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Earth Stewardship: Oikophilia and Philanthropy

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ABSTRACT

The starting point of this paper is the ecological crisis. Faced with this crisis, human beings have come up with different solutions, which imply a rethinking of the role of technology in our relationship with the environment. Among them, in this paper, three main solutions are highlighted: the techno-fix, the critique of technocracy (and the return to a pre-technological era), and Earth Stewardship. This latter is, in my opinion, the approach that is most in line with the doctrine of the Catholic Church in recent years and simultaneously implies the love for the "common home" (*oikophilia*) and the other human beings (philanthropy). These two aspects are the ontological framework of Earth Stewardship. This approach implies, from an ethical standpoint, the development of a sense of responsibility towards both the other living beings and the human beings themselves (i.e., human ecology). In this sense, I argue that the focal point of this approach is the human being and not the environment: our focus must be our dwelling on Earth, which recalls fruitful relationships with the environment –i.e., the possibility of flourishing for both the human being and the other living beings.

Keywords: Christian Ethics, Earth Stewardship, Environmental Ethics, Human Ecology, Technology.

RESUMEN

El punto de partida de este trabajo es la crisis ecológica. Ante esta crisis, los seres humanos han ideado diferentes soluciones, que implican un replanteamiento del papel de la tecnología en nuestra relación con el medio ambiente. Entre ellas, en este trabajo se destacan tres soluciones principales: el *techno-fix*, la crítica de la tecnocracia (y el retorno a una era pre-tecnológica), y la *Earth Stewardship*. Esta última es, en mi opinión, el enfoque que más se ajusta a la doctrina de la Iglesia Católica de los últimos años e implica simultáneamente el amor a la "casa común" (oikofilía) y a los demás seres humanos (filantropía). Estos dos aspectos constituyen el marco ontológico de la *Earth Stewardship*. Este enfoque implica, desde un punto de vista ético, el desarrollo de un sentido de la responsabilidad tanto hacia los demás seres vivos como hacia los propios seres humanos (es decir, la ecología humana). En este sentido, sostengo que el punto central de este enfoque es el ser humano y no el medio ambiente: nuestro centro de atención debe ser nuestro habitar en la Tierra, que evoca las relaciones fructíferas con el medio ambiente, es decir, la posibilidad de florecimiento tanto para el ser humano como para los otros seres vivos.

Palabras clave: Earth Stewardship, ecología humana, ética ambiental, ética cristiana, tecnología.

INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights the central role of Earth Stewardship in the Christian approach to environmental issues and the current ecological crisis. In this regard, it is worth: a) describing what the Earth Stewardship is and investigating the role of oikophilia and philanthropy in this concept (section 2); and b) outlining the role of responsibility towards nature's vulnerability in the Earth Stewardship paradigm (section 3). To do this, I must begin with a brief description of the current state of the ecological crisis, as well as the possible solutions to it.

It is well known that we live in the Anthropocene, that is, in the epoch of anthropogenic climate change.[1] According to the founders of the concept of "Anthropocene,"[2] the recent global environmental changes are due largely to the impact that human have had on the environment.[3] This impact has resulted in the beginning of a new geological era, the epoch of "Man," as humans have become the greatest geological agent on the planet. With the Anthropocene, the notion that the earth has limits and the idea of collapse or catastrophe, have returned. The general concept is that human exploitation of the earth is reaching its limits, and we are facing the non-linear and potentially chaotic consequences of this, which may lead to the end of human civilization. In this regard, "recent technological developments and new scientific tools regarding socioecological systems have created new global settings, which bring to the core new environmental problems, approaches, challenges, and conflicts. […] These changes are conducting to state shifts and tipping points in Earth's biosphere."[4]

1 For more on this aspect, please see J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

2 Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'anthropocene,'" *Global Change Newsletter* 41(2000): 17–8, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10888-011-9190-3. I will not challenge the concept of Anthropocene as a new geological era in this paper. I will start from the assumption that at least human activities have had a significant impact on the environment (especially in the last decades).

3 To be more accurate, it would be worth considering the difference between direct and indirect drivers of change. For more on this topic, please refer to Gerald C. Nelson et al., "Anthropogenic Drivers of Ecosystem Change: An Overview," *Ecology and Society* 11, no. 2 (2006): 29, https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-01826-110229.

4 Luca Valera and Juan C. Castilla, "Introduction," in *Global Changes. Ethics, Politics and the Environment in the Contemporary Technological World*, ed. Luca Valera and Juan C. Castilla (Springer, 2020), 1–2.

1. ANTHROPOCENE, HUMAN IMPACT, AND STEWARDSHIP

Once acknowledged that we are reaching a tipping point regarding the exploitation of our planet – climate change, along with other global changes,[5] are good indicators of this "critical point" – we may look at the possible solutions to this problem. In this regard, we may identify three main approaches to solving this issue: 1) technological optimism; 2) an extreme critique to technocracy; and 3) a prudent approach to the environment that incorporates other aspects in addition to technology. It can easily be understood how the first and second approaches represent extreme positions in this field, and they have been commonly renamed as strong anthropocentrism and biocentrism, respectively.

The first approach (i.e., technological optimism) attempts to offer a positive solution to problems created by technologies by using itself as a tool. It has been often called "techno-optimism" or "techno-fix," and "is pervasive in our society but hardly justified. In one form or another, we are repeatedly assured that 'more efficient technology will solve the problem.'"[6] In brief, the technological fix is the idea that the solutions to all problems can be found in better and new technologies. A controversial example of this approach is the claim that anthropogenic global warming or climate change may be solved through geoengineering.[7] Given the outcome of the technological impact on the environment over the last fifty years, a prudent response to this problem may be the one suggested by the American biologist and politician Barry Commoner in the "third law of ecology:" "The often catastrophic results lend considerable force to the view that 'Nature knows best.'"[8] Indeed, increasing the number of technologies to fix the ecological crisis has resulted in a worse environmental situation: "As human beings have developed more and more powerful technologies, at the same time, the Earth, then, has become more and more vulnerable to experiencing negative and irreversible effects."[9] In

5 For more on the main global changes that we are experiencing in our era, please see Luca Valera and Juan C. Castilla, *Global Changes. Ethics, Politics and the Environment in the Contemporary Technological World* (Springer, 2020).

6 Michael Huesemann and Joyce Huesemann, *Techno-Fix: Why Technology Won't Save Us Or the Environment*, New Society Publishers, 2011, xxiii.

7 For more on this topic, please see Stephen M. Gardiner, "Ethics and Geoengineering: An Overview," in *Global Changes. Ethics, Politics and the Environment in the Contemporary Technological World*, ed. Luca Valera and Juan C. Castilla (Springer, 2020), 69–78; and Augustine Pamplany, Bert Gordijn & Patrick Brereton Pamplany, "The Ethics of Geoengineering: A Literature Review," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 26 (2020): 3069–3119, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-020-00258-6.

8 Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (Dover Publications, 2020), 41.

9 John Mizzoni, "Environmental Ethics: A Catholic View," *Environmental Ethics* 36, no. 4 (2014): 409–10, https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics201436445.

this regard, an ethical problem[10] arises because the vulnerability of nature has been caused precisely through our technological interventions. Consequently, as the German philosopher Hans Jonas argues,[11] "humans have a special obligation to the earth in its vulnerability caused by human power."[12]

On the contrary, the second approach strongly criticizes a wide use of technologies to fix the environmental problems, highlighting the issue of "technocracy:"

> Technocracy is the worship of and domination by technology. Technocracy involves the appropriation and transformation of large portions of the earth by and for technology, and the reign of the one best, most efficient, rational method over all cultural variegation. […] Technocracy especially means consideration only of technical solutions to problems – and sticking to technocracy instead of environmental concerns.[13]

In this regard, the main critique of this approach, which we may consider to be very akin to Deep Ecology, is that technocracy reduces the environmental crisis to a problem that may be solved technically (its motto would be "more technologies for better solutions!") without understanding the core of the crisis. Arne Næss, the Norwegian philosopher and father of the Deep Ecology Movement, made a similar critique of shallow ecologists (in contrast to deep ecologists)[14]:

> What a conservationist sees and experiences as reality, the developer typically does not see – and vice versa. A conservationist sees and experiences a forest as a unity, a gestalt, and when speaking of the heart of the forest, he or she does not mean the geometric center. A developer sees quantities of trees and argues that a road through the forest covers very few square kilometers, so why make so much fuss? If the conservers insist, he will propose that the road not touch the center of the forest. The heart is then saved, he may think. The difference between the antagonists is one of ontology rather than ethics. They may have fundamental ethical prescriptions in

10 Sandler calls it "the moral hazard." – Sandler, "The ethics of genetic engineering."

11 An explanation of this point may be found in Luca Valera, "¿Tenemos una responsabilidad hacia nuestro genoma? El ser humano como 'objeto de la técnica,'" *Revista de Filosofía Aurora* 32, no. 57 (2020): 639–52, https://doi.org/10.7213/1980-5934.32.057.DS02.

12 Clarence W. Joldersma, "How Can Science Help Us Care for Nature? Hermeneutics, fragility, and responsibility for the earth," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 4 (2009): 481. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2009.00331.x.

13 Hugh P. McDonald, *Environmental Philosophy. A revaluation of Cosmopolitan Ethics from an Ecocentric Standpoint* (Rodopi, 2014), 346–9.

14 This notorious distinction may be found in Arne Naess, "The shallow and the deep long-range ecology movement. A summary," *Inquiry. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1973): 95–100, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682. For more on this distinction and its meaning in Naess's works, please see Luca Valera, "Depth, Ecology and the Deep Ecology Movement. Arne Næss's Proposal for the Future," *Environmental Ethics* 41, no. 4 (2019): 293–303, https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics201941437.

> common but apply them differently because they see and experience differently. They both use the term forest but refer to different realities.[15]

A deeper environmental approach – as a methodology and ontology – considers the ecological crisis as a possibility to delve into our experiences and actions, while a technocratic approach may only search for adequate solutions for generating better consequences and benefits. While the former is a more systemic, complex, and long-term approach, the latter is a more limited, superficial, and short-term attitude. In reference to this last approach, it should be emphasized that the rejection of technology – not present in all authors in the field of environmental ethics – evidently seems to be somewhat unrealistic and contrafactual. As I have argued in another work,

> technologies have become almost inseparable from our daily lives, our privileged sphere of action. In fact, it could no longer be said simply that 'technology has drastically transformed the human environment,' but rather that technology has become the human environment. There is, therefore, no such thing as a 'natural' environment and, apart from that, technologies: our environment coincides with the technological environment, in which 'natural' and 'artificial' elements coexist.[16]

Finally, building on the idea that technology is an insufficient means for solving the ecological crisis, the third approach (the prudent approach to the environment) attempts to illustrate that our ecological behavior must be balanced. Instead of focusing on technologies, it highlights "personal integrity" and the core values that may better guide our actions: "Wisdom […], courage […], temperance […], justice […], love or fidelity […], community, simplicity, humility, and above all responsibility, accountability, a disposition to carry out effectively stewardship of that which has been placed in our care."[17] This approach argues that "'fixing' the environment or climate through technology or finance or legislation is necessary but not sufficient. Ethical approaches are also needed"[18]. In this sense, the viewpoint of this approach is as follows: we may not deal with the ecological crisis without dealing with our humanity as well.

15 Arne Næss, "The World of Concrete Contents," in *The Selected Works of Arne Næss*, ed. Harold Glasser and Alan Drengson (Springer, 2005), vol. X, 456.

16 Luca Valera, *Espejos. Filosofía y nuevas tecnologías* (Herder, 2022), 21.

17 Lisa H. Newton, *Ethics and Sustainability. Sustainable Development and the Moral Life* (Prentice-Hall, 2003), 3. An attempt to deepen these same "environmental or ecological virtues" further may be found in Luca Valera, *Ecologia umana. Le sfide etiche del rapporto uomo/ambiente* (Aracne, 2013), 235–48.

18 Mary E. Tucker, "World Religions, Ethics, and the Earth Charter for a Sustainable Future," in *Earth Stewardship. Linking Ecology and Ethics in Theory and Practice*, ed. Ricardo Rozzi et al. (Springer, 2015), 396.

This latest point, which we may define as "Earth Stewardship,"[19] lies at the core of the Christian approach to the ecological crisis. In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

> The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles "in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments." Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society. Nature, especially in our time, is so integrated into the dynamics of society and culture that by now it hardly constitutes an independent variable. Desertification and the decline in productivity in some agricultural areas are also the result of impoverishment and underdevelopment among their inhabitants.[20]

There is a strong link between the environment and the human being who dwells in it. This connection is the ontological basis of this ethical focus of Earth Stewardship, as I will try to illustrate in the next section.

2. OIKOPHILIA AND PHILANTHROPY: THE BASICS OF EARTH STEWARDSHIP

When looking at the Christian attitude to the environment, it is impossible to disregard Lynn White's famous criticism[21] of the Christian strong anthropocentrism. White states that, going as far back as Genesis (1, 26-30), Christianism has mostly reduced the environment (and all other living beings) to mere resources that are to be used only for human aims. In Palmer's words, "stewardship of the natural world, whether Christian or otherwise... remains profoundly anthropocentric and un-

19 On this topic please see Luca Valera, "Earth Stewardship: do domínio à responsabilidade," in *Ecos da natureza* (CRV, 2023), ed. Jelson Oliveira et al., 152–64; Luca Valera, "Loving God, Loving Nature? Intrinsic values, stewardship, and reverence for nature," *Revista de Filosofia Aurora* 36 (2024): e202430731, https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.036.e202430731; Luca Valera, "Nuevas formas de la responsabilidad: hacia la Earth Stewardship," in *Del Desarrollo Sostenible a la Justicia Climática* (Tirant lo Blanch, 2024), ed. Lucía Aparicio Chofré, 17–35.

20 Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter "Caritas in veritate" on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth* (2009), 50.

21 Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–7, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.120.

ecological, legitimating and encouraging increased human use of the natural world."[22] The main criticism, then, refers to the Christian attitude of dominance over the other species, which finds its justification in a "desacralization and subsequent exploitation"[23] of the natural world. The desacralization would be the consequence of human power (dominion) over the environment, which is justified by the extreme "anthropocentrism"[24] and "ex-centrism" of the human being itself.[25] As the theologian Celia Deane-Drummond argues, this kind of approach refers more to Bacon's point of view than to Christian one,[26] and therefore, the criticism of the Christian thought on the environment would be inappropriate.[27] Just the opposite, "for those who understand nature as God's creation, natural entities and ecosystems have a goodness that human beings may not rightly squander."[28] This is the very basis of the Christian approach to the environment, which we call "Earth Stewardship"[29].

I will attempt to illustrate how Earth Stewardship is based upon two main assumptions: oikophilia and philanthropy. There is a strong link between these two assumptions as they both demonstrate the essential and inseparable relationship between human beings and their environment. In this regard, we may say that human ecology[30] is the key to understand the "place of the human being in the cosmos." To explain this relationship, I recall the abovementioned passage by Pope Benedict XVI, which links the "environmental desertification" with "human

22 Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: a case study in environmental ethics," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*, ed. R.J. Berry (T&T Environmental Stewardship, 2006), 75.

23 Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology* (Saint Mary's Press, 2008), 82.

24 On this point, it is worth noticing that the Christian approach to the environment cannot under any circumstances be anthropocentric, since the human being actually isn't the center of the world. On the contrary, it is theocentric, since God must be the focus of every living beings' consideration – For more on this issue, please see Andrew J. Hoffman and Lloyd E. Sandelands, "Getting Right with Nature. Anthropocentrism, Ecocentrism, and Theocentrism," *Organization & Environment* 18, no. 2 (2005): 141–62, https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026605276197. Hence, Saint Francis' example is particularly illuminating: "St. Francis stressed that nature, as God's creation, is a place where human beings can come close to God" – Per Binde, "Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition," *Anthropological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 19. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2001.0001.

25 See Valera, *Ecologia umana*, 182.

26 Indeed, as Celia Deane-Drummond correctly points out, "from the perspective of Christian theology one of the most popular models for envisioning such a relationship with the natural order is not virtue, but stewardship. One of the difficulties of this idea is that stewardship is often associated with an impersonal attitude to nature; it becomes 'resources' to be managed for human good" – Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology*, 82.

27 Celia Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature* (Blackwell, 2004), ix.

28 Jennifer Welchman, "A Defence of Environmental Stewardship," *Environmental Values* 21, no. 3 (2012): 306, https://doi.org/10.3197/096327112x13400390125.

29 As many authors argued, "the concept of Earth stewardship is at the core of religious messages" – Guillermo Kerber, "Stewardship, Integrity of Creation and Climate Justice: Religious Ethics Insights," in *Earth Stewardship. Linking Ecology and Ethics in Theory and Practice*, ed. Ricardo Rozzi et al. (Springer, 2015), 383.

30 For more on this concept, please see Luca Valera, "Ecología humana. Nuevos desafíos para la ecología y la filosofía," *Arbor. Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura* 195, no. 792 (2019): a509, https://doi.org/10.3989/arbor.2019.792n2010.

desertification."[31] If the environmental desertification is the result of an Anthropocentric arrogance (a lack of oikophilia), then human desertification is the consequence of the "arrogance of anti-humanism" (a lack of philanthropy)[32].

What is oikophilia?[33] For the English philosopher Roger Scruton, it is "the love of the oikos, which means not only the home but the people contained in it, and the surrounding settlements that endow that home with lasting contours and an enduring smile. The oikos is the place that is not just mine and yours but ours."[34] A reflection on the love (*philia*)[35] of our home (*oikos*) brings us back, then, to a definition of the idea of the home. A deeper explication of this topic may be found in the following paragraph:

> "Home [is] not a building" since dwelling does not consist of a simple "being on Earth." The consequence of this idea is that "our current *unheimlich*" is caused by "our inability to dwell," that is, we suffer "from a place-corrosive process." The current crisis, therefore, would not be primarily a lack of homes or resources – albeit, in a certain way, it has something to do with these two aspects.[36]

Thus, the definition of the home (oikos) strictly depends on the relationship that human beings have with the space. It is, in a sense, an anthropological issue,[37] as it recalls the ontological constitution of the human being. As this is a complex issue, and is as old as philosophy itself, I will only offer an interpretation of this problem, without criticizing alternative points of view. I argue that human beings are strictly connected to their environment, because "everything is connected to everything else,"[38] as suggested in Commoner's first law of ecology. The Australian philosopher

31 For more on this topic, please see Valera, *Ecologia umana,* 20.

32 This expression may be found in Arne Næss, "The arrogance of antihumanism?," *Ecophilosophy* 6 (1984): 8–9.

33 This issue has been explored in Luca Valera, Yuliana Leal and Gabriel Vidal, "Beyond Application. The Case of Environmental Ethics," *Tópicos (México)* 60 (2021): 437–59, https://doi.org/10.21555/top.v0i60.1122.

34 Roger Scruton, *How to Think Seriously About the Planet. The Case for an Environmental Conservatism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 227.

35 The concept of love (*philia*) is particularly relevant for Christian theology, especially in the field of environmental ethics –in this sense, it is worth mentioning: James Nash, *Loving Nature ecological integrity and Christian responsibility* (Abingdon Press, 1991). Furthermore, for a more accurate understanding of the concept of *philia* (in contrast with *eros* and *agape*), please see the famous passage in the Part I of: Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (LEV, 2005). For reason of space, I cannot develop further this argument –for more on this topic, please see: Elena Bartolini et al., *Dio è amore. Commento e guida alla lettura dell'enciclica "Deus caritas est" di Benedetto XVI* (Edizioni Paoline, 2006).

36 Luca Valera, "Home, Ecological Self and Self-Realization: Understanding Asymmetrical Relationships Through Arne Næss's Ecosophy," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 31 (2018): 664, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9715-x.

37 In this regard, Pope Francis wrote: "There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" – Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' on Care for Our Common Home* (2015), 118. On this topic, please see Valera, *Ecología humana.*

38 See Commoner, *The Closing Circle*.

Jeff Malpas – the father of the "Philosophy of Place" – puts it in this way: "The stuff of our inner lives is thus to be found in the exterior spaces or places in which we dwell, while those same spaces and places are themselves incorporated 'within' us." [39] Our experiences, then, are truly embodied in our home: without this environment, they would be impossible. The concept of "home," therefore, recalls the relationships that human beings are capable of generating with the space they occupy and, at the same time, with those relationships that are given to them independently of their will. In this sense, "place (and 'home' in particular) is vital to how we both construct and understand the world,"[40] since "home [is] not a building. […] Home [is] where one belonged. Being 'part of myself,' the idea of home delimited an ecological self, rich in internal relations to what is now called environment." [41] Indeed, if we forget this essential (or structural) connection between human beings and their environment, we would be unable to understand why we, as human beings, have to care for the environment. It would be a meaningless effort if the natural world (or the environment) was something totally external to the human being and, if we adopted a Baconian point of view, it would be without value. However, if we assume both that "creation is a place where human beings can come close to God" and "we are connected to it," it would be exactly the opposite: we are dependent on the environment and our self-realization (or flourishing) is subject to our home. In this sense, "human realization depends on the implementation of its potential identification with otherness. Through this process, the self is 'widened and deepened,' so that the realization of the other does not become an obstacle to my achievement, but a stimulus."[42] This latest point may help us to understand the reasons why

> in the beginning, the Greek word ethos did not mean ethics, but a den: the place where an animal lives. This idea broadened to include human practices and it came to mean the abodes of humans. […] Ethos can be understood as a habitat, and […] was used later as a verb: to inhabit. […] It is important to note that any habitat influences and, in turn, is influenced by the ways in which it is inhabited.[43]

39 Jeff E. Malpas, *Place and Experience. A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

40 David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 50.

41 Arne Næss, "An Example of a Place: Tvergastein," in *The Ecology of Wisdom. Writings by Arne Naess*, ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Counterpoint, 2009), 45.

42 Valera, *Home, Ecological Self and Self-Realization*, 667.

43 Jorge F. Aguirre Sala, "Hermeneutics and Field Environmental Philosophy: Integrating Ecological Sciences and Ethics into Earth Stewardship," in *Earth Stewardship. Linking Ecology and Ethics in Theory and Practice*, ed. Ricardo Rozzi et al. (Springer, 2015), 239.

Once we have explained the very essence and the reasons of the oikophilia, we may take the next step towards understanding the importance of Earth Stewardship by delving deeper into the meaning of philanthropy. It is particularly relevant to disentangle this word, which nowadays has taken on the meaning of a set of charitable acts or other good works that help others (or society as a whole). I am using this term here in its original meaning and recalling its etymology: *philanthropia* (Latin) or *philanthrōpia* (Greek), that is, "humanity, benevolence, love to mankind." In this regard, oikophilia and philanthropy are the two bases of "human ecology." The love for the oikos and the love for humanity are strictly connected, as the American conservationist Wendell Berry highlights: "To see and respect what is there is the first duty of stewardship […] That is an ecological principle and a religious one. […] In losing stewardship, we lose fellowship; we become outcasts from the great neighborhood of Creation. It is possible – as our experience in this good land shows – to exile ourselves from Creation, and ally ourselves with the principle of destruction."[44] What is, so, the basis of philanthropy? With the German philosopher Max Scheler, we may respond that it is our ontological communality. Alfredo Marcos called it "the mutual dependency of the members of the human family," based on our common animality.[45] To understand his notion of ontological communality, we must read the *Formalismus*:

> The degree of coresponsibility, too, can increase or decrease according to the type of participation. Coresponsibility does not result from this demonstration of participation but is cogiven with self-responsibility and lies in the essence of a moral community of persons in general. Coresponsibility cannot be regarded as having sprung from self-responsible acts of "recognition" of this community, that is, recognition that would result from the requirement of the moral law which the person puts upon himself. For it is the identical personhood of every individual in a community, not the individuality of the person, that founds responsibility along with autonomy. The idea of a moral community of persons (whose highest form is a religious community of love) would not be possible according to the (Kantian) principle of autonomy rejected earlier. For Kant, all esteem for the other person (or his personal dignity) is founded on the subjective autonomy of one's own person, as well as on self-esteem or esteem for one's own "dignity;" in other words, if, on the basis of what we said before, we consider love to be moral comportment of maximal value, love for the other is founded on self-love. But, in fact, love for the other is not founded on self-love (much less on self-esteem, as Kant would have it). Rather, love

44 Well Berry, *The gift of good land* (Counterpoint Press, 1981), 281.

45 See Alfredo Marcos, "Dependientes y racionales: la familia humana," *Cuadernos de Bioética* XXIII, no. 1 (2012): 83–95.

> for the other and self-love are equally original and valuable; and both are founded ultimately on God's love, which is always a coloving of all finite persons "with" the love of God as the person of persons. Hence it is God's love through which the fundamental individualistic and universalistic moral values, "self-sanctification" and "love of one's neighbor," ultimately are inseparably and organically united.[46]

This communality, thus, is based both on our animality (being members of the species *Homo Sapiens*) and personality, which affords us the openness to others. Our dependence (and mutual dependence), as human beings, is, then, the source of our communality: "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it."[47]

3. RESPONSIBILITY, VULNERABILITY, AND STEWARDSHIP

Once we have acknowledged the anthropological, ecological, and ontological basis of Earth Stewardship, we may focus on the ethical aspects regarding our place in the cosmos. As mentioned previously, the Christian approach to the environment cannot be interpreted as being anthropocentric.[48] A "Promethean"[49] worldview, which is focused on the human dominion on Earth, is radically opposed to Christian teaching. Pope Francis expressed it as

46 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 497–498.

47 Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 229.

48 A good explanation of this issue is the following: "Critics might reply that while there have been some salutary revisions to the concept of stewardship, these revisions do not go far enough. Stewardship remains anthropocentric in its orientation to nature because the values it promotes are human values rather than the value of nature independent of its role in human life. But criticisms of this sort rest upon a confusion. While the values environmental stewards are committed to protecting are indeed values assigned to nature by human beings (i.e., anthropogenic), this does not entail that the values assigned must themselves be uniformly anthropocentric (human centred). Nor does it entail the more radical thesis that the only values stewards would assign to natural entities or systems would be instrumental" – Welchman, "A Defence of Environmental Stewardship," 307–8. On the same issue, James states: "The only perspective we can adopt in this context is our own. […] Our perspective in this context, as in any other, must be a human perspective. […] In considering the effects of climate change, or indeed any other environmental issue, we should not think of ourselves as trapped within the confines of our all-to-human outlook on things" – Simon P. James, *Environmental Philosophy. An Introduction* (Polity Press, 2015), 155. On the topic of value in environmental ethics (i.e., the difference between intrinsic and instrumental values), it is worth considering Holmes Rolston III's point of view – e.g., Holmes Rolston III, "Value in nature and the nature of value," in Philosophy and the natural environment, eds. R. Attfield & A. Belsey (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13–30. On the nature of value in environmental philosophy, please also see my paper: Luca Valera & Marta Bertolaso, "Understanding Biodiversity from a Relational Viewpoint" *Tópicos (México)* 51 (2016), 37–54, https://doi.org/10.21555/top.v0i0.755.

49 I am recalling, here, the famous expression by Hans Jonas: the "Unbound Prometheus" and his "immodesty" – Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 185 and 202.

> an inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world. Often, what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about. Instead, our "dominion" over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.[50]

The idea of human dominion as a stewardship (that we have been assigned by God "to be [the] stewards of all creation"[51]) may be found at the very beginning of Genesis (2, 15): "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Here, we can immediately notice two main points. First, the relationship between the human being and the earth is essential. The "Garden" is the place where the human being dwells, and God is in it ("He walks in the garden in the cool of the day"). The relationship between the human being and the Garden is mediated, then, by the presence of God, and vice versa. The human being is placed by God in the Garden, but the very center of the Eden is the tree of life, not the human being itself: "In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2, 9). This fact gives us some indications on the idea of dominion (and, conversely, on the criticism of Christian anthropocentrism).[52] The other living beings are not "in function of the human being" but rather, the human being must take care of them. And this is, precisely, the second point: the "Garden" belongs to God, but under His authority, human beings have been given the privilege to steward this garden, and also the responsibility to care for it. This stewardship of the "Garden" may be carried out through two actions: "To work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2,15). These actions are inseparable and are subsequent to God's acts of creation and giving: we may work the earth and take care of it since God gave it to us. Pope Benedict XVI expanded on this:

> Human beings legitimately exercise a responsible stewardship over nature, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world's population. On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself—God's gift to his children—and through hard work and creativity.[53]

50 Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 116.

51 Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 236.

52 On this point, please see Silvano Petrosino, *Capovolgimenti. La casa non è una tana, l'economia non è il business*, (Jaca Book, 2007).

53 Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter "Caritas in veritate,"* 50.

The desertification of reality is, therefore, a consequence of living in a manner that has forgotten that dwelling implies both stewarding and building. These two dimensions are the essential elements of dwelling.[54] When we say that human beings have the role of constructor, we are highlighting their creative and inventive properties and their desire to change the environment:

> Building implies creating an opening to make human dwelling visible, and it is not the result of production, but instead, its essence lies in making human dwellings possible. It can be expressed on the one hand by housing, carving, buildings, and other material implications of dwelling, and on the other hand, through the cultivation and care of nature and all the fruits that it brings us. Consequently, inhabiting implies stewardship given that taking care does not merely consist of not doing anything wrong. Genuine caring is something positive and happens beforehand when we leave something in its essence.[55]

Therefore, there cannot be any building that does not imply caring. This is the essence of Earth Stewardship: stewarding or taking care of the earth does not mean preventing its development, nor does it imply that we must leave it as it is and not change it. Likewise, building does not mean destroying everything. Building and stewarding must always go hand in hand.[56]

Once this definition of Earth Stewardship is acknowledged, the question remains as to why we should take care of our home, beyond the fact that it is a divine imperative. This question brings us back to the issue of the vulnerability of nature and our corresponding responsibility for it. Is this vulnerability the philosophical basis for our responsibility? I have attempted to explain this elsewhere: "If it is true that […] vulnerability cannot be the foundation of our responsibility […], it is also true that it is the privileged object of our own responsibility."[57] This is because our actions (which have been radically changed by emerging technologies) have had extremely powerful impact on nature.[58] Our responsibility is, therefore, strictly connected to our power. We can, thus, conclude that Earth Stewardship (and the

54 I deepened the concept of dwelling (concerning home and, more particularly, environmental ethics/philosophy) in: Luca Valera, "Home, Ecological Self and Self-Realization." Furthermore, on this topic, it is worth mentioning: Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (Routledge, 2000), in particular part II. In line with Ingold, this paper in inspired in an "ontology of dwelling," which is the basis of our stewardship and responsibility towards nature.

55 Valera, Leal and Vidal, "Beyond Application," 447.

56 John Passmore is particularly clear on that topic. He "acknowledges that belief in human dominion can be taken not as despotic but as implying that humanity, as the steward or bailiff of God's creation, has responsibility for its care" – Robin Attfield, "Christian Attitudes to Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 3 (1983): 371, https://doi.org/10.2307/2709172.

57 Valera, "¿Tenemos una responsabilidad?," 649.

58 See Binde, "Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition," 18.

issue of responsibility) refers to our actions, and not to nature. We are responsible for the human behaviors that refer to the environment: "Environmental stewardship is the management of human behaviour that degrades natural resources or values, not management of nature."[59] Therefore, the object of an adequate environmental ethics is our relationship not only with the environment itself, but also with the other human beings.

Nevertheless, this is only one aspect of the relationship between responsibility, vulnerability, and power, and we call this "the negative role of responsibility." We should also consider the "positive role of responsibility." This is the possibility for us to use our power to help the world flourish.[60] The Australian philosopher Passmore conveyed this by saying that humans are to "perfect nature by co-operating with it."[61] In this sense, human action is essential for the world to flourish; that is, human beings co-operate with God in His ongoing creation. For this reason, "Benedict has also incorporated the notion of 'perfecting' nature as part of what stewardship is. It is a traditional Christian view that the universe is the creation of God and it is the responsibility of humans – who are made in the image and likeness of God – to be its steward, and even 'lead it to perfection.'"[62] In the Christian interpretation of stewardship, nature is not something "static, immovable and eternally perfect." On the contrary, there is a continuous interaction between humans and nature that aims for greater perfection. Contributing to a greater world perfection is precisely where our responsibility lies. This human contribution carries with it a great promise: "If Nature is not only a sacrament but also the promise of more being, stewardship is no longer reducible to acts of preservation, but consists also of preparation, that is, of making the world ready to host creative new developments in the long-term future."[63] In this sense, the goal of stewardship is not just management but co-creation and perfection. This implies, in the Christian tradition, a teleological view of nature: all the living being should be respected since they have a well-defined nature, which claims for "self-realization."[64] Indeed, it is

59 Welchman, "A Defence of Environmental Stewardship," 309.

60 In this sense, "Stewardship is strongly dependent upon knowledge—both of the affected system and of the effects of human action within it" – Calvin B. DeWitt, "Earth Stewardship and Laudato Si'," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 91, no. 3(2016): 275, https://doi.org/10.1086/688096.

61 John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 32.

62 Mizzoni, "Environmental Ethics," 411.

63 John F. Haught, "Science, Ecology, and Christian Theology," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology* (Blackwell, 2017), ed. John Hart, 125.

64 The topic is evidently too broad to be fully argued here. For the sake of this paper, it is sufficient to understand that there is a difference between "perfection" and "self-realization" in both the theological and philosophical domains. I use the two terms as synonyms, here, since I want to emphasize the ethical question (i.e.,

worth recalling Robert Spaemann's words on the relationship among human intervention and natural ends, in the context of the ecological crisis:

> In the future, everything will depend on whether we manage to see the limits to the expansion of our domination over nature as something like limits that are full of meaning, i.e. a *telos*, limits whose respect leads us to the realization of what we properly are as human beings. Only on this assumption will it be possible to make ecological awareness a constitutive part of the good life.[65]

CONCLUSION

Starting from the ideas sketched above, I can delve a little deeper into understanding the image of Nature that underlies the paradigm of Earth Stewardship from a Christian perspective. Chesterton wrote a very suggestive passage on this subject:

> Only the supernatural has taken a sane view of Nature. The essence of all pantheism, evolutionism, and modern cosmic religion is really in this proposition: that Nature is our mother. Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother, you discover that she is a step-mother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister.[66]

It is important to highlight that the Christian view of nature is incompatible with both the ideas of the Mother Nature[67] and of nature as a sacred, untouchable world. From this assertion, it obviously does not follow that we may destroy our earth because it only has instrumental value[68]: "Where 'desacralise nature' means representing nature as having no independent value of its own, neither theism nor stewardship implies anything of the kind"[69]. Indeed, human history is the history of our dwelling on the earth, which implies a certain interaction with nature.

This interaction is particularly interesting when considering the notion of "landscape," as opposed to that of "wilderness." If a landscape recalls the idea of

the relationship of human beings to nature and other human beings), rather than the ontological question (i.e., the essence or structure of nature/creation).

65 Robert Spaemann, "Teleología natural y acción," *Persona y derecho* 30 (1994) 9–26.

66 Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (John Lane Company, 1909), 207.

67 For more on this concept, please have a look at Luca Valera, "Françoise d'Eaubonne and Ecofeminism: Rediscovering the Link between Women and Nature," in *Women and Nature? Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment* (Routledge, 2017), ed. Douglas Vakoch and Sam Mickey, 10–23.

68 It is worth considering the issue of sustainability, here, when we refer to the Earth Stewardship paradigm. For more on this topic, please see F. Stuart Chapin III, *Grassroots Stewardship: Sustainability within Our Reach* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

69 Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of the Global Environment* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 59.

the integration between culture and environment, then wilderness could be defined as "large areas that have experienced minimal habitat loss".[70] Hence, we are talking about two different ways of dwelling the earth. On the one side, we can observe a fusion between human constructions and nature (and, therefore, the environment should be interpreted as a cultural environment); while, on the other side, we acknowledge a juxtaposition between humans and nature (and, therefore, the environment should be interpreted as a wild environment). The human culture is mainly a history of the "landscape;" that is, a history of a powerful interaction (and in many cases, we may say, an excessive interaction) between humans and nature. At the base of this interaction there should be a sense of stewardship, which is an "inherently virtuous practice, since its performance involves the constraint of personal self-interest and the cultivation of morally important."[71] This stewardship is

> an *ongoing role or relationship* maintained over time with the stewards' principals and with the lands, things or persons in their care" and this "requires the exercise of certain moral virtues. To be a competent steward, one must possess and act from dispositions such as loyalty, temperance, diligence, justice and integrity, as well as intellectual virtues or technical skills such prudence and practical rationality.[72]

We may return, then, to the starting point. There is a strong relationship between human beings and the environment, and between human realization and environmental preservation. Earth Stewardship makes sense only from the ontological and cosmological perspective presented above: we dwell something that doesn't belong to us… something that is the condition of possibility for our realization and is intrinsically good –here is the essence of the concept of creation. Once again, the focal point of my paper (and Earth Stewardship, I guess), is the human being and not the environment. If we want to progress in safeguarding our environment, we should change our way of dwelling on the earth.[73] This is,

70 James E.M. Watson et al., "Wilderness and future conservation priorities in Australia," *Diversity and Distributions* 15 (2009): 1029, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1472-4642.2009.00601.x.

71 Welchman, "A Defence of Environmental Stewardship," 299.

72 Welchman, "A Defence of Environmental Stewardship," 299.

73 It is quite interesting to consider our dual role as co-inhabitants of the earth and as the main drivers of environmental transformations and changes: "If humanity is to advance towards a planetary consciousness, Earth Stewardship is the paradigm to be adopted. According to it, human beings are co-inhabitants of the planet and should consider the consequences of their development patterns, not only for current and future human generations, but also for other species. The challenges of implementing this paradigm are great, especially after the beginning of the Anthropocene, period in which humanity became the main driver of the transformations of Earth systems" – Eduardo Viola and Larissa Basso, "Earth Stewardship, Climate Change, and Low Carbon Consciousness: Reflections from Brazil and South America," in *Earth Stewardship. Linking Ecology and Ethics in Theory and Practice*, ed. Ricardo Rozzi et al. (Springer, 2015), 367.

specifically, an ethical issue that lies at the core of Christian values and ethics. From the Christian theology, our stewardship (both directed at the Earth and human relationships) is strongly related to the intrinsic goodness (and limits) of creation, which is the common home of all people and living beings (past, present, and future). In this sense, our first goal is to make human relations more mature, if we want to steward the Earth (including humanity).

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