at the world as if through two windows. On the one hand, through the window of religious revelation with its possibilities for transcendence and its moral aspects, and on the other, through the window of materialistic rationality that enables us to absorb and implement scientific knowledge. If religion or natural science claim sole possession of the truth, they become ideological⁹. According to the story of creation in the Bible, creation, like evolution, is an ongoing process that continues to this day and it is said that the Earth itself makes further development steps. In the story of creation, the last day of Creation, the Sabbath, remains open. It was not concluded with the usual formula “and there was evening and there was morning” as with the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth days. Creation has remained “work in progress” to this day.

⁸ SEIDENBERG (2016): 17. - ⁹ LÜKE (2008).

Evolution

Beginning of the world:

The Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago

Since then → Expansion of the universe with the creation of space and time.

Creation of the Earth 4.6 billion years ago and the primordial oceans.

The first building blocks of life – 3.8 billion years ago
Amino acids in the oceans
or impacts on Earth from asteroids.

Emergence of species: 550 million years ago
Bacteria, plants on land,
animals in water
Dinosaurs develop and die out again.

Mammals and 50 million years ago
primordial forms of
humans evolve.

This Cenozoic continues to this day
and Homo sapiens continues to evolve
to this day.

The evolution of all living things in
countless variations and interrelations
continues.

The moral evolution of Homo sapiens needs
the support of commandments and laws.



Creation

The days of creation could span 13.8 billion years:

Beginning of the world: Irritation or giggling in the universe leads to **Tzimtzum** (= withdrawal of God – generation of time and space for the Creation)

1. day of the Creation: time – light and darkness,
2. day of the Creation: space – firmament
In the beginning was Tohu-wa-Bohu – it was desolate and empty, the earth was covered with shallow seas,
3. day of the Creation: water, primordial animals in the water, land; plant life ,
4. day of the Creation: steady rhythms, seasons through the influence of the heavenly bodies, sun, moon and stars,
5. day of the Creation: animals in the water and in the air,
6. day of the Creation: land animals and genus Adam = primordial humans,
7. Sabbath = day of rest – without conclusion → development continues to this day.

The primordial human genus Adam (male and female primordial human beings were created at the same time, Gen 1:26) should behave well, i.e., according to God's example and work on and guard the Creation (Gen 2:15).

Then there is the development of Isha, the social and cultural side of Adam and thus to modern humans. Humans now descend from humans – bones from my bones, flesh from my flesh.

Growing awareness pulls humans away from nature, from animals.

Humans become mortal = the genus Adam receives life (Chawa = Eve). It is the task of the human mind and body to bring people and nature into balance.

Chava, mother of all living things

Genesis chapter two focuses on the further development of Adam. It appends to the first chapter and continues the first creation narrative. This view contradicts the perception that there are two independent stories of creation in Genesis. In the second chapter, Adam also stands for the generic term “humans”. Mankind was an entity, namely Adam. The question of gender in Genesis is irrelevant.

Kabbalah says that everything newly created comes from the “Red,” Adom. Dam is blood and Adama is the Earth. Organic and inorganic things make up the building blocks of life. The reduction of Adam to a first man, from whose rib the first woman arises, is a narrative for children that leads us away from the idea of evolution, and instead serves gender hierarchies. The narrative completely ignores the fact that Eve is only mentioned at the end of the third chap-ter. It is only when all creatures

leave Paradise that Chava (Eve) is added. Chava is the mother of all living things. Chava is life. Only when united with life does everything that is alive become mortal. The cycle of life and death began. Previously, Adam, primaevial humanity, developed into Homo sapiens analogously to the theory of evolution. To this day, no one knows when and how this evolutionary quantum leap took place. Was it just a “small quantum leap”, a completely fluid transition that is still going on, or a mutation? According to the Hebrew Bible, God took one side of Adam. This side had development potential. It was the other side, Isha to Ish. Isha is the fertile aspect of Adam, with female connotations. Adam's first cognitive abilities are now supplemented by social ones.

Through esh (fire), ish and isha, the consonantal alphabet also offers a developmental strand reminiscent of Zoroastrian patterns or the Egyptian idea of a phoenix from the ashes. Recent archaeology shows that about 300,000 years ago Homo sapiens were already widespread on the African continent and that since then, therefore, humans have descended from humans. The Bible says: flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones.

Creation 2.0 – Noah means “rest” in Hebrew

Another important ecological example is the biblical narrative about Noah (Christian), Nuha (Muslim) or Noh (Yazidi). Nebi Noh is the one who mediates between ancient and modern times. The Hebrew Bible says that Noah acted in God's image. He walked in God's ways. Noah had chosen a “tzadik ve tamim”, a “just and non-violent” life. Immediately before the Noah narrative, it had been said that from now on a human could live for one hundred and twenty years. But then it says twice that Noah was 600 years old when he became a father. This could indicate the superhuman effort required to resist moral decline. Noah's role model thus points beyond his own time, unlike most Bible interpreters to this day. Noah means “rest” in Hebrew. This meaning is lost in translations. A calm approach is a strong approach. Retreating to the ark

meant a year of rest, relaxation, regeneration and purification – a Sabbath year. Noah and his family retreated from the environment into a shared world.

If we take the ark as the inner self of every human being, then the different animals may symbolise the different inner voices. One must live permanently in balance with one's aspirations, urges, needs, wishes and desires, even with the “wild animals” in us. This can only be achieved if we are very attentive to ensuring that no living need is neglected, suppressed, or even killed off. Creation would not have survived if there were a war inside the ark. Anyone who has ever cared for animals knows that we have to pay full attention to them. It is vital to prepare the right food at the right time and in the right quantity. We have to bend down to feed them. Seeking an equilibrium and inner balance creates peace with ourselves and others. When the waves have calmed, we, our ark, can open up again and continue our journey.

Noah and his family lived justly while the world around them sank into a chaos of self-centredness, violence, destruction and animal cruelty. Animals had their body parts ripped out alive and eaten raw. There were no Commandments. The great flood, Mabbul, was to devour this bad creation, men and animals (Gen. 6:13). Noah and his family heard God's call. “To call” is “kahal” in Hebrew. Kahal as a reflective verb means to gather. Kahal is the root of kehilah (community). Noah and his family followed the call, for they did not live on bread alone. They had a spiritual connection to divine presence. With the call they also gathered all the animals to the community. Of the herd animals, not only one pair, but seven pairs of animals were taken on the ark. That was foresight. Otherwise, the offering of thanks would have already eradicated a species after the rescue. An “archic” community and not a “hierarchic” one ensured the survival of the species. Noah and his family can be considered our “archetypes of biodiversity.” They preserved the biodiversity of the Earth.

A ship-like ark can be thought of as a “child's” variant of salvation from Mabbul, the great flood.

Could a small boat have saved Noah and his family, as well as all animals, from destruction? The Hebrew word for ark is teva. Today teva, spelled differently, means nature. The original meaning of teva is box. A box opens up unexpected dimensions of abstraction. It must have been in covenant with God. How else could Creation 2.0 have survived with its immeasurable diversity, if not in some sort of “treasure chest.” The Torah says, “From that time forth, wild animals should flee from men.” This new fear of man should protect them from violent death (Genesis 9:3). Where can animals escape today?

Noah and his family, our archetypes of biodiversity

Rules were to apply to the new world after the flood. The Talmud mentions seven commandments of Noah (Sanh 56b), including one that protects animals from torment (Shab 128b) (Num 22:28; Dtm 11:15; 25:4).¹⁰ Animals are to be treated with compassion (Baba Mezia 32b) and their lives are to be respected (Dtn 25:4).¹¹ Inconsiderate behaviour towards animals and their needs is wrong, according to the rabbis (Zeva 116a).¹² This first rule set limits to greed. The rabbis also demanded the gentle treatment of animals for reasons of self-protection. Otherwise, humans could bestialise them and then turn against each other.¹³ Only the righteous should eat meat. They would keep their gentleness. Treating animals well is essential for a fair life. This commandment addresses our compassion. Animals are representative of all weaker entities. The covenant with Noah, his family, the animals and God was a treaty, an agreement that imposed clear restrictions on human behaviour.

After the flood, animal sacrifices become a “holy” act and service. The Bible verse “You shall not eat flesh in which there is still blood” (Genesis 9:4) states that an animal had to be killed before the sacrifice. Meat was to be eaten cooked from now on. The biblical word for “temple sacrifice” (Heb. korban) has the same Hebrew word root as the word “karov,” which means “closeness.” The spiritual level of

the sacrificial rite promised that humans could approach God through it. A unity of ritual and ethics. For this spiritual closeness to God, those willing to sacrifice were willing to give up their material possessions. Those who had little, sacrificed little, such as women, who sacrificed only pigeons.

Immediately after the destruction of the Temple, the animal sacrifice cult was abolished by the rabbis and transferred to the abstract. The bulls were now to be sacrificed “with the lips”, that is, through prayers. Temple sacrifices were replaced by prayers. As of 63–70 C.A. in the Roman province of Judaea, the temple cult degenerated into a “barbecue” for pilgrims from the surrounding area. For the Talmudic sages, the consumption of meat was merely a concession to human weakness. It acquired a low moral level. A return to the “meat pots of Egypt” was understood as regression and turning away from God. It is precisely because of the consumption of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden that it is still important for Jews to adhere to the religious dietary regulations that help us to effectively limit our greed. Not everything is allowed to be eaten that is edible. As a result of setting limits, most animal species are considered unsuitable for consumption, and are thus protected. Pigs, which physiologically resemble humans, are protected. Here, this could be construed as cannibalism in the context of the prohibition. As far back as 900 years ago, the Jewish scholar Maimonides called for “men to have mercy, to find a fair measure, and not to succumb to a greed that harms creation.” The paradisaically prescribed perfect nutrition for humans and animals is a vegan diet. In Genesis, only seeds and fruits were used for nutrition. After India, Israel now has the most vegans in the world and a huge variety of vegan food. Alternatives to meat consumption have existed in industrialised countries for a very long time. We don't have to eat animals anymore.

Today, about 2,000 years after the abolition of temple sacrifices, should humans learn to make new sacrifices to honour God's presence in the midst of our shared world? However, they would certainly

¹⁰ LANDMANN (1959): 46. - ¹¹ BERKOWITZ/ KATZ (2016): 69. - ¹² NACHMANIDES (1976): 271. - ¹³ INGENSIEP/ BARANZKE (2008): 104-108.

not be animal sacrifices, but would have to become “greed sacrifices”. Dare to become more spiritual. The connection to divine spheres, which has been disturbed by man's egoisms, must be reestablished. Let us unite and renew the covenant of Noah and his family. The moral evolution to fellow creature and shared world goes beyond their relationship, which humans develop into life, to the covenant of all living things in the succession of God. In the future, virtual “circumcision of the heart” seems possible. A bond for healing wounds, a “connection” between humans, and between humans and the more-than-human world, would require a new covenant and divine presence.

The new covenant

Before Mabbul, it was said that God wanted to destroy all humans because man's community was “fundamentally” bad. Noah was righteous even before the Flood. So not all humans could have been fundamentally, or, as we would say today, genetically predisposed towards being, bad. After the Flood, God promised to make a covenant humanity and to spare them in the future, because they are bad “from their youth” (Chapter 8 Verse 21). Fundamentally or from youth – isn't that the same? No, because in today's words, this means that humans do not have a general “genetic defect” that makes them bad or already determines to be bad from birth, but that they only become bad or can also become good during their early development due to the impact the environment has on them.¹⁴

A Talmudic doctrine (Bava Metzia 58b) states: “When you humiliate another person in public, it is as if he were shedding his blood. Rav Nachman bar Yitzhak then said: you have spoken well, for if anyone is humiliated, this person becomes pale, his face's redness leaves and pallor takes its place. This is tantamount to shedding his blood.” Bloodshed means acting against divine commandments. Humiliation is against God, against life. Murderous conflicts, wars and slaughterhouses shed blood. The dualistic power gap between humans and

animals is a global, socially fixed worldview that is shared by Jews and the majority of humanity. Systemic violence is socially legitimate and is not considered cruel by the majority. Jugularism lives hidden in supposedly civilised cultures. In the US and Israel, by the way, there are industrial slaughterhouses that are in no way inferior to the cruelty of Western slaughterhouses. In Germany we allow about two million land animals to be slaughtered every day. Approximately 10% of these animals die miserably because the slaughter technique prescribed by law fails or is used improperly.¹⁵ Can we seriously believe that this immense violence will not influence our souls in any way? We humans suppress the recognition that animals like us are capable of feeling and suffering. This denial of recognition prevents the spreading of justice to all creatures and animals as subjects of our own life principles. Jugularism only ends when zest for life and the skills approach are also considered valid for animals. In light of animals in a shared world, we must never perceive them only as objects of scientific analyses, but must at the same time also take them into account methodologically as subjects and stakeholders in their own rights. A cow had walked next to me at eye level on a mountain pasture. Completely unexpectedly, we looked into each other's eyes. Its gaze screamed of the eternal imprisonment of all creatures, from almost endless suffering, and at the same time, it looked at my own animal nature with mercy. Relationships can remove boundaries, overcome divides, and form communities. Humans have the ability, and therefore the obligation, to build bridges with animals that live “indoors”.¹⁶

“Hineni” – humility and commitment in following God

In the Garden of Eden, God called out to the Adamites, “where are you?” What is your moral position, Adam? Will you follow God's example? They replied, “We heard your voice in the garden, and we were afraid because we were naked, and so we hid ourselves.” A cowardly excuse. Adam was

¹⁴ GABRINER (2016). - ¹⁵ Antwort Bundesregierung (2012). - ¹⁶ AGAMBEN (2004): 77.

ashamed. Their growing intellect led to a distancing from God and nature. Animals remained shamelessly naked. The human task on this side of Eden was to overcome the distance between mind and body.

This seemingly simple question “Where are you?” receives a much more profound answer later in the Book of Genesis. When God put Abraham to the test and said to him, “Abraham,” Abraham replied, “Hineni, here I am” (Genesis 22). Abraham was willing to subordinate his genetic proximity to his son to his “elective kinship” with God. In the Akeda (binding) of Isaac (Gen 22:6-14), the sacrificed ram marks the new beginning.¹⁷ Human sacrifices, cruelty and animal cruelty and their psychological disposition have since been regarded as aberrations.¹⁸ Abraham said “Hineni” three times. Each time to a different counterpart. The first time to God, the second time to his son, and the third time to angels. “Hineni, I am here.” Hineni appears on other occasions in the Hebrew Bible: Jacob (Genesis 46:2), Joseph (Genesis 37:13), Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:4.) and Samuel (I Samuel 3:4.) answered: Hineni, “I am here”. Hineni is a geographical positioning, but also an existential one. “I am here”, wherever and however you find me, absolutely focused, here entirely. And even more: “I am here” with all that I have, with all that I am and can be. It's the kind of reaction we only offer a few times in life. If we promise ourselves to someone, we love without knowing what the future will bring, if we look into the eyes of a newborn and promise, we will never let them down and if we promise ourselves to be all we can be. Hineni is the strongest expression in Hebrew for human humility, mindfulness, and willingness.¹⁹

Today we live in an age that is the antithesis of Hineni. What practical implications does this have for our time?²⁰ After thousands of years filled with dogmas, dictatorships and a life that contained never-ending traditions and duties, we have finally been liberated and can be what we want to be and can live as we wish without external constraints. But paradoxically, it is the testimony of “Hineni” to a life of duty and responsibility to others that brings out our deepest

being. Humanity longs for the connection with life, for a strong connection with something greater than itself. This is why even the generation blessed with freedom should accept the “Hineni” testimony.

On Sinai, the assembled people respond to the revelation of the Ten Commandments (words): we will act and we will hear. Naase venishma. The Torah verse can be understood as a call to process thinking. The requirement is to act first and then to hear, to understand. An en-tender process overcomes dualisms and helps to build bridges. Tender, the Spanish word for equal approach and entender, the Spanish word for understand, hear. The entendering process is the answer to the question of “how” every distance, a distance to things or living beings or to ourselves can be overcome. Repeating the process leads to understanding. Understanding creates respect and connection. The grown connection leads to commitment, i.e., to responsible action and a covenant.

Radical compassion for the shared world – interreligious action

There is the chemical law of nature: free radicals attract each other. This should be an example for us. The current crisis of the shared world now requires radical compassion. Believers of all religions must join forces for a new covenant of life. As Buddhist teacher Geshe Ugyen Tseten Rinpoche stated in 1999: “Mahakaruna, the Great Compassion is a mindset that extends evenly and without exception to all living beings and is based on the realisation that all living beings want to strive for happiness and avoid suffering. Moved by this realisation, the Great Compassion exists in the desire that all living beings may indeed achieve happiness and be free from suffering, and in the endeavour to take responsibility for achieving this goal. Radical compassion is capable of uniting religions. Radicula, Latin for the embryonic root (radicle), embryo and compassion is in Hebrew “rachamin”, which comes from the root word “rechem”, uterus. In Arabic, compassion has the same root, i.e., uterus. God in Islam is “Ar Rahman”,

¹⁷ ARCHIATI (2009): 134. - ¹⁸ Adapted from “Menschenopfer (human sacrifice)” by: FREUD (2010). - ¹⁹ CARDIN (2022). - ²⁰ GOLINKIN (2021).

the all-compassionate. Radical compassion means new life, the growth of the radicle in the uterus. Christianity knows the Samaritan, the stranger, who is the only one who has mercy and acts. (Luke 10:25-34). Radical compassion for truth, peace and justice, for a happy life in the diversity of creation. Compassion has been a parental principle since the genesis of the world. The creation of all living things is reflected in his image. The gift of love, creation, continues for all eternity with each new life. When we are ready to take responsibility, we unite in compassion. Compassion leads us to the new covenant of life. The conversion to radical compassion, which also seeks to join forces with the secular world, will nourish the hope that through our actions we can repair the disturbed “server” to the divine presence and bring about healing for our shared world instead of destruction.



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GAIA. A THEORY OF RADICAL TERRESTRIALITY

Jakob Siegel

“Ecological grief” (Deutschlandfunk), “climate depression” (Stern) – for young people in particular, climate change is often also associated with psychological stress, as shown in a study by the University of Bath, in which 10,000 young people from different countries aged 16 to 25 were surveyed¹. A large majority (75 %) of respondents said the future was scary for them, and more than half (56 %) agreed that humanity was doomed. A majority of young people felt sadness, fear, anger or helplessness in the face of climate change, and 45 % saw themselves as negatively affected by these emotions in their everyday lives.

How to escape this without suppressing real existing climate change? In view of the sluggish efforts to bring about global systemic change, can we still credibly hope for *normality* in a *world after the crisis*? No, says Bruno Latour, social philosopher and one of the most influential thinkers of the present – the time of hoping for a world after the climate crisis is over. It is not lack of will, political failure or lack of resources that caused Latour made this statement; his analysis is as simple as it is shocking: “We are not in a crisis. It will not ‘pass’, we will have to get used to it.”²

Latour's work on Gaia, in which humanity's “incurable belonging” to the world is postulated, has generated a lot of attention. In his 2015 book “Face à Gaia” (in the English translation “Facing Gaia”), Latour speaks of the dawn of a new era and the end of the age that calls itself *modern*. Latour's key concern is to contrast the modern separation of man and nature with an alternative concept and to think of human characteristics as part of a living and interwoven system. According to Latour, everything points to the fact that “behind the phantasmagoria of dialectics, the metamorphic zone becomes visible again.”³

What does he mean by that? In contrast to the self-understanding and world-view of modernity with the great revolutions of industry, science and technology, which are all based on strictly separating a recognising subject (culture) and recognisable and controllable objects (nature), with the beginning of the new age, “nature” as an effective actor will enter the stage of events. Agency, according to Latour's argument, is by no means reserved only for human beings. In the essences of nature, Latour no longer sees inanimate objects, but impacts, “which are no longer disconnected to what we are and do.”⁴ What surrounds people can therefore no longer be kept at a distance, as if nature had no people. “Human activity can be seen everywhere, in the building of knowledge and the generation of phenomena of which science is to bear witness. Playing with the dialectical contrast of subjects and objects will fail. The driving force that kept Kant, Hegel and Marx going has served its purpose.”⁵ So, the *metamorphic zone* is the area in which entities *coexist, depending on each other* – a several kilometres-thick layer of living things, soil, bacteria, plants, people and atmosphere that surrounds planet Earth and what Latour calls Gaia.

The Gaia hypothesis goes back to biologist Lynn Margulis and chemist James Lovelock. They had found in their research that some parameters on Earth, such as the oxygen content of the atmosphere, the salinity of the oceans, or the temperature of the Earth's surface, changed only slightly over hundreds of millions of years. This observation seemed unusual in view of the cosmic and terrestrial influences on the different ages of Earth. Based on these observations, in the 1970s Lovelock and Margulis developed a theory in which they describe the Earth and its biosphere as a dynamic system that, like an organism, is able to respond to external and internal changes and influences, and thus maintain the conditions for life on planet Earth.

¹ MARKS et al. (2021). - ² LATOUR (2022): 31. - ³ Ibid.: 113. - ⁴ Ibid.: 112. - ⁵ Ebd.: 112 f.

Lovelock demonstrated how it works in his highly regarded “Daisyworld” model, in which he simulated an Earth-like planet populated only by two plant species, white and black daisies.⁶ Despite simulated external influences, such as an increase in solar radiation, the temperature on Daisyworld remained constant due to positive feedback effects.⁷ Lovelock transferred the positive feedback mechanism to Earth's (much more complex) system. Here, too, parameters such as the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere would be significantly higher if microorganisms and vegetation did not store CO₂ in the soil. And, without the help of countless agents, the salinity of the oceans would also be so high that organic cell membranes could not exist, making maritime life impossible. The system described is thus able to react to disturbances such as volcanic eruptions, increased solar radiation, asteroid impacts or the steadily increasing impact of humans. Lovelock writes, “Gaia, like the camel, has several stable states so that it can accommodate to the changing internal and external environment.”⁸ Conversely, this also means that if humans increasingly threaten the balance of the Earth's system, they are in danger of extinction, because “we live on a live planet that can respond to the changes we make, either by cancelling the changes or by cancelling us.”⁹

Through their research, Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock are considered important pioneers of the environmental and biodiversity movement from the 1980s onwards. And yet today's understanding of environmental protection mostly ignores the core message of the Gaia hypothesis. The very composition of the words suggests that the effort to *protect the environment* is still based on the modern understanding of the distinction between humans with the power to act and nature that is available. It is precisely this, however, that is the great novelty of Margulis and Lovelock's works and the reason for Latour's resumption of the hypothesis that “fundamentally [...] there is no longer any

environment to adapt to. Since all living agents constantly pursue their intentions, modifying those of their neighbours as much as possible, it is impossible to distinguish the environment to which the organism adapts from the point at which its actions begin.”¹⁰

More important than the effort *to get to grips with* nature would be to establish a self-image of radical terrestriality. A change of heart that lifts humans from their throne and sets them back on or *in the very midst* of the Earth, where they instinctively feel that they are living in a system that is indissolubly intertwined with themselves and their actions. Following Latour, this project is no less significant or extensive than the upheavals that followed Galileo's cosmic discoveries in the 17th century. “It seems that three and a half centuries later Lovelock reconsiders some of the features of the same Earth that Galileo had to neglect in order to treat it simply as one body among others... namely, its colour, its smell, its surface, the way it feels; its genesis, its ageing, perhaps its death, this tiny layer within which we live, in short: not only its movement, but also its behaviour. As if the secondary qualities would come to the fore again. [...] Lovelock's Earth, which shakes, would have to be added to Galileo's Earth, which is moving.”¹¹



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⁶ WATSON/ LOVELOCK (1983). - ⁷ In this case, the increased solar radiation led to slight warming of the planet, which in turn contributed to spreading of white flowers, and thereby also to a higher reflection of incoming solar radiation and slowing down of warming; WATSON/ LOVELOCK (1983). - ⁸ LOVELOCK (2021): 4. - ⁹ LOVELOCK (2021): 5. - ¹⁰ LATOUR (2022): 177. - ¹¹ LATOUR (2022): 139.

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THEOLOGICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND THE SHARED WORLD¹

Rainer Hagencord

The transmission intervals of viruses from animals to humans are becoming ever shorter: in 2002 it was SARS, in 2009 the 'swine flu', in 2013 the avian flu H7N9, and since 2020 another pathogen from the coronavirus family has had a firm grasp on us. The question is not whether the next virus will be transmitted, but when – and it will very likely occur via industrial livestock farming or at one of the wet markets where the last animals of their species are mercilessly offered for consumption. And we do not know whether that virus will be as merciful as COVID-19 and not immediately kill humans. We would then be extinct, but everything else would still be there, and probably breathe a sigh of relief. This should make us humans, who have hitherto blithely called ourselves the 'crown (corona) of creation', think very carefully and raise the big questions:

1. How do we see ourselves as human beings? (anthropology)
2. How do we want to live? (ethics)
3. How do we want to believe? (theology)

The following attempts at a response are obvious:

1. To learn to see myself as a fellow creature and not one that has descended from Heaven.
2. To deal with all fellow creatures on an equal footing and not as a master or mistress.
3. To open myself up to the divine reality amidst the natural shared world.

In view of conventional theologies, this approach is quite unusual because it leaves behind traditional

religious beliefs which are anthropocentric and have forgotten nature. No later than in modern times, theology, anthropology and ethics developed with their backs turned to the shared world, i.e., to the exclusion of non-human creation in their considerations.

As early as the 1990s, the natural philosopher Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich certified that the industrial nations on Earth behave like "interplanetaryists", for whom the entire planet is merely a resource. Meyer-Abich shows how, in the course of the last few centuries, an "apotheosis transfiguration of industrial societies" was able to break ground within the framework of an unholy alliance of modern philosophy and bourgeois theology: "Omniscience in independence is the unbinding knowledge by which people become similar to God, who himself is without obligations."² In 1644 Rene Descartes summarised the ideals of the modern industrial nations as attributes of God that man – as his image – could acquire: independence, limitlessness, the highest insight and supreme power, from which the whole world is created, be it clocks or trees. This is the foundation of the new Trinity to which "Christian Europe" is committed: "Knowing everything, being able to do everything, doing everything".

Meyer-Abich also demonstrates that we not only act wrongly according to this guiding principle, but above all think wrongly: prevailing rationality has become unreasonable. It is a reminder of humans' forgotten dream of being at home with nature. For this to be possible, not only new ideas but also a new "awareness of feeling" are required.

¹ This article is a shortened and amended version of the article "Mensch – Tier – Natur" published in DIAKONIA (51) in 2020.

- ² MEYER-ABICH (1997): 138.

To learn to see myself as a fellow creature and not one that has descended from Heaven

“We forget that we are part of Mother Earth (cf. Gen 2:7). Our own bodies are made up of the elements of the planet; it is its air that gives us breath and its water that invigorates and refreshes us,”³ warns Pope Francis at the beginning of the *Laudato si* encyclical, starting a different kind of anthropology:

- We ourselves are part of Mother Earth, bound to the water and air. Through our bodies, we are in a constant change of substances with other organisms.
- We are free not because we have no instincts, but because we have many of them. Especially in crises situations, we unfold the entire evolutionary catalogue in order to be able to react appropriately.
- Through cultural evolution, our biological evolution experienced a quantum leap. This would have been, and is, impossible without the social and ecological intelligence of animals and plants, which lies ready like a treasure in our genomes.
- Through the factor of “time”, a new dimension has found its way into people's lives, because with it the questions about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, about the meaning and purpose of life are added; a conscious existence towards death – stronger and more life-determining than with the primates – makes up the life of humans and establishes religion, culture, poetry.

With reference to the medieval theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), Meyer-Abich makes it clear that at the beginning of modern times an alternative way of thinking to Cartesian rationalism certainly existed. Nicholas of Cusa describes humans quite poetically as cosmographers who write down and perceive everything essential about the world: “A complete living being, with the immanence of sense and reason, can be regarded as a cosmographer with senses typical of a city with five gates. Through these, the messengers from all over the

world enter and proclaim the whole state of the world in the following order: those who tell something new about its light and colour, enter through the gate of sight; those who tell of tone and sound, through the gate of hearing; those who speak of fragrances, through the gate of smell; those who speak of pleasant taste, through the gate of taste; and those who tell of warmth, cold and other tangible things, through the gate of touch. And the cosmographer sits enthroned in it and writes down everything that has been reported to him, so that he can record the description of the entire world of senses in his city. But if any gate of this city is permanently closed, for example, that of sight, then the description of the world will be inadequate because the messenger of light cannot enter, and the description will not, therefore, include the sun, stars, light, colours, shapes of humans, animals, trees, cities, and a large proportion of the world's beauty. Similarly, if the gate of hearing remains closed, the description will not include conversation, song, melodies, and the like. The same applies for all the other senses.”⁴

Nicholas of Cusa holds up a mirror to us modern-day humans: yes, this is how we are, or rather: this is how we want to become, more and more. How often are our gates not open! Cusa continues: “The cosmographer therefore strives by all means to have all the gates open and to continuously hear reports from new messengers and to make his description ever more true. When he has finally completed the whole description of the world of senses in his city, he places it in a well-ordered and proportionate manner on a map and turns to it. He dismisses the messengers. He closes the gates and now turns with his inner vision to the founder of the world, who is nothing of all that what he has understood and recorded about the messengers, but who is the artist and the reason for all these things.”⁵

Nicholas of Cusa always sees us human beings next to other creatures and states: “We learn from ourselves, who share the senses with the other living beings, that we also have a spirit, which

³ *Laudato Si*, 2. - ⁴ NIKOLAUS VON KUES (2002): 707. - ⁵ *Ibd.*

knows about the order and praises it; and in this we know that we are capable of immortal wisdom and the connection with God and the spiritual".⁶ What is special about the human spirit is that it makes the world its own through concepts. These are not given to him, not are they innate; rather, it is a question of his own spiritually human, creative activity. That talent certainly has predecessors in the animal kingdom, for example, in primates or parrots, which certainly know "terms".

To deal with all fellow creatures on an equal footing and not as a master or mistress

In addition to the ethical question of responsible dealings with fellow creatures, we must also consider the importance of our relationship with animals to our self-image as humans – even and especially when humans are understood as spiritual beings with a conscious relationship with God, whom we believe to be the common source of all life. The authors of the Bible (also) knew that no rift separates us from the other creatures, that we are related to all of them and that we did not descend from Heaven. This knowledge must be disseminated in view of the fact that every day about ten animal and plant species are wiped out and millions and millions of turkeys, chickens and pigs are forcefully taken to ever larger animal factories and slaughterhouses and disappear in this (perverse) way.

After a long time, biology has departed from a view of animals, according to which they are merely stimulus-reaction automatons whose inner life is irrelevant. From mice copying the courtship sounds of their competitors, to corals with algae infestations calling fish for help, to the only supposedly dull and proliferating basil that can smell predators and analyse colours: everything around us communicates. Working groups around the globe are on the trail of a singing, smelling, seeing, tapping and dancing cosmos and are, almost casually, turning the paradigm of modern times on its head, according to which it is (almost) exclusively human beings

who, thanks to their faculty of reason, are able to communicate with their peers.

Beyond philosophical-theological anthropology, it is important to look at reality: for example, Leonardo Boff speaks of the "crucified Earth" in 2010 and presents convincing basic features of ecological spirituality⁷. And this in the face of a dramatic reality: J. S. Foer speaks of a war that we are waging against our shared world. The vast majority of so-called livestock, for example, are bred through factory farming within an industrial agricultural system for the parts of them that can be used, restricted in their possibilities for movement and given unnatural feed. Behind this, Foer sees the same attitude that Pope Francis also denounces: namely, subordination of the right to life to the interests of profit. In order to achieve the lowest possible production costs, ecological and health-related consequential damage is ignored or outsourced. "For thousands of years, farmers were guided by the cycles of nature. In livestock farming, nature is regarded as something to be overcome".⁸

In fact, given that life on this planet evolved for about three billion years without humans, and that there is no place on Earth where animals were not there before us, it seems not just grotesque to think that God only favours humans. To accept a God of Creation for whom all fellow creatures of homo sapiens were only intended for secondary roles and Earth's entire ecosystem is the relatively meaningless backdrop for the appearance of the "actual" divine partner, invites suspicion of heresy.

Opening myself up to the divine reality amidst the natural shared world

British behavioural scientist Jane Goodall, who has worked with chimpanzees for many years, describes the⁹ following event in her autobiography "Reason for Hope": It was May 1981, after the death of her husband Derek, when she returned to Gombe. Actually, she did not want to observe the chimpanzees on that day, but only to be among them. After

⁶ NIKOLAUS VON KUES (2002): 707. - ⁷ Cf. BOFF (2010). - ⁸ FOER (2010): 45 f. - ⁹ GOODALL (2001): 223 f.

a thunderstorm, she sat in a familiar place under a palm tree in the rain. She saw a young chimpanzee mother bent over forwards to protect her child, a young male squeezing her close in the nest, and another one crouching on a branch with its back bent. "I lost all sense of time. The chimpanzees and I formed a silent, uncomplaining unity", explains Goodall, who encountered a pervasive spiritual experience in the situation: "My self was no longer there; the chimpanzees and myself, earth, trees and the sky, seemed to merge and become one with the spiritual power of life".¹⁰

Only the chorus of loud chimpanzees brings the scientist, who was otherwise making sober observations, back into everyday consciousness. Later, Jane Goodall tried to clarify for herself what happened on that day. She concluded that there are many windows to the world. Science had opened one of them to her in order to shed some light on the life of chimpanzees and their complex social behaviour in careful records and critical analyses. In addition, however, there is another window that opens itself to the saints, the mystics and the founders of the great world religions. "That afternoon it had been as if an invisible hand had pulled open a curtain so that I could look through such a window for a fraction of an instant".¹¹

From a theological perspective, Jane Goodall describes the fundamental and indissoluble paradox of self-loss and self-becoming during one and the same experience. When this ecstasy toward God becomes man's experience of unity, he begins to suspect that God is not only the You he encounters in love, but also the reason that carries the experience of unity. God, whom the creature faces, is at the same time the creative power that makes this experience of God's You possible, or in the Christian language of the Triune God: the one God is at the same time the one who transcends me as the Creator and in Christ gives me his eternal word, as well as the spirit that lives through everything and opens to the divine You.



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¹⁰ GOODALL (2001): 223 f. - ¹¹ Ibd.

SHARED WORLD AS A PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPT

Ingrid Miklitz

“The things we really know are not the things we have heard or read about, but the things we have lived, experienced, felt.” (Calvin M. Woodward)

Interwovenness

“Leave your human nests”, one would like to call out to the parents, the children and the professionals working in childcare. “Experience how wonderful and intoxicating the great outside feels, how it smells, sounds, crawls, bursts forth, fades away... The wonderful, vulnerable shared world, often desecrated by human action or inaction, begins right on our doorstep.

When cool morning air envelops the air we exhale, it becomes visible – this lifelong, indissoluble connection between man and atmospheric space; this interweaving of all living things with each other. We are constantly connecting with our shared world. Children who are allowed to experience that it is the plants to which we owe this air we breathe, which we need to survive, sense their own inter-

wovenness and dependence in the wickerwork of life. They understand that they are no more and no less than part of a larger whole – with all the dependencies that come with it.

The Earth breathes

On a February morning, I walked past a nearby field with children. Here we had enjoyed a swaying wheat field in the summer. On that morning, the wind carried the fine smell of soil from the ploughed clods of earth – directly to our noses. In the still cool morning air, the soil emitted steam from all pores. A thin cloud of haze hovered over the field. The field seemed to be waking up from its hibernation. Earth and Heaven intertwined this morning – visible to us. The field had changed again since our last visit: the mellowness due to frost had broken open the large clods of earth. They had become flatter – the clods, still thick and shiny in late autumn, had fallen apart into fine crumbly topsoil. Some children took the moist morning soil and took aim at the furrows.



Getting acquainted

On this February morning, we heard it for the first time this year: the trilling jubilation of a male skylark soaring – sky-high above the field. Soon, it was only visible as a tiny, dark dot against the sky blue. So fresh in the morning, so beautiful, so clear was the cheerful canon of the little vocalist. We put our hands behind our ears. Listening carefully, we could still hear the trilling song from a height of 200 metres. The children knew that it was the song of a female when it resonates from the ground – because larks are ground-nesting birds. They need areas without trees and high vegetation. In years when corn grows in the field, we miss the song of the larks. The beautiful song by Werner Gneist, which finds so sensitive and expressive words for “his” sunrise in 1929, comes to my mind instinctively (1st verse):

*It dawns, the sun's morning light
Awakens all the creatures.
The birds' joyful early chorale
Welcomes the trail of light.
Singing and rejoicing everywhere,
Forest and meadow are awakened.*

Gneist finds words for something I feel but myself cannot express. I call it my “soul mirror.” I sang this first verse at the edge of a field and the children felt that something in me was rejoicing and was touched emotionally.

This is how the seasons pass over our field. And with each season its colours, shapes and smells change. The children experience a growing familiarity with this little piece of Earth. A tiny snippet of what surrounds them – a part of their non-human world. They have the rare chance to connect with this dot on Earth, to develop an identity with a place. A field – squeezed into further corridor landscapes, which seem to be laid out with a giant ruler. Here, plants and animals live in tiny, often threatened habitats. Their struggle for existence, their joys and sufferings, as seen through a magnifying glass, turn before the eyes of an interested, sympathetic

observer. As knowers, they can become bearers of memory and thus guardians against forgetting everything – of plants and animals that may not be here one day.

One and all

*I will not and cannot do otherwise but empathise,
with you, thirsty tree on the side of the road,
with you, bird looking for a nesting place,
with you, pruned, cut shrub,
with you, maltreated pig,
with you, defenceless field,
with you, snail looking for a damp place –
with everything that surrounds and carries me.*

*I live with you on the same earth.
I breathe the same air as you.
I feel the same pain as you.
I want to open my eyes and ears.
I don't want to close my mind anymore,
I don't want to turn away.
I want to let go and receive.
I want to fit into the finely woven, wonderful mosaic
of life on this Earth.¹*

Longing for connectedness

Children have a natural need to connect with their shared world. They are happy on the road as explorers, hunters, collectors and hut builders; if you let them. Young people need time and space to meet these fundamental needs. They also need the possibility to wander and discover natural areas independently, that is, especially on foot, because tardiness increases the chance of being able to approach the non-human shared world with all the senses and to connect with it emotionally in a variety of ways. In this way, the fertile soil for growing a sustainable community can be laid. Children can only perceive what exists next to them and also wants to live if they spend a lot of time outside, in nature.

The reality is different: the time in which we humans spend in nature has decreased sharply overall. Only

¹ MIKLITZ (2018).

during the coronavirus pandemic did children and adults increasingly go to natural areas.

Connectedness to the world also arises from experiencing the seasons: everything is in the constant flow of changing and adapting. Even the two boulders behind our house change – almost imperceptibly; it is only perceptible with the knowing eyes of children, which are shown how to pay attention to even small and rather inconspicuous things. Processes of things emerging and passing away – where can children still experience this today? Something dies, passes away, withers, rots... There are big and small dramas outdoors. Also eat and be eaten.

Particularly strong in children is the desire to make contact with animals, with whom children can build a close relationship from an early age.

The animal in me

*The animal in me
It speaks to you
You, my wild cat.
I can feel your paw.
If you jump excitedly
With a wide leap
Then I'll tense my limbs.
And nothing will keep me in place anymore.
I feel it again and again –
The wild, beautiful
Lives in me.
And it wants to go more and more to you.²*

Learning to share

Our fellow creatures want to live – just as we want to live. They need habitats appropriate to their species for this. Appropriate to their species also means that they have peace and quiet there from us humans. Those who think they have to walk “across fields”, off the beaten path to satisfy their need for new discoveries and adventures often do so at the expense of the plants and animals living here.

Actually, this natural area is already “occupied”. Sharing living space means practising modesty and humility. This is the only way we humans can develop a sense of exceeding limits in the network of what the shared world needs.

Wild animals, large or small, also do not want to be touched, patted or removed by humans from the place with which they have become familiar, in which they have settled. Here they know, for example, sources of danger, lifesaving hiding places and food sources. A change of perspective can broaden our human perspective: how would we feel if a giant hand took hold of us and placed us in a completely strange, unfamiliar place?

Children can and must learn to take responsibility for animals. At a young age, directly, i.e., in relation to their immediate living environment. And in later years, also indirectly. For example, through a plant-based diet. In times of rapidly advancing climate change, conscious thinking about and action for the shared world are becoming particularly important.

In doing so, taking action can be practised from an early age. It also gives children the feeling of personal efficacy: I can do something, make a difference by acting. In our compost heap, we always keep a certain area moist during dry periods. This is where earthworms and other animals can retreat if it doesn't rain for a long time. We also supply water to roadside trees if they are suffering from drought. We share the water available to us with our non-human neighbourhood.

Children who are encouraged to act can derive hope from this and see reason for the necessity of human self-discipline.

Telling stories

Being aware of the shared world depends on stories. Good stories can build bridges between humans and the world around them. Bridges can help overcome the progressive process of alienation between

² MIKLITZ (2012): 24.

humans and the non-human world. As a young mother, I wrote a very personal birthday story for each of our five children: what was it like when you, little Earthling, came into the world? What was going on around you, in nature? What do your silent companions from the animal and plant kingdoms want to give you on your way through life? This resulted in twelve birthday stories, poems and songs that can provide fertile soil for an expanded awareness of the shared world. If the young person hears this, his birthday story again and again, they will internalise it and be able to tell it, their story, to themselves at some point. And the child will perhaps also be able to visit their faithful companions in later years and find comfort and shelter with them. Here is an excerpt.

The February Child

“...Soon your parents were holding you in their arms. Dad, the midwife, and the doctors and nurses at the hospital had helped you find your way to our beautiful Mother Earth. Everyone was very happy. Your parents gave you the beautiful name Elisabeth. Near the hospital, a blackbird had her nest. She told the animals about your arrival. Soon the woodpecker knew about it too. After days of tapping, it had on that day made a nest burrow in the trunk of the tree. “The little human child will know that it will soon be spring when I tap,” said the woodpecker. “It should always be able to enjoy the velvety softness and beauty of my catkins on its birthday,” said the willow. Finally, the squirrel had found two of its hiding places for nuts. “I searched for a long time today until I finally found my winter nuts,” said the squirrel, “what the child can learn from me is that you should not give up so quickly.” The squirrel dreamed of a next harvest with plenty of nuts, and even mum and dad had arrived in the realm of dreams after this special day...”³

Be brave – become a storyteller and open the door to the shared world.



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Ingrid Miklitz is a qualified social scientist and author of numerous books on the topic of education for sustainable development and natural space. Since 2000, Miklitz has been the first chair-person of the Landesverband der Wald- und Naturkindergärten BW e.V.

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³ MIKLITZ (2015): 54.

ENVIRONMENT OR COMMON HOME: NATURE KNOWN HUMANELY OR INHUMANELY

Joachim Ostermann OFM

Those who want to know what makes the difference between a common home and an environment will benefit from experiencing major changes in their lives. Thrice this happened to me, which makes me think that I am competent to write about this topic. While growing up in Germany, I always wanted to become a scientist, and this is what I became. Later, after graduating with a doctorate in biochemistry, I went to the United States. After ten years as a postdoc and assistant professor, I became a manager in a Canadian biotech company and moved from basic science to commercially applied science. But after a few more years came the most important change in my environment: I joined the Order of Friars Minor. So, these are the three big changes in my life: From Germany to North America, from basic science to commercial applications, and from secular life to life as a Franciscan. In light of these experiences, it is not hard to say what makes a common home out of what is at first just a new environment. It is when you stop acting like a stranger and fully take part in it and understand it as a home shared with others, a common home.

This essay is meant to convey how nature is not just the environment. It is meant to be a common home. Does this mean back to nature? Many have tried, but it is a long way from here if more than a walk in a parc is meant by this. As a Franciscan, my understanding of nature is inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi and the community he formed in the 13th century, but much has changed since then. In the year 1620, or at the start of the Age of Enlightenment, Francis Bacon¹ demanded a new understanding of nature. “Just let the human race get back the right over nature that God gave to it, and give it scope; how it is put into practice will be governed by sound reason and true religion.”²

This articulates what lies at the foundation of our modern understanding of nature and our modern science of nature. Humanity’s right is to seek power over nature, and the traditional idea of being in nature and at home in nature and taking direction from nature is to be abandoned. But what will now give direction to our acting in nature and the exercise of our powers? For Bacon, all that it needs is sound reason and (for him, Anglican) religion. But today, religion and the power of the state are deemed to be best kept apart.

Instead of religion, maybe human dignity and democratic values could replace religion as the context in which the different interests of human beings are negotiated. But this is hardly easy. Not everyone trusts in the democratic process and the compromises it requires. Furthermore, how could the voters of one country legitimize decisions also involving countries far away and human generations yet to be born? But these open questions are no cause for despair. If you grew up like I did in a house next to the Rhine in Düsseldorf, then you would know how much progress common sense and democratic structures can make in matters of environmental protection. What was in my childhood an industrial sewer is now once again a living river. Environmental protection is possible, and everyone can come out ahead by making it a priority.

But science and technology are not enough to solve all the problems caused by environmental pollution. Science and technology need to be given direction and awareness of purposes and ends in nature. Alas, the modern view of nature is shaped by another quote from Bacon: “For the inquisition of final causes is barren, and like a virgin consecrated to God produces nothing.”³ Modernity has banned

¹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/francis-bacon/>. - ² Francis Bacon; *The New Organon*, Aph. 129. - ³ Francis Bacon: *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, III, 5.

ends, purposes, and the final causes of Aristotelian philosophy from scientific inquiry. What something is for when it is how it is no longer be asked. Instead, we are to ask how to control it and how to make it useful for us. This is how the world is seen by the scientifically educated technocrat, and not without reason, as much has been accomplished in this way. We mustn't become luddites, if we want to reconcile modern science with the Christian understanding of life. What human reason has discovered in nature and applies in useful assistance to better our lives and ease our burdens is always a gift of God, and it must be appreciated. Eco-conservative naturalism that seeks to turn back the clock is not at all what I want to talk about.

To understand nature as a common home, the first thing to understand is that we are not doing this for nature's sake. The terrestrial biosphere had done quite well without us for billions of years. No matter how dramatic the end of the human species might be, the biosphere would make a quick recovery and begin anew with a multitude of diverse living creatures. Our concern is human beings. For the sake of human life do we seek to make the environment a common home. "There is no ecology without an adequate anthropology", teaches the pope.⁴ Therefore, we need a third way between, on the one hand, eco-conservative naturalism that sees no human good in progress and, on the other hand, technocratic dominance that considers the concrete human life as a mere means towards making further progress.

The politics of this third path must neither be about social engineering nor nostalgia for a lost way of life. But nature has become a stranger, and this is a problem. When you read the encyclical *Laudato si*, then you will see how many topics the pope must address concerning the consequences and new Christian duties arising from this alienation from nature. Only after overcoming this alienation while including the modern understanding of nature and integrating it into politics can we properly understand the signs of nature and read its message and find direction for further human progress.

The alienation from nature is not overcome by walks in uninhabited wilderness, of which there is more than enough in Canada. An African brother in my community in Montreal much prefers shopping malls. Outside in the parcs he is afraid of snakes, he says. Our assurances that he is quite safe from snakes on the Island of Montreal do nothing to reassure him. Having grown up in an African village, he is probably a little amused by the naïve love of nature characteristic of my compatriots in Canada and Germany. I, however, very much like to go to the park and especially to the botanical garden of Montreal, and when I must visit shopping malls, then my patience runs out after 20 minutes. But when I go to the park and he to the shopping mall, then what we see is not so different. There are other people all around us who follow their interests. Some are jogging in the park, others go shopping with their friends, many are sitting with family or friends on a picnic blanket, and others are meeting in a restaurant. We see community. Since Franciscans consider communal life at the heart of their lives, we are trained to recognize it. And we also see the ones who seem lonely, who seem to be always alone in the crowds surrounding them. Feeling the closeness of being together in a common home is hard for some.

But the human being's essential nature is the vocation to live in conscious awareness of openness to others so that community becomes possible, and this insight shapes Franciscan spirituality and Franciscan life. Francis writes in his Testament how his life began in the 13th century as a disciple of Christ.⁵ It was an encounter with a suffering man whom he showed mercy which made him recognize how the mercy of God was to be found. And then, the Lord gave him some brothers, and there was a small community that walked together on the path mapped out by the Gospels. In this story, religion is understood quite differently from what Bacon would write 400 years later as a representative of the established Anglican Church. In the religiously motivated small community, religion is the experience, remembrance, and anticipation of healing

⁴ *Laudato Sí*, 118. - ⁵ Francis of Assisi (1999): 124-127.

of all that alienates from God and his people. It is individually experienced faith, but the full challenge of this faith can only be experienced in human community. On this foundation in daily life Franciscans can understand their natural vocation as human beings and children of God.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself. . . . Do this, and you will live” says the Lord in the Gospel of Luke (10:27-28). In these words, only at first sight naïve, lives the Christian view of nature. It understands human nature as called to love God and human beings, and this is foundational for understanding the whole world. The Gospel calls every one of us personally into live, and when we hear this call, then we also understand nature as creation and respect the life of all creatures in it.

A nice example for Franciscan community life is found in the *Sacrum Commercium*, an allegory about Franciscan poverty.⁶ Poverty makes dependent, and in dependency, it is easier to understand both your own needs and the needs of others. If poverty and the resulting dependence is a free choice, then you can use this experience to better understand others, as this form of life makes you less capable of isolating yourself by your own strength. In the narrative of the *Sacrum Commercium*, we read of the success of this project. Sitting on a meadow and eating their frugal meal, the Franciscan are asked, “Where is your monastery?” In response they point all around themselves and say, “Here is our monastery.” They own nothing, but they own the whole world. They hold on to their lives but not lifeless possessions.

The topic of life requires serious philosophical reflection. We see life when manifest before us, whether it is in another human being or a tree. Even a mere amoeba that swims by chemotaxis towards food is correctly understood by us as the behavior of a living being. But a car that is

programmed to find its way to its destination is not alive. It does not act out of itself, but it is a machine that differs from a wind-up toy only by the larger part of its components and their electronic rather than mechanical connection. An artificial plant may fool me for a while in thinking it alive, but once I know that it is not, the foolish thing just annoys me.

We recognize living beings as a special kind of beings. The respect that we have in site of any living being in need is calling us to attention. Hearing this call is a consequence of the respect that we have for our own life. In the life of others, we see what gives us life. We know that as finite living beings, we remain dependent on others and cannot be entirely alone. Our independence remains dependent on other people and their care for us. This is never something that we can do without permanently, but only for a while.

Life is a temporal being that remains always dependent on its sustenance. The atoms remain behind, but the living being is in them and can cease to be and leave them behind. The living being has its own unity and sustains its unity by metabolism and development. It can pass on its life to its offspring. In a manner of speaking, life floats on non-living matter like a story on the letters of a book. Therefore, we cannot see life when we look for it by the methods of the physical sciences. We only see how life forms the material substrate that is prior to life and remains after death. We see homeostatic states far from thermodynamic equilibrium, but these are signs of life, not life itself. Entirely independent of physical science we understand by our own life how to recognize living beings that we then study by the means of the physical sciences.

The already mentioned purposes and ends, all those reasons that refer to a goal to be reached, have no place in the answers given by physics, chemistry, and molecular biology. But the questions that we ask of molecular biology are questions that we have already recognized as purposes and ends of a living being. These purposes and ends are no longer

⁶ Ibid, 529-554.

found in the answers provided by these sciences, but these answers give us new powers over nature. This power may even seem boundless, as nature understood without its own purposes does not set the boundaries of our dominion. But living beings nevertheless have their own purposes and ends for which they do what they do in their life, and aware of our human awareness of the value of life, we must value living beings with their own purposes and ends.

When you let living beings live as they live and live with them, then this does not mean that you consider nature like a zoological-botanical garden that must be kept nice and clean for a Sunday walk. Life of living beings is a development through life with death as the completion of their story. This is true not only for individuals but for every species in its interdependence with other species. We are one of them. All change in nature, including the dying of species caused by human actions, are part of nature. The extinction of the woolly mammoth is not to be reckoned as humanity's guilt. But this does not mean that nature is a mere resource for us. Life in its temporality must always be understood as being creative. Living in the environment as a common home means remaining attentive to the creativity of life and taking responsibility for one's own creativity in this common home.

The religious term of creation, in which religiously motivated wonder finds its expression, is not a static term like a blueprint, but a living story unfolding in time. We are not threatened by change in the environment, which we could handle by adapting, but we are threatened by technology that removes us so far from nature that we no longer understand either life in general or our specifically human life. The conscious goals of human life are good goals when we understand them together with the mere ends of living beings. When brought together, then the characteristically human life mediates between the life of the spirit and animal life.

Philosophical thoughts can lead to useful advice in political decision making. They can help to pinpoint

the problem and the values at stake. When we consider today open pit mining of brown coal in Germany or oilsands in Canada, then speaking of a common home seems entirely unrealistic. There, the earth is treated as a lifeless thing. It is as if we had turned part of our world into a lifeless planet that is now a mere resource for us. The exploitation of these resources can be critiqued or supported. Both in Germany and in Canada, democratically constituted governments have done much to reconcile diverse and often contradictory interests. But this does not mean that the resulting compromises are unproblematic. Political compromise is not comparable with sustainable resource use as in a forest that has already for a long time been part of human culture and human way of life. Sustainability is impossible to consider when resources are mined by simply pushing life aside. Renaturation will only be a partial recompense. In ethically responsible decision making, important is not only the end state but also the value that we see in the beginning. Those who want to consider the environment as a common home must seek to see in nature its inviolable dignity that cannot simply be replaced with something else.

Saint Francis did certainly not think of our modern problems when he composed the *Canticle of Creatures*, but when we read it today, we find in it the dignity of creation.⁷ Francis sings how sun, moon, and the stars, and earth, water, air, and fire all together proclaim the praise of God. This is kind of abstract, as he says little about plants and nothing about animals. You need to know that Francis wrote this canticle in awareness of the closeness of his death and in the hope for eternal life. He already sees creation at the end of time in its perfection in the creator. He no longer sings of our world with its short and simple life stories, but he already anticipates the world in its fulfillment at the end of time.

But in this song about the heavenly bodies and earthly elements – lifeless to us – Francis sees brothers and sisters singing the praises of God.

⁷ Francis of Assisi (1999): 113-114.

This is an important difference to other religious compositions of this kind. In the song of the three young men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:51-90) are many more creatures by which God is praised. But contrary to Francis's canticle, the creatures are not brothers and sisters of the men. Even if Francis's canticle does not mention the living creatures of our experience, it is nevertheless full of the life of the transformed creation in which all creatures are together as brothers and sisters. When little children will complete their drawings of the sun or the moon by giving them faces, then they are closer to the wisdom of God than astrophysicists. And when Francis, close to death and in great suffering, once again gives faces to sun, moon, and stars, then he is not returning into childishness. He recognizes the importance of life in the fragility of his own life. He understands that his own personal life and the life of created beings and all creation are eternally carried by the life of God. Therefore, the song concludes with the reminder that bodily death is not to be feared. Even bodily death belongs to the eternal family of that enters the fullness of life. Francis reminds us that those who live in accordance with God's will have escaped death as the annihilation of their being. For them, the embrace of Sister Death is their entry into the fullness of life.

But in between these lines carried by the philosophically understood life comes something very important, and it refers to the concrete situation of Francis at the end of his life. He is suffering from severe illness, and his city is divided by political strife. He calls himself and all others to find peace for the love of God and live with one another in peaceful relationships. Crowned by God will be those who can transform their suffering into acts of peace making.

When you take Francis's poetry into our modern context, then you are not far from his thought when you seek peaceful rather than destructive interaction with nature and its resources. We must understand how the special dignity of human beings is inseparable from the dignity of all other

living creatures. Only those who know this and can live like this can truly live. Only they can understand the life of others, no matter whether they are a mere microbe or an irreplaceable biotope or the people of a whole city. In the sense of a creative participation in nature as our common home, instead of domineering control of the environment, humanity can truly be the crown of creation. Let's call it a democratically constituted crown, akin to the Canadian monarchy.

The call "back to nature" that is meant to teach us how to live begins in human relationships with each other. Our first care, according to our nature, must be for those who are truly dependent on others by their situation in life. In the end, to work slowly but steadily on human relationships is the true way of acting out our nature. It changes our attitude towards the environment in such a way that it becomes our common home where we, too, belong.

Therefore, it is the Franciscan community life and our desire to live with others who have been brought together by nothing more than the Franciscan way of life that will be the Franciscan contribution to turning from the environment towards a common home. Compared to the workings of large NGOs and political movements, our contribution seems rather small. But the inheritance passed on to us from St. Francis and his brothers is a powerful inheritance.

When you read the rule of St. Francis and compare it with the rule of religious life among the Benedictines or Augustinians, then you notice right away the importance of the topic of Fraternity.⁸ Francis does not speak of superiors and highly disciplined father-figures, but of brothers that care for one another with maternal attentiveness. Most likely, this is not exactly new and just interprets forms of life already found by other religious renewal movements. It is obvious that such a way of life is closer to the life of Jesus and his disciples of which we read in the Gospels and in the Act of the Apostles. "You have one teacher, and you are all brothers

⁸ OSTERMANN (2022).

and sisters” (Mt. 23:8). But in this way, in all the inefficiency of such a principle of leadership that does not necessarily pick the most effective for leadership, Franciscans learn what it means to form and guide community by creative and constructive mutual dependency.

Such knowledge can not only change your personal life but also the lives of people around you. It is a concrete personal decision that is at the heart of Franciscan spirituality and way of life. This leads us back to nature in a way fitting to our human nature so that we can be at home in nature in a truly human way.



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