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"THE EARTH IS THE MOTHER OF ALL PEOPLE" (CHIEF JOSEPH): THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ITS RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL DIMENSIONS[1]

This essay addresses the emergence of the concept of sustainability and its religious and ethical dimensions. One of the fundamental questions here is the basic understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural world, and with this the growing awareness of human responsibility. Conceptions of humanity's relationship to the natural world in various religious traditions will be addressed, as well as the major ethical schools of thought in their unique approaches to the question of sustainability and environmental responsibility today.

Keywords: sustainability, environmentalism, religion, ethics, environmental ethics.

Terminological Genesis of "Sustainability"

What we talk about today when we talk about "sustainability" in the abstract sense is something that was already embedded in some ancient religious traditions at the level of implicit subconsciousness and occasionally at the level of conscious explication in the holistic language of interdependency, and in the context of human responsibility for both the animals and the environment. These matters will be addressed below; before turning to these traditions (and modern ethical thought), however, the emergence of the concept of sustainability in the Western tradition in the 20th century will be addressed.

"Sustainability" and "sustainable development" have become central terms of our public discourse and are now guiding principles in the political and economic realms and within the environmental movement. While there are a few echoes of the idea before the 20th century in Western traditions – some of which have

[1] This essay was the basis of my lectures at the University of Hohenheim in July 2022, on the same theme. Unless otherwise specified, all English translations are my own.

been rediscovered in the academic search for its pre-history[2] – for the most part the origins of the term are to be found emerging in the second half of the 20th century with a group of ecologists, economists, system theorists, energy specialists, environmentalists, natural scientists, and diplomats. They worked together to bring the concept of sustainability into the broader public consciousness and into the programs of the United Nations. The term itself entered the English language in the 1960s in economic growth theory with the phrase "sustainable growth" and was then used in the 1970s in the abstract sense of "sustainability". Thereafter, the system-theoretical conception of "sustainable development" became very popular, being understood as a process working towards the ideal[3]. The three central theoretical realms in view that underlie the theory of sustainable development are embodied in the terms *environment*, *economics*, and *equity* or *social equality* (UN World Summit, 2005)[4]. Beyond this, Jeremy L. Caradonna's historical analysis of the concept points to four basic ideas as central to the general understanding of sustainability as it became conceptualized in contemporary debates. These are, if one attempts to summarize them in four basic principles with concrete terms: *inter-connectedness*, *ecological limitations*, *future-orientation*, and *localization*[5]. The various concepts in this paradigm of four principles and in the three realms named above have parallels in multiple religious traditions. Yet, the reputation of religion in these matters has been notoriously problematic, and especially so in the Jewish and Christian traditions of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. These traditions are marked by the narratives of creation and the view of humanity in creation as "ruler". Caradonna also points to the ancient tradition in Genesis 1 as underlying, or being echoed, in the new patterns of thought in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, especially embodied in the new conceptions of nature as purely inert material for study and use, rational analysis, and exploitation in all senses[6]. The legacy of religious thought and influence on

[2] Hans Carl von Carlowitz articulated some of these basic concepts in the 1700s in his work on forestry and forest management. See *Hans Carl von Carlowitz und die Nachhaltigkeit – eine 300-jährige Geschichte: Tagungspublikation zum 35. Treffen des Arbeitskreises Bergbaufolgen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geowissenschaften, 13.–14. September 2013 in Freiberg* / ed. Katrin Kleeberg. Duderstadt 2013.

[3] J. L. Caradonna. *Sustainability: A History*. Oxford 2014, p. 7. See also *Routledge Handbook of the History of Sustainability* / ed. J. L. Caradonna. New York 2018; U. Grober. *Sustainability: A Cultural History* / transl. R. Cunningham. Totnes, Devon 2012.

[4] Caradonna. *Sustainability*, p. 8.

[5] Grober. *Sustainability*, pp. 12–19.

[6] Caradonna. *Sustainability*, p. 29. Many contemporary voices have followed this path of criticism and essentially assert the ancient cause of the environmental catastrophe of the 20th and 21st centuries in this old passage of the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible. Most recently, see for example Philipp Blom. *Die Unterwerfung: Anfang und Ende der menschlichen Herrschaft über die Natur*. Hamburg 2022. The theory was developed first for a popular audience by Lynn White, Jr. The Historical

the environment, if one can even quantify it, may be indeed more complicated and important than is often held. Indeed, religion is not only an active participant in the conceptualization of, reflection on, and interpretation of the world, but also as a living cultural system, passively responding to the reality of climate change. As Sigurd Bergmann argues, climate change itself affects religion as a cultural system and represents "a severe challenge to religious belief, as it radically questions the created goodness of the world and life in general"[7]. It has also raised our awareness of human responsibility and drawn our attention to the reality of human freedom in its complexity and negative potentiality.

In the closing chapter of his study on environmental and social reform, titled "Is there a way out?", Sander van der Leeuw argues that we should focus on behavioral habits rather than on trying to "frontally attack mindsets or worldviews that are closely related to people's and groups' identities [...]"[8]. The worldviews being referred to here would certainly include religious ones. Indeed, there is a strong argument to be made in this sense, for the latter habits may be more easily reformable than identity-forming concepts, traditions, religious ideas, and basic convictions or "worldviews". Of course, these realms of human existence are interrelated. Nevertheless, if we seek to understand these basic identity- and habit-forming conceptual frameworks and seek to consider them especially in the religious dimensions, a treasure trove of resources becomes quite evident, and not only problematic issues that need to be reformed. Naturally, it must be acknowledged that we read these texts and understand these traditions within the frameworks of interpretation in which we exist today. We see them and look back at them from our modern perspective with all the experiences and knowledge that have been accumulated over the centuries about the natural world and human history. At the same time, however, there are aspects of these ancient

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Roots of Our Ecological Crisis // *Science* 155/3767 (10 March, 1967) 1203–1207. White's basic ideas go back to older German language debates from around 1900 and following about the origin of Western modernity, the scientific method, capitalist thinking, and theological conceptions of time. As White argued: "Our daily habits of action [...] are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology". *Ibid*., p. 1205. According to the creation narrative of Genesis, in White's assessment, "no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image". *Ibid*. As an antidote, White proposed Francis of Assisi as a "patron saint for ecologists". *Ibid*., p. 1207.

[7] S. Bergmann. Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Religion // *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development* / ed. E. Tomalin. New York 2015, p. 402. Yet, he argues that religion will provide a response to this, and helps in the process of making humans feel at home in the world even in difficult situations.

[8] Sander van der Leeuw. *Social Sustainability, Past and Future: Undoing Unintended Consequences for the Earth's Survival*. New York 2020, p. 389.

religious traditions that speak directly to the questions we are asking today. Thus, there are moments in these traditions that directly overlap with our contemporary concerns. In these moments, we can identify aspects of ancient religious thought that are certainly anchored in and emerge from the given textual reality in its historical distance and the long-passed context and "place in life" of a distant history. These moments of overlapping serendipity emerge, it seems, not only in or from our interpretive activity in the contemporary situation, but actually have a fixed point of reference from which the historical transfer of these religious traditions in either textual or oral tradition unfolded. This fact raises a basic question, a question which also plagued the Romantics of the 19th century: Have we fallen from grace in the modern era, in the scientific era, in the industrial age, and should we seek to return to the thought-worlds of the pre-modern and pre-industrial era?

There is a fundamental presupposition in many of our contemporary debates regarding environmental ethics and sustainability, namely, the belief that prehistoric people and the pre-modern and pre-industrial age had a basically harmonious relationship with nature or cultivated a different and better worldview, one which was better than the modern view of the world. This basic thesis has been articulated in many ways and has long been an element of the academic debates about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the Enlightenment and modern period, and especially the scientific method of research of the 17th century. This raises the basic issue: When it comes to the question of environmental worldviews, were pre-modern people and pre-modern worldviews essentially better (in terms of environmental ethics or sustainability-theory) than that which came in the modern age? Some evidence suggests that even in the pre-modern era the principle of maximum exploitation of resources was very common. There are a few counter examples of this general tendency, such as ancient Egyptian agricultural methods, which were highly sustainable, but on the whole human beings in both the pre-modern and in the modern era have generally sought to extract as much as possible from the natural world, including the logging of forests and the hunting of animals to extinction or near-extinction[9]. What changed in the modern era, in essence, were the tools and technologies that humans used and the scale in which they employed these new tools in their exploitation with new knowledge and abilities.

A new development in the history of human interaction with the environment certainly occurred with the industrial age in the 19th and 20th centuries. This development is essentially related to progress in scientific knowledge (espe-

[9] J. Radkau. *Nature and Power: A World History of the Environment*. Munich 2002; for an attempt to see the long-term perspective on these questions reaching back over 10,000 years BCE, see Sander van der Leeuw. *Social Sustainability, Past and Future*, pp. 67–78.

cially in the 17th and 18th centuries) and the development of new technologies. In the background of this is the Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, an era (as summarized by Lawrence Principe) that "saw a substantial increase in the number of people asking questions about the natural world, a proliferation of new answers to those questions, and the development of new ways of gaining answers"[10]. Even if many of the developments of this era are somewhat curious from our perspective today, such as the fascination with alchemy, we cannot go back behind the basic impulses of the "revolution", nor can we abandon all the questions or even the basic intuitions that drove it to rediscover the world. On the contrary, we must use these methods of knowledge acquisition in service of higher ideals, such as sustainable development.

These historical developments led to a new era in the history of the environment. Since Paul J. Crutzen coined the term in 2000, the new era following industrialization has been called "the Anthropocene", the new age in the history of the earth in which humans significantly (and, above all, negatively) influence the environment. Especially around 1900 and in the following decades, there are multiple indications pointing to a new development, some of which were already anchored in the 19th century. Yet even many of these new developments in technology may not have led to our current situation if there was not a corresponding population explosion. Of course, the latter was closely related to the former, for the development of new technologies enabled population growth. In this sense, the developments went hand in hand. As data from the United Nations Population Division shows, around 1900 the world population began to grow at a rate much faster than it did in the 19th century and before. This development took on new proportions in the middle of the 20th century, when the human population started to grow at an exponential rate. While the world population is no longer growing at the rate it did in the 1960s, we are still living in an era deeply affected by this development, and especially as this relates to the growth of the population in the Western world in the 19th and 20th centuries. Proportionally, Westerners have emitted far more carbon and thus have uniquely contributed to global warming. Of course, today the carbon being emitted into the atmosphere is coming from every corner of the globe, and to a high degree from the new industrial giants, such as China. The development of new technologies and the growth of the population were both related to the growth of GDP in the 20th century, which essentially reflected this development. As data from the Maddison Project Database of 2020 shows, especially in the Western world, western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, there has been a massive explosion of wealth since the middle of the 20th century. The wealth was both directly related to and also led to further production of goods, which used even more fossil fuels and led

[10] See L. Principe. *The Scientific Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford 2011, p. 3.

to the emission of more carbon. The use of fossil-based energies, coal, oil and gas, and among these, especially, oil, exploded in the mid-20th century, as Mikael Höök has shown[11]. There is a direct correlation between this and the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, which also exploded in the mid-20th century and grew exponentially in billions of tons leading up to today. As a result of this development since the 19th century, there has been, and continues to be, with increasing intensity since the mid-20th century, a warming deviation from the norm temperature on the surface of the earth. As a result, which has been demonstrated by the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (Brussels), weather patterns are changing and there is now a confirmed increase of extreme weather, drought and storms and floods since the mid-20th century continuing to today. A recent example of this is the heatwave in the Northwest of the United States and in British Columbia, Canada. According to the World Weather Attribution (KNMI, LSCE, NCAR Oxford, Princeton, Climate Centre), commenting on this heatwave:

> Looking into the future, in a world with 2°C of global warming (0.8°C warmer than today which at current emission levels would be reached as early as the 2040s), this event [the heatwave, PSP] would have been another degree hotter. An event like this – currently estimated to occur only once every 1000 years, would occur roughly every 5 to 10 years in that future world with 2°C of global warming. […] the Pacific Northwest 2021 heatwave is still rare or extremely rare in today's climate, yet would be virtually impossible without human-caused climate change. As warming continues, it will become a lot less rare.[12]

As studies from the European Environmental Agency have shown, key food commodities, such as corn, bananas, soybeans, coffee, and palm oil, are all highly vulnerable in these developments of climate change. The poorest and most vulnerable people in the world are also the most exposed to these developments, as the Global Climate Risk Index has shown.

The short- and long-term solution to this general problem is the reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases in order to slow the surface temperature change and limit it as much as possible. This goes hand in hand with the development and increase of more sustainable energy creation, industrial production, consumption, and transportation. Sustainable development has been a major intellectual paradigm at least since the latter part of the 20th century and has increased in popularity to this day as a central goal of international cooperation.

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[11] M. Höök. Coal and Peat: Global Resources and Future Supply // *Fossil Energy: Selected Entries from the Encyclopedia of Sustainability Science and Technology* / ed. R. Malhotra. New York 2013, pp. 311–342.

[12] Western North American extreme heat virtually impossible without human-caused climate change // *World Weather Attribution* (worldweatherattribution.org), 7 July, 2021.

The United Nations Brundtland Commission defined the term in 1987 as meeting "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"[13]. When it comes to putting meat on the bones of the theoretical concept, "sustainability" ultimately refers to the sustainability of the *replacement rate* (replenishment and harvest), the principle of *equilibrium* in the broadest sense, the *interrelationship of the environment, economy and society*, and the *interdependency of national and international parties*.

If we take the fishing industry as an example of this, we see a similar development since the mid-20th century in use and human consumption of millions of tons of both inland and marine fish through capture, and since the latter part of the 20th century increasingly from aquaculture. In many cases, this capture has exceeded the maximum sustainable yield ("overfishing"). This is, at a minimum, a violation of the replacement rate principle and the equilibrium principle. Aquaculture has been growing exponentially since the mid-20th century, and this has significantly offset the increased rate of wild capture. Nevertheless, as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has shown, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of over-exploited fish stocks since the mid-20th century. Over 30 percent of the world's fish stocks today are still over-exploited.

While fish provide a healthy source of nutrition for human beings and are used as well for animal feed, the massive reduction of the tuna supply, for example, is causing increased strain on local fishermen from developing countries, such as Kenya. Other aspects of the food chain in the non-human realm are also deeply strained and, in some cases, endangered by this. For example, sharks and rays are highly vulnerable to these depleted fish stocks[14]. Sustainable development in the fishing industry, by contrast, promotes human flourishing and works to preserve the beauty and diversity of the natural environment in all its life-complexity.

Sustainability and Religious Thought: In Search of the Right Paradigm

A significant amount of the literature on religion and environmentalism often wittingly or unwittingly suggests religious paradigms of thought as an escape from or critique of the modern world and modern natural scientific views of the world. The underlying logic of such religious counterproposals asserts that a return to these frameworks of thought will essentially solve our problems or help us in the advancement of sustainable development. The world in which we live today is deeply influenced by religious paradigms of thought. Showing how

[13] UN World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future* / ed. G. Harlem Brundtland *et al.* Oxford 1987, p. 8.

[14] N. K. Dulvy *et al.* Overfishing Drives over One-Third of all Sharks and Rays toward a Global Extinction Crisis // *Current Biology* 31/21 (2021) 4773–4787.

these religious thought-worlds approach the question of humanity's relationship to the environment is highly relevant. In another regard, however, such an analysis must acknowledge the obvious, namely, that these religious traditions, some of which I will address below, emerged in a context before the Scientific Revolution without modern scientific knowledge of the world. They provide us not an "alternative science" but rather insights into basic convictions about human life and its relationship to the world. They cannot be read as if they spoke to the world of modern science or knew what would happen after the Industrial Revolution. Understanding these religious realms of human life and the corresponding ethical reflections rather help us see the great diversity and richness of ancient conceptions of humanity and the place of humanity in the natural environment. They provide a glimpse into humanity's ancient longings and deepest visions and hopes, expressing interpretations of the world not in the abstract sense of natural science but in the special language of religion with various concepts and specific figures. The brief sketch of a few moments in these traditions that is offered below is not comprehensive in any sense. It simply seeks to highlight select aspects of a few traditions. Can these inspire us or even enlighten us today? Can they open up new horizons and thought-worlds that contribute to human flourishing and natural preservation in the sense of sustainable development? These questions cannot be answered in any definitive sense, for every reader approaching these religious world-interpretations comes with different preconceptions and expectations, and different ranges of openness and receptivity. Religious patterns of world interpretation can sometimes be unapproachable for us, but they can also be very inspiring and thought provoking, pushing us ahead to reconsider the habits of our hearts and minds in ways that other disciplines and traditions do not. They can also ask us to reconnect with emotional levels of human existence which we may have forgotten, and from which we may benefit by remembering.

No religious tradition has received a more negative assessment for its environmental consequences than the tradition of Genesis in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. For Jewish and Christian scholars, this is a sad fact that we must grapple with, and not simply throw off as if it were entirely wrong. At the same time, however, this interpretation is somewhat questionable, even if the passages themselves are not entirely innocent. The two narratives of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 offer us a glimpse into a view of the world in which the natural environment is a great master work of God, one in which human beings have been placed not to destroy, but to keep. While human beings are called to "rule" (Gen. 1:26), the original intent was clearly not something like a call to destroy, deforest, or make uninhabitable and unfruitful in the sense of unsustainable[15]. Indeed,

[15] See my essay: Dominium terrae: exegetical and theological reflections // *To Discern Creation in a Scattering World* / ed. J. Haers & F. Depoortere. Leuven 2013, pp. 19–29. On the Jewish ethical

the ideal harmony of human beings living in the garden presents an entirely different idea, one which is far closer to the idea of sustainability than maximized consumption without end. In the second creation narrative this comes out very strongly, for there human beings are placed in the garden to "till it and keep it" (2:15). Obviously, this idea of keeping it presupposes the basic idea of sustainability in the most general sense. Other aspects of the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament could be mentioned in this sense as well, such as Genesis 8 (see also Psalm 24:1), which exemplifies the ideal of continuity and maintenance, in which life continues according to a regularity and balance in the sense of equilibrium: "all the days of the earth, sowing and harvest shall not cease, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" (Gen. 8:22). Clearly, the authors of these passages of the Bible had no idea what would come in the modern era, but these texts give expression to a deeper longing of human beings for a world ruled by God which is at peace with itself and exists in a way that exemplifies harmony and concern for the natural world. The same thought is brought to expression in the wisdom tradition: "The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel" (Prov 12:1). In the prophetic tradition, moreover, the idea of humanity and animals as interlocked in the natural environment is expressed (Hos 4:1–3). In Rabbinical Judaism as well, Deuteronomy 20:19–20 was a central passage in the emergence of a religious tradition of ethical thought concerned with the environment and the commandment not to destroy trees. Later, Maimonides (1135–1204 CE) held that destruction without justification was forbidden[16].

The view of universal redemption in Pauline theology was expressed in the Epistle to the Romans: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Rom. 8:22). The visions of a New Heaven and New Earth in the closing chapters of the final book of the New Testament, the Revelation of John, sketch out – among other things such as judgment and punishment for evil – a perspective of hope in reconciliation, a world unified in the peace of the nations under the rule of God and in the harmony of humanity in a new state of being in which the dark forces of evil have been overcome and "every tear" has been washed away, a new situation in which "mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (Rev. 21:4). Of course, these visions of the end times are interwoven with a specific Christological eschatology and various other layers of meaning and symbolic narrative of the new heaven and earth. Yet there are also deeper aspects of human consciousness being brought to expression here, ones which

tradition of responsibility in the Hebrew Scriptures and beyond, see: H. Tirosh-Samuelson. Judaism // *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* / ed. R. S. Gottlieb. Oxford 2006, pp. 25–64.

[16] H.-J. Loth. Umgang mit der Umwelt/Tiere: Judentum // *Ethik der Weltreligionen: Ein Handbuch* / ed. M. Klöcker & U. Tworuschka. Darmstadt 2005, p. 262.

drive toward universal impulses and strive after an order of eternally-sustaining peace with a great river in the vision of the city of God, with a tree of life on each side, and the "leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (22:2). In the Christian tradition, "The Canticle of the Creatures" by Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) exemplifies this idea as well, bringing all of creation into a conception of universal harmony in praise of God[17]. In the latter 20th century, the World Council of Churches took up these impulses and others in "The Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation" (1983), calling for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

In the Islamic tradition of the Koran there are moments of surprising conservationist awareness, such as the call to "eat and drink, but do not be excessive" (7:31). Indeed, this principle emphasized the moral virtue of the individual in their personal habits of consumption with a view to the social dimension of human behavior typical of the wisdom tradition. Yet there is an underlying principle here which is drawn upon, the idea of a general balance of things, measure and moderation. All these principles are central to the idea of sustainability, which seeks to maintain this difficult equilibrium. It requires, as is expressed in the same Koran, that we remain humble: "The servants of the Merciful are those who walk the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, 'Peace'" (25:63). There are also moments in the Hadith or Traditions which give expression to the care for animals as animate beings created by God[18]. As Rabeya Müller argues, in Islam animals are viewed as primarily created for humans. Yet they are also considered independent creatures which are conscious of their Creator[19].

The monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are extremely diverse, yet they tend to have a strong hierarchical conception of creation and Creator, one that often conceptualizes a delegation of lines of authority and responsibility from above. In a negative sense, this can generate a view of nature as essentially passive and a view of humanity as primarily active. At the same time, however, it can also generate a great deal of positive human responsibility for sustainable development when the conception of stewardship is emphasized.

Very impressive expressions of the consciousness of humanity as integrally related to the natural environment are found in many American indigenous traditions, and especially in the Native American ceremonies of blessing, but also in wisdom sayings, songs, and oratory. In the "green movement" of envi-

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[17] See *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* / ed. R. Armstrong *et al*., vol. 1. Hyde Park, N.Y. 1999, pp. 113–114.

[18] See R. Hancock. *Islamic Environmentalism: Activism in the United States and Great Britain*. New York 2018.

[19] R. Müller. Umgang mit der Umwelt/Tiere: Islam // *Ethik der Weltreligionen: Ein Handbuch* / ed. M. Klöcker & U. Tworuschka. Darmstadt 2005, p. 259.

ronmentalism, no other tradition of religious thought has been given so much positive attention as the Native American one. Environmentalists from Christian heritage nations who refer to this tradition want to promote this history and religious sentiment, even if the plurality of Native American traditions has often been overlooked. By contrast, more than any other religion, representatives of the European-American Christian religion collaborated in the destruction or forced assimilation of Native Americans, Indian culture, and religious traditions in North America, abandoning the ancient call of Jesus to love your neighbor. Yet the Native American traditions are not only a thing of the past, and they have survived the persecution, even if they are today somewhat inseparable from the European cultural traditions with which they have merged in various ways. In these traditions, the natural interaction of human and non-human existence and the spiritual realm is seen in a direct relationship of dependency and mutual conditioning, in which a culture of mutual respect and consideration is central to the shared aim of survival and flourishing[20]. The clear distinction between the "natural world" or "nature" and "humanity" is not, according to John Baumann, characteristic of the traditions in Native American culture and religious thought. Even the terms "nature" or "religion" from Western traditions are not comparable. He proposes the term "lifeways" to get at the idea in the Native American traditions, a view of a unified, interdependent, and holistic framework for thinking of human and non-human beings as closely connected with the surrounding environment: "Indeed, many stories describe a time when human and nonhuman animals spoke the same language, and contemporary stories suggest the possibility that knowledge of nonhuman languages is not completely lost"[21]. This self-understanding implies a moral code and responsibilities: "Being in harmony with the world, with the ways of the ancestors, with society, with community, and with family is a properly lived religious life. The maintenance of a proper relationship with one's surroundings implies sustainability, rendering the creation of a secondary self-identity as an environmentalist unnecessary"[22]. Another aspect of this basic worldview is animism, a belief that the spiritual world is interconnected with the animals and humans and nature, which beckons a posture of responsibility and mutual consideration and even fear of violating the order of things. As Armin W. Geertz writes regarding the Northwest Coastal Native Americans: "One of the basic ideas is that humans are situated in a complex web of relationships reaching into the animated world of the physical habitat,

[20] Countless examples could be cited here; see: *American Indian Quotations* / ed. H. J. Langer. London 1996; L. J. Zimmerman. *The Sacred Wisdom of the Native Americans.* London 2011.

[21] J. Baumann. Ecology and environmentalism // *American Indian Religious Traditions: An Encyclopedia* / ed. S. J. Crawford & D. F. Kelley, vol. 1. Santa Barbara 2005, p. 255.

[22] Baumann. Ecology and environmentalism, p. 256.

the animals, the spirits and the dead. Life and death are in constant flux, and survival depends on ritual and kinship relations with a variety of creatures"[23]. This generational dynamic is especially important when considering the ethics of generational responsibility today in sustainable development and in sustainability theory. Chief Joseph of the Nez-Percé brought this to expression as well in a different sense of human justice and equality in his appeal for equal treatment under the law: "If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian, he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The Earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it"[24]. This combination of the call to equal rights within the basic framework of understanding that we are all children of the Great Spirit and Mother Earth is still living today in the Indigenous Environmental Network, among other initiatives and working groups.

The Hindu tradition also speaks of this dimension of human existence as interwoven with the various non-human forces of the natural world and the underlying spiritual reality of the entire cosmos as deeply interlocked and sharing a mutual interest and common recognition. A Sanskrit prayer brings this to expression: "To the heavens be peace, to the sky and the earth, To the waters be peace, to plants and all trees, To the Gods be peace, to Brahman be peace, To all men be peace, again and again – peace also to me!"[25] In the Bhagavad Gita a similar view of the interwoven dimensions of life in a spiritual reality energized and realized by the Absolute is communicated: "Nothing is higher than I am [...] all that exists is woven on me, like a web of pearls on thread. I am the taste in water [...] the light in the moon and sun […] the sound in space, valor in men. I am the pure fragrance in earth, the brilliance in fire, the life in all living creatures […] every creature's timeless seed, the understanding of intelligent men [...]"[26]. In Buddhism, the religious thought in Mahāratnakūta Sūtra regarding the ideal forest monk expands upon the idea of human obligation to all sentient beings. There are

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[23] See A. W. Geertz. Native North American Religions // *Handbook of Living Religions* / ed. J. R. Hinnells. London 1997, p. 521. See also J. A. Grim. Indigenous Traditions: Religion and Ecology // *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* / ed. R. S. Gottlieb. Oxford 2006, pp. 283–312.

[24] Chief Joseph of the Nez-Percé (1879). An Indian's View of Indian Affairs // *Indian Oratory: Famous Speeches by Noted Indian Chieftains* / ed. W. C. Vanderwerth. Norman, OK 1979, p. 282.

[25] Yajurveda 36:17 // *The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjarī, An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* / ed. R. Panikkar *et al*. Delhi 2001, p. 306. On this tradition, see: O. P. Dwivedi. Hindu Religion and Environmental Well-Being // *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* / ed. R. S. Gottlieb. Oxford 2006, pp. 160–183.

[26] Bhagavad Gita 7:7–10 // *The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War* / transl. B. Stoler Miller. New York 2004, p. 74. See also R. Prime. *Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth*. Dehli 1996, p. 27. Passages from the Atharva Veda 12 also give expression to this theme.

also surprising moments in this tradition which call for an acceptance of a passive stance in nature, to embrace death with happiness if one is eaten by wolves and tigers, for one thereby actually only loses a "fragile body" to be replaced with a "stable one", indeed: "I have no food to give to the tigers or wolves, but they will be comfortable and happy after they eat my flesh"[27]. It calls for the forest monk to focus on the doctrine of "emptiness, singleness, and nonaction"[28]. In this pattern of religious thought, "...just as grass, trees, tiles, and stones have no [inner] self, master, or owner, so it is with the body. There is no self, no life, no personal identity, no sentient being, no contention. All dharmas arise from the combination of conditions and cease with their dispersion. In reality, no dharma arises or ceases"[29]. Of course, this is only one moment in the Buddhist tradition, which is very well known as a religious tradition of peace and human tranquility. There are some distant echoes that have been drawn upon in the contemporary discussion in this sense. According to Buddhist traditions, in his earlier forms of existence, Buddha offered himself to the animals. Another aspect of the history is found with the ancient Buddhist ruler Ashoka, who decreed that medical care should be established for the people of his realm and for the animals[30]. There are also many examples of contemporary environmental activism in Buddhism, as Susan M. Darlington has shown[31].

Daoism, and especially its conceptions of balance and *wu-wei* (the principle of action in non-action or "effortless action"), is another unique expression of the eastern religious traditions. *Wu-wei* is a concept of harmony in action, the mental state of people which can be outwardly identified, an ethical and religious ideal. It correlates to both the internal world of subjectivity and the external world. As Edward G. Slingerland argues, it "represents the highest degree of objectivity, for it is only in wu-wei that one's embodied mind conforms to the something larger than the individual – the will of Heaven or the order presented by the Way. This is why the state of wu-wei should be seen as a *religious* ideal, for it is only by attaining it that the individual realizes his or her proper place in

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[27] Sutra 44, V // *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūta Sūtra* / ed. G. C. C. Chang. New York 1983, p. 303. This is obviously only one moment in this very diverse tradition. For a broader analysis, see S. Kaza. The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils // *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* / ed. R. S. Gottlieb. Oxford 2006, pp. 184–206.

[28] Sutra 44, V // *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, p. 304.

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] F. Usarski. Umgang mit der Umwelt/Tiere: Buddhismus // *Ethik der Weltreligionen: Ein Handbuch* / ed. M. Klöcker & U. Tworuschka. Darmstadt 2005, p. 256. See also M. Fisher. *An Environmental History of India: From Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, United Kingdom 2018, p. 66: his "edicts proclaim his compassion for animals".

[31] See also S. M. Darlington. Contemporary Buddhism and Ecology // *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism* / ed. M. Jerryson. New York, NY 2017, p. 499.

the cosmos"[32]. The Native American traditions and Daoism are some of the most interesting religious-philosophical traditions when evaluated from the standpoint of sustainability-theory today because they come so close to mirroring the principles and normative concepts of sustainability in the broader discourse. The Daoist tradition is also expressed in the often cited "One Hundred and Eighty Precepts of Lord Lao" from the fourth century CE, including:

> 14. You should not burn [the vegetation of] uncultivated or cultivated fields, nor of mountains and forests. […] 18. You should not wantonly fell trees. 19. You should not wantonly pick herbs or flowers. […] 36. You should not throw poisonous substances into lakes, rivers, and seas. […] 47. You should not wantonly dig holes in the ground and thereby destroy the earth. […] 53. You should not dry up wet marshes. […] 79. You should not fish or hunt and thereby harm and kill living beings. […] 95. You should not in winter dig up hibernating animals and insects. […] 97. You should not wantonly climb in trees to look for nests and destroy eggs. 98. You should not use cages to trap birds and [other] animals. […] 100. You should not throw dirty things in wells. 101. You should not seal off pools and wells. […] 109. You should not light fires in the plains. […] 116. You should not defecate or urinate on living plants or in water that people will drink. […] 121. You should not wantonly or lightly take baths in rivers or seas. […] 125. You should not fabricate poisons and keep them in vessels. […] 132. You should not disturb birds and [other] animals. […] 134. You should not wantonly make lakes.[33]

Of course, all these ancient religious traditions emerged in a world before the Modern Period, before 19th century industrialization, before the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. They do not work up from the modern scientific knowledge of the natural environment which we today presume. They speak to us today in an entirely different sense, expressing to us deeply human desires for natural harmony, peace, survival, and also very wise ethical thought and practice gathered from human experience in the world and scientific study of the world in an era before Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and his transformative shift to empirical methods (*Novum Organum*, 1620). Certainly, in this sense,

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[32] E. G. Slingerland. *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. Oxford 2003, p. 8.

[33] Daoist Ecology: The Inner Transformation. A Study of the Precepts of the Early Daoist Ecclesia / transl. K. Schipper // *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape* / ed. N. J. Girardot *et al*. Cambridge, MA 2001, pp. 81–82; see also J. Miller. Daoism and nature // *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* / ed. R. S. Gottlieb. Oxford 2006, pp. 220–235. Paul Jackson also points to this same list of precepts and argues that they provide for an "intellectual impetus for the conceptual construction of nature as sacred". This is not the idea of intrinsic sacredness of nature but a recognition of the mysterious workings of *dao* in the natural order. P. Jackson. Ideas in Daoism relative to ecology and the environment // *Nature, Environment and Culture in East Asia: The Challenge of Climate Change* / ed. C. Meinert. Leiden 2013, p. 63.

these religious traditions can guide us and support us today in a mediated and interpreted interchange as we seek to take a step into their world in order to bring these ancient moments of human desire and transcendent thought and holistic self-consciousness back into our world with all their enriching powers and energies of inspiration and memory.

There is no space to address possible answers to the following question here, but the simple question should be posed briefly in this context of the discussion of the religious dimensions of the idea of sustainability: Does the intellectual subject matter, the moral challenge, and the universalizing idealism of sustainability and the drive toward sustainable development in our contemporary discussions and political debates essentially constitute a new form of religious consciousness? Perhaps this would be an inflationary assessment in the general sense. At the same time, however, there are many people today in the Western world who can no longer identify with formal religious traditions but who (in the Durkheimian sense) find profound and virtually religious meaning (or something parallel to this) in the cause of environmentalism and the work toward sustainability. This conceptualization of the world can bring a new sacredness with it. It can call us to labors and self-identification with the frameworks of thought. It can generate almost the basis of a new community of the "beloved" (and perhaps even an outsider class of the "damned"), along with a new "mission", "gospel", and moral code for the community. This may be overstretched, but there are certain parallels that stand out. Indeed, perhaps this is one of the reasons why conservative religious people (of all stripes and creeds) tend to be somewhat skeptical, nervous, and cautious about the environmental movement, at least at the ideological level. Religious communities may look with scorn on the environmental movement as it vies for power as an alternative force of meaning-making, but maybe more self-criticism on the part of religious traditions is necessary today. Perhaps we should take a humbler approach that seeks to understand why the movement towards environmentalism and sustainable development emerged, for the most part, outside of religious communities. Perhaps we have something to learn from this general development in a religious sense.

Major Ethical Approaches

Like the religious traditions, the ethical schools and debates on the various approaches to sustainability and environmental thought are very diverse and in their respective discursive realms extremely expansive and complicated. A few dominant impulses can be emphasized here briefly, focusing on the major paradigms, including duty ethics, virtue ethics, utilitarian ethics, the ethics of Romanticism, the ethics of life-philosophy, and finally the (dangerous, unconstitutional and counterproductive) theory of neo-authoritarian eco-dictatorship.

The dominant argument from the ethical tradition of duty ethics or deontology (following the great philosopher and ethicist of the Enlightenment Immanuel Kant) says that we must organize our lives and behavior in such a way as individuals and as communities, states and international federations of states, in accordance with principles and maxims that we can simultaneously expect everyone to follow, in the sense that they would be general rules or laws in the broadest sense. Thus, we must live in a way that we could claim in good conscience and in light of reason that it was universally applicable[34]. The tradition of virtue ethics may not disagree with this, but it would argue primarily that we must seek to foster the development of character and personality, and thus promote the formation of ethical individuals and communities as they engage in the respect and care of the environment[35]. The tradition of utilitarianism may not disagree with either of these approaches, but it would emphasize primarily that we consider the well-being of all affected by the consequences of our actions and seek to promote the greatest possible utility and benefit for all[36].

Perhaps the most influential philosophical influence on environmental thought is found in Romanticism. This broad tradition of ethical thought emphasizes the potential transformation of our life, the elevation of our being to a higher consciousness through the deep experience of nature. For example, Henry David Thoreau writes:

> I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, – to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. […] I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. […] I believe that climate does thus react on man – as there is something in the mountain-air that feeds the spirit and inspires. Will not man grow to greater perfection intellectually as well as physically under these influences? […] we shall be more imaginative, […] our thoughts will be clearer, fresher, and more ethereal, as our sky, – our understanding more comprehensive and broader, like our plains, – our intellect generally on a grander scale, like our thunder and lightning, our rivers and mountains and forests, and our hearts shall even correspond in breadth and depth and grandeur to our inland seas.[37]

Another beautiful example of this tradition is found later with John Muir, who wrote:

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[34] I. Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A German-English edition* / ed. J. Timmermann, transl. M. Gregor. Cambridge 2011. See also T. Svoboda. *Duties Regarding Nature: A Kantian Environmental Ethic*. New York 2015.

[35] *Environmental virtue ethics* / ed. R. Sandler & Ph. Cafaro. Lanham, MD 2005.

[36] *Consequentialism and Environmental Ethics* / ed. A. Hiller *et al*. New York 2014.

[37] H. D. Thoreau. Walking // *The Atlantic Monthly* 9/56 (1862) 657, 662, 664.

> Camp out among the grasses and gentians of glacier meadows, in craggy garden nooks full of Nature's darlings. Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.[38]

The claim is simple: embracing nature in direct experience will transform us and widen our hearts and minds. The impulses of 19th century Romanticism are also expressed in a very different sense in the life philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, who synthesized Kantian duty ethics with Nietzschean life philosophy. He wrote:

> The elementary fact that we become aware of in every moment of our existence is: I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live. What is mysterious about my will to live is that I feel compelled to behave sympathetically toward all will to live that is alongside mine in existence. The essence of good is: preserve life, promote life, bring life to its highest value. The essence of evil is: destroying life, damaging life, impeding life in its development. So the basic principle of ethics is reverence for life.[39]

Along with these very laudable approaches to environmental ethics and the idea of sustainability, a final warning must be heard from an entirely different and chilling strain of thought. It emerges from neo-authoritarian thinking. Hans Jonas, who has written many good things, addressed the challenges associated with the environmental crisis and suggested that the democratic process may not be able to address the problems. In light of this, rather than calling for actors in the democratic process to work more fervently to address the issues, he suggested the possibility of "a benevolent, well-informed tyranny animated by the right insight", a new "elite" which could enforce environmental policy against the majority in light of "future-responsibility"[40]. Yet, this thinking is itself a violation of the principle of a government of, by, and for the people, a rejection of democracy and a denial of the constitutional limitations on state power. Such an approach is to be rejected for these reasons *per se*. Yet even viewed in terms of consequentialism, this approach of a "tyranny" would certainly cause unimaginable damage to our social and political orders and be counterproductive in the broader development towards a more sustainable way of life.

Every context is unique and each one must be recognized and responded to as such. Different religious and ethical approaches will speak to different contexts with differing degrees of intensity. What may be more fitting for one situation

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[38] J. Muir. Yellowstone National Park // *The Atlantic Monthly* 81/486 (1898) 515–516.

[39] A. Schweitzer. *Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen: Zwei Aufsätze zur Religionsphilosophie*. Munich 2002, pp. 86–87.

[40] H. Jonas. *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*. Frankfurt am Main 1979, p. 262.

may be less fitting for another. Yet there is a very wide array of religious resources from various traditions. Only a few moments could be addressed above among many more. There is also a very broad panoply of ethical traditions of argument concerned with the questions of responsible environmental conservation and sustainability. One moment in many of these traditions, a moment brought to unique expression in the Native American, the Daoist and Hindu traditions, and also very pointedly in the Romantic tradition of ethical thought, is the self-consciousness of interdependency, the grasping of human life within the cycles, paths, energies, beings, and actors of an ever-present spiritual reality, one which imbues everything with vitality and embraces everything as its children. Social and political orders which enable religious freedom and emphasize the freedom of thought provide a space in which various religious and ethical traditions can learn from one another and benefit one another. The awareness of the potential of mutual affirmation and partnership in diverse communities of education may never be fully realized, but the desire for peace and the flourishing of all, also in the broadest sense of sustainability, will bring us back again and again to this possibility of collaborative heterogeneity. Especially when considering the important issue of sustainability and sustainable development, the great diversity of religious traditions and the plurality of schools of ethical thought make up a rich source of inspiration and enlightenment.

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Пол Силас Петерсон

«Земля – матір усіх людей» (вождь Джозеф): концепція сталого розвитку та її релігійно-етичні виміри

В есе розглянуто появу концепції сталого розвитку та її релігійно-етичні виміри. Одним із фундаментальних питань тут є базове розуміння взаємовідносин людства зі світом природи, а разом із цим і зростаюче усвідомлення людської відповідальності. Автор розглядає концепції взаємовідносин людства зі світом природи в різних релігійних традиціях, а також основні етичні школи в їхніх унікальних підходах до питання сталого розвитку та екологічної відповідальності сьогодні.

Ключові слова: сталість, екологізм, релігія, етика, екологічна етика.