Scientific Article
ISSN 2965-1557
https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.036.e202430731

Revista de Filosofia Aurora
periodicos.pucpr.br/aurora
PUCPRESS

Loving God, loving nature? Intrinsic values, stewardship, and reverence for nature[1]

¿Amar a Dios, amar la naturaleza? Valores intrínsecos, stewardship y reverencia por la naturaleza

Amar a Deus, amar a natureza? Valores intrínsecos, stewardship e reverência pela natureza

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Como citar: VALERA, Luca. Loving God, loving nature? Intrinsic values, stewardship, and reverence for nature. *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*, Curitiba: Editora PUCPRESS, v. 36, e202430731, 2024. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.036.e202430731.

Abstract

Most approaches in environmental ethics that contemplate the normativity of intrinsic values rely on the idea of love or reverence for nature. This paper challenges the need to love nature in order to respect it as a value in itself (i.e., as an intrinsic value). In this regard, the main questions to

[1] This research has been supported by: the John Templeton Foundation— Project nº.: 61559-13; by Project nº. 1210081 (ANID/Fondecyt Regular); and the Project ANID PIA/BASAL nº FB210018—Centro Internacional Cabo de Hornos (CHIC).

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answer are: is there a need to regard nature as sacred in order to respect it (i.e., to ascribe intrinsic value to it)? What kind of coincidence is there between God and the natural world? The response to these questions calls for a deep inquiry into the cosmological or metaphysical ideas (or conceptions of divinity) underlying them. This paper analyses, thus, three theological, cosmological, or metaphysical ideas (i.e., pantheism, theism, and teleological conception of nature) concerning intrinsic values: some of these (e.g., pantheism) contemplate the idea of the sacredness of nature, which has a clear religious inspiration. These cosmological paradigms also imply different human behaviors towards life: 1. Pantheism implies reverence for Life since nature is sacred (God mainly coincides with nature). Thus, the human being is part of the extended more-than-human community. 2. Theism reaffirms that every form of life is good since it has been created by God. This implies that human beings are the steward of creation. 3. The finalistic idea of nature sustains that life is an end in itself (i.e., has intrinsic value) and that our responsibility emerges from both the value of life and our impact on the environment.

Keywords: Pantheism. Theism. Eco-theology. Cosmology. Sacredness. Environmental Ethics.

Resumen

La mayoría de los enfoques en la ética ambiental que consideran la normatividad de los valores intrínsecos se basan en la idea del amor o la reverencia por la naturaleza. Este artículo cuestiona la necesidad de amar la naturaleza para respetarla como valor en sí misma (es decir, como valor intrínseco). En este sentido, las principales preguntas a las que se debe que responder son: ¿existe la necesidad de considerar la naturaleza como sagrada para respetarla (es decir, atribuirle un valor intrínseco)? ¿Qué tipo de coincidencia existe entre Dios y el mundo natural? Responder a estas preguntas exige una investigación en profundidad de las ideas cosmológicas o metafísicas (o concepciones de la divinidad) subyacentes. Por ello, este artículo analiza tres ideas teológicas, cosmológicas o metafísicas (a saber, el panteísmo, el teísmo y la concepción teleológica de la naturaleza) relativas a los valores intrínsecos; algunas de ellas (por ejemplo, el panteísmo) contemplan la idea de la sacralidad de la naturaleza, que tiene una clara inspiración religiosa. Estos paradigmas cosmológicos también implican diferentes comportamientos humanos en relación con la vida: 1. El panteísmo implica reverencia por la Vida, ya que la naturaleza es sagrada (Dios coincide principalmente con la naturaleza). Así, el ser humano forma parte de una comunidad extendida (o más que humana). 2. El teísmo reafirma que toda forma de vida es buena porque fue creada por Dios. Esto implica que los seres humanos son responsables de la creación. 3. La idea finalista de la naturaleza sostiene que la vida es un fin en sí misma (es decir, tiene un valor intrínseco) y que nuestra responsabilidad se deriva tanto del valor de la vida como de nuestro impacto en el medio ambiente.

Palabras clave: *Panteísmo. Teísmo. Ecoteología. Cosmología. Sacralidad. Ética ambiental.*

Resumo

A maioria das abordagens da ética ambiental que contemplam a normatividade dos valores intrínsecos se baseia na ideia de amor ou reverência pela natureza. Este artigo questiona a necessidade de amar a natureza para respeitá-la como um valor em si (ou seja, como um valor intrínseco). Nesse sentido, as principais perguntas a serem respondidas são: há necessidade de

considerar a natureza como sagrada para respeitá-la (ou seja, atribuir-lhe valor intrínseco)? Que tipo de coincidência existe entre Deus e o mundo natural? A resposta a essas perguntas exige uma investigação profunda sobre as ideias cosmológicas ou metafísicas (ou conceções de divindade) subjacentes a elas. Este artigo analisa, portanto, três ideias teológicas, cosmológicas ou metafísicas (ou seja, panteísmo, teísmo e conceção teleológica da natureza) relativas a valores intrínsecos: algumas delas (por exemplo, o panteísmo) contemplam a ideia da sacralidade da natureza, que tem uma clara inspiração religiosa. Esses paradigmas cosmológicos também implicam diferentes comportamentos humanos em relação à vida: 1. O panteísmo implica reverência pela Vida, uma vez que a natureza é sagrada (Deus coincide principalmente com a natureza). Assim, o ser humano faz parte de uma comunidade estendida (mais que humana). 2. O teísmo reafirma que toda forma de vida é boa, pois foi criada por Deus. Isso implica que os seres humanos são os responsáveis da criação. 3. A ideia finalística da natureza sustenta que a vida é um fim em si mesma (ou seja, tem valor intrínseco) e que nossa responsabilidade emerge tanto do valor da vida quanto do nosso impacto no meio ambiente.

Palavras-chave: Panteísmo. Teísmo. Ecoteologia. Cosmologia. Sacralidade. Ética ambiental.

Introduction

Reverence (or love) for nature? Religions, eco-theology, and the ecological question

In 1855, In his famous poem *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman stated: "This is what you shall do: love the earth and sun and animals," emphasizing the importance of extending our care to other living beings. We could say that environmental ethics raised precisely from that renewed Golden Rule: "Do not treat other living beings in ways that you would not like to be treated." What lies behind most of the environmentalist discourse is, at the core, an unconditional appreciation – a kind of reverence – for the different forms of life, beyond the human world. In this sense, most of the environmental philosophies seems to engage in a mystique akin to that of traditional religions, recalling the importance of venerating the "sacred realm." This realm, in many thinkers of environmental ethics is the whole nature:

> Love all of creation, every worm and tree and drop of water. Love every entity just as it is. Love the sunrise, the eagle, each leaf of every tree. Accept and love everything for the wondrous miracle that it is (Twobears, 2016, p. 162).

Loving other living beings would be a way to recognize "the divine mystery in things." In fact, as we will see below, the sacredness of nature is the basis for the recognition of an intrinsic value of such a reality. Thus, the possibility of granting reverence to the different forms of life seems to imply the permanence (or presence) of the divinity in them. Therefore, the environmental ethics discourse has often been intertwined with a religious one, both in its activist and academic/scientific dimensions.

By combining the world of values (ethics) with the world of the sacred (religion), environmental discourse gained both normative force and the capacity to compel or motivate human beings. However, the greatest difficulty for a discipline that wants to define itself independently of religious beliefs is precisely that of rationally demonstrating its principles without the need to appeal to beliefs.

The point to consider, moreover, is that not all religions have approached the question of love of nature in the same way: some have emphasized the direct relationship between nature and God – mainly through the permanence and coincidence of the latter in the former (*e.g.*, indigenous worldviews and different forms of pantheism) –; others, on the contrary, have stressed the simple participation of nature in divinity (*e.g.*, Christianism or Islamism). Within the same religion, furthermore, one can find different hermeneutics of the relationship between divinity and nature, and from there infer opposite ethical guidelines. Indeed, Kerber (2015, p. 392) writes:

> Religions have played an ambiguous role in relationship to the care for the Earth and to climate justice. They have served as inspiration for both the destruction of the Earth and for its protection, as has also been the case of other institutions and sectors of society.

From the criticism to religious "destructive" feature – with particular reference to Christianism –environmental ethics has emerged, according to the famous article by Lynn White Jr (1967). The criticism is directed at the anthropocentric cosmology imposed by Christianism, which has spread the idea for which "Man and Nature are two things, and man is master" (White, 1967, p. 1205). The

possibility of the human dominion, hence, is connected to the question for which "the Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature" (White, 1967, p. 1205).

Indeed, White states that, going as far back as Genesis (1, 26-30), Christianism has mostly reduced other living beings to mere resources for human aims. In Palmer's (2006, p. 75) words, "stewardship of the natural world, whether Christian or otherwise... remains profoundly anthropocentric and un-ecological, legitimating and encouraging increased human use of the natural world." The main criticism, then, refers to the Christian attitude of dominance over other species, which finds its justification in a "desacralization and subsequent exploitation" (Deane-Drummond, 2008, p. 82) of the natural world. This would be the consequence of the human power (dominion) over the environment, which is justified by the extreme "anthropocentrism" of the human being itself. Anyway, as Deane-Drummond (2004, p. ix) argues, this kind of approach refers more to Bacon's point of view than to the Christian one[2], and, therefore, the criticism of Christianism would be inappropriate. Indeed, when White (1967, p. 1206) states: "To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West," he is mainly referring to the utilitarian, materialistic, or reductionist Western point of view. On this point, it is worth noticing that the Christian approach to the environment cannot under any circumstances be anthropocentric since the human being isn't the centre of the world (*e.g.*, Slagle, 2022). On the contrary, it is theocentric since God must be the focus of every living being's consideration (Hoffman; Sandelands, 2005). 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" (Binde, 2001, p. 19)[3].

In this sense, following White's intuitions, if we were to look only to the Western tradition of thought, we could state that we are witnessing a demoralization of nature (Brockelman, 2016, p. 39), caused by a loss of spirituality when looking at it. This fact mainly deals with

> a shift in the view of nature [that] took place with the Enlightenment. In the secular perspective of positivistic science, nature lost its moral value as either being inferior and opposed to divinity and the spiritual, or as revealing the divine (Binde, 2001, p. 24).

Eco-theology precisely stems as a response to this demoralization of nature: "Mainstream ecotheology engaged with White more positively and, over the past 40 years, it has came [sic.] to constitute a major component of American environmental thought" (Whitney, 2015, p. 401). The main eco-theological concern is, obviously, the relation between utility and the absolute value of nature. Once defined nature as something "objectively good," the next step is the right to conserve it.

Intrinsic values and their possible foundations

Both ecotheology and environmental ethics present this dichotomy in the form of the difference between the instrumental and intrinsic value of nature. This difference is clearly explained by Sandler (2012, p. 4):

[2] As Deane-Drummond (2008, p. 82) 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."
[3] White himself recognizes the relevance of the figure of St. Francis for the Christian thought and interpret his message as "panpsychist" (Whitney, 2015, p. 397).

> Intrinsic value is the value that an entity has in itself, for what it is, or as an end [...]. The contrasting type of value is instrumental value. Instrumental value is the value that something has as a means to a desired or valued end.

In this sense, to state that different forms of life have intrinsic value is to say that these same entities have certain properties such that their value is independent of their relationship to otherness (Sagoff, 2009, p. 643). Indeed, as Vucetich *et al.* (2015, pp. 322–3) argue,

> a way of describing intrinsic value is value beyond instrumental value. Instrumental value lies solely with the function of the object, not with the object itself. [...] Intrinsic value is associated with the object itself, not its function [...]. Acknowledging an object's intrinsic value means valuing it for what it is, not only what it does.

From this statement, we can infer that intrinsic value is not a kind of "relational value," or better, that "intrinsic properties are then understood as [...] 'non-externally relational' properties" (Mcshane, 2007, p. 48). This fact may represent an aporia in the same definition of intrinsic values: if the value is a relational property and one of the terms of this relationship has necessarily to be an assessing subject, there cannot exist values independent from a valuer, that is to say, there cannot exist intrinsic values (Batavia; Nelson, 2017, p. 370). The relational perspective in the context of value, indeed, seems impossible to eliminate, and if remove one of the basic elements of value its sense is completely lost, turning the very existence of intrinsic value into an aporia (Hyde, 2018). Hence, when approaching the issue of intrinsic value from a logic standpoint, we necessarily face a *petitio principii*.

How can we ground, then, intrinsic values? We may distinguish between two main possibilities: 1. Grounding intrinsic values on the features of the entity at stake – e.g., its capacity to experience pain or pleasure (Singer, 1975), its will to preserve its nature (Næss, 1995), or its will to live (Schweitzer, 1923) –; its capacity to have interests (Johnson, 1993); its conation, that is to say, "the condition of striving to fulfil one's interests or pursue one's good" (Batavia; Nelson, 2017, p. 369), or its "telos" (Taylor, 2011); or, more generally, its functions (Callicott, 1986). 2. Grounding intrinsic values on metaphysical, cosmological, or religious viewpoints. While in the former case, we are required to justify why we consider one feature more ethically relevant than another, in the latter, we are not. In this second alternative the philosophical problem is no longer the theoretical justification of intrinsic value, but the consistency of the metaphysical, theological, or cosmological system we are assuming at the basis of the intrinsic value itself. In this latest approach,

> the idea of intrinsic value is derived from a sense of the sacred. Things have intrinsic value because they are members of the great community of life and the divine mystery is at work in them. [...] Each unique life form is perfect, whole, and complete just as it is, without qualification. The intrinsic value in things is to be identified with what Martin Buber called the "thou" in all things. [...] The thou in things cannot be turned into an object for analysis and quantified. It is the presence of this mysterious, elusive, sacred thou in all living beings that constitutes their intrinsic value (Rockfeller, 2016, pp. 57–8).

The idea of sacred, thus, defines two issues: 1. the necessary relationship with the divinity of the object that is defined as "sacred;" 2. the unavailability of that same object. Regarding 1, the direct and necessary participation of the concrete living being in the divine essence makes that this living being has the same status of the divinity (that living being "is part of God," even if it is not God). Furthermore, if every living actively participates of God's essence, it is worth focusing on the connections that every living being maintains with otherness, to grasp the whole of the divinity. In this sense, ecology – which mainly focuses on interconnections between living beings – has a strong

affinity with pantheism (Valera; Vidal, 2022). Indeed, "to perceive the sacred [...] is to see the interconnectedness of all of life. And to see that sacred ground of life is [...] to develop one's soul" (Twobears, 2016, p. 161). Actually, God is identified with that substance that enables the continuous interconnections among the living beings. Point 2, then, is a corollary of 1: if this living being is a part of the divine body – to retake an interesting expression by McFague (1993) – we are not authorized to use it to achieve our purposes. God cannot be used for human sakes, indeed.

It seems, thus, that "reasons to value nature intrinsically derive from religious, cultural and moral traditions" (Sagoff, 2009, p. 643): many religions (or traditions) immediately offer a cosmological ground to connect the sacred to living beings, directly implying ethical precepts that do not need to be justified philosophically, but only experienced existentially. The link between God and the living beings is the source of the sacred and, at the same time, of the moral precepts we must follow.

Sacred nature?

The question I want to answer in this section is: "What is the kind of coincidence between God and the natural world?" (Valera; Vidal, 2022, p. 547). The response to this question allows us to face the issue of linking intrinsic values to a well-defined cosmology. As a paper by Valera & Vidal (2022) points out, not only pantheism but also panentheism provides a cosmology consistent to the sacredness of life. Wood Jr. (1985, pp. 157–61) argues: "Among religious viewpoints, pantheism is uniquely qualified to support a foundation for environmental ethics. [...] Pantheist ethics has as its goal a closeness with nature [...], based not upon imitation, but upon reverential communion." The same evaluation we should claim regarding panentheism. Indeed, "fundamental to ecotheology are the two notions that God has a certain presence in nature and that mankind has an affinity with all of God's creatures" (Binde, 2001, p. 20), meaning that the similarities between different living beings override their differences. To put it another way: the possible connections between them necessarily prevails over the barriers, since both refer to the same common origin (*i.e.*, God). For this reason, "every species [...] demands respect, and every creature has a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Every form of life [...] is equal in the eyes of the Creator" (Worster, 2005, p. 11). From this statement, we can once again conclude that the dignity (or value) of each living being is based on its participation with the divine substance. So, the measure of value is precisely the ontological participation in the unity of the Whole[4]. Such unity is, so, one of the main principles of the ecological cosmology: one of the basic postulates of ecology is that "everything is connected to everything else" (Commoner, 1971).

In this regard, ecology is strongly connected to pantheism, which could be thus defined as "the doctrine identifying the Deity with the various forces and workings of nature" (De Jonge, 2016, p. 103). This sounds particularly interesting if we look at Arne Næss's ecosophy, which endorsed Spinoza's cosmology as the point of reference of any ecosophical statement: "All things represent the unfolding of divinity, and every particular thing, humans, living beings, are expressions of divinity" (Valera; Vidal, 2022, p. 557).

The continuous presence of divinity in concrete living beings – the immanence of God in the finite modes – also implies a "deification of nature. Nature is construed as an omnipresent organism with specific intentions, the inherent goodness of which is contrasted with the proclivity for greed and short-sightedness

[4] Grula (2008, p. 160) claims that unity is the most fundamental principle of pantheism: "The definition of pantheism I use here is: the doctrine that God is not a personality or transcendent supernatural being but that all laws, forces, manifestations, and so forth of the self-existing natural universe constitute an all-inclusive divine Unity."

of human beings" (Binde, 2001, p. 21). Here we can appreciate a radical difference between pantheism and classical theism, for which God is actually present in reality, without being confused with it. Retaking Swinburne's (1993, p. 1) famous statement, we can define theism as the doctrine for which

> there is a God in the sense of a being with most of the following properties: being a person without a body (that is, a spirit), present everywhere (that is, omnipotent), the creator of the universe, perfectly free, able to do anything (that is, omnipotent), knowing all things (that is, omniscient), perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, eternal, a necessary being, holy, and worthy of worship.

In this sense, the divinity doesn't coincide with the world, since "God is seen not only beyond creation but also in creation" (Kerber, 2015, p. 385): theism acknowledges the "difference between God and creation, even while stressing the immanence of God in creation" (Deane-Drummond, 2004, p. 219).

This radical difference can be definitely appreciated in Christian theology and cosmology, where the notion of creation – and, more precisely, of *creatio ex nihilo*[5], which also entails *creatio continua* – implies a necessary ontological separation between God and the world: God is "present in and through the physical world" (Schaefer, 2009, p. 82), but God doesn't coincide with it[6]. This fact also implicates three additional considerations: 1. the human being, insofar as created by God has the dignity of a creature and it is something "good"[7]; 2. in the human being God makes Godself present; 3. "if God is in creation, human beings are also in creation and not above it. There is a close and indissoluble bond of human beings to the Earth. 'Man' is 'earthling' (*adam* in Hebrew), created out of the soil (*adamah*). Created 'in God's image and likeness,' humans have a special place within creation and responsibility towards it" (Kerber, 2015, p. 385). This responsibility – or stewardship, reverence, or love – will be the focus of the last chapter of this paper.

Reverence, stewardship, or responsibility?

Finally, we can get back to ecological issues and the concern of respecting the intrinsic value of all forms of life. Retaking an interesting synthesis by Rodman (1995, p. 126), we may state that the "three major components of an Ecological Sensibility" are: 1. "A theory of value that recognizes intrinsic value in nature;" 2. "A metaphysics that takes account of the reality and importance of relationships and systems as well as of individuals;" and 3. "An ethics that includes such duties as noninterference with natural processes." In this paper I have focused on the first two points identified by Rodman. The third point concerns the ethical dimension of intrinsic values spreading from the different cosmologies described in the previous chapter: ought we respect every form of life because of their sacred nature? Does intrinsic value necessary imply a reverence (or love) for nature or other forms of respect?

[5] Anscombe and Geach (1961, p. 110) clearly explain the necessary co-implication of *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continua*.

[6] Different approaches and nuances coexist in Christianism (*e.g.*, Puig, 2019). Indeed, it is worth considering "Christian nature mysticism, following the Franciscan tradition," for which "God is present in nature in a sense that borders on pantheism. In this thinking, nature seems to be equated, with God because of shared features of greatness and power. Like God, nature is eternal, omnipresent, and unfathomable; like God, the ruler of the world, the natural forces and the seasons of the year have a powerful impact on human beings and the whole world [...]. There is a strong wish to overcome the categorical border between man and nature-cum-God" (Binde, 2001, p. 23). It is precisely this closeness that makes Lynn White Jr. (1967) argue that the Western Judeo-Christian tradition must precisely embrace St. Francis's thought, if it is to overcome its own exaggerated anthropocentrism. On the other side, "there is a strong tradition within Christianity that regards wild and untouched nature as an abode of divine presence, apt for consolation, renewal, revelation, and redemption, and also as a place where the Christian faces temptations and trials" (Binde, 2001, p. 18).

[7] This latest point implies some ethical considerations, too, as we will see in more detail later on: "The conviction that nature is intrinsically good because it comes from God who created it in this way fosters in the believer the feeling of moral responsibility in preserving the planet and caring for the beings who inhabit it" (Lind; Nobre, 2021, p. 660).

A first answer is that respecting all the living being means considering them not only on the basis of their utility, that is to say, as mere means to human ends. In this regard, environmental ethics necessarily considers all the living beings as "values in and of itself," "going beyond [their] utility for us" (Brockelman, 2016, p. 38). Recalling the first principle of Deep Ecology, we may simply resume this idea as follows: "The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes" (Næss; Sessions, 1985, p. 69). Anyway, to affirm that the dignity of a living being goes beyond its usefulness for human purposes seems to be still insufficient – it simply tells us how we should *not* treat such living beings, without indicating proactive ways of respecting them. Concerning the proactive respect (or reverence) that we may give to non-human life beings, three main forms has been provided, linked to the issue of intrinsic values: 1. The right to live and blossom of all the living beings, due to the fact that they are citizens of a more-than-human community; 2. The prudence and stewardship we may employ in our environmental impact, given the fact that every living being is a creature; 3. The responsibility we have towards nature, since all organisms are teleological centres of life. In the following, we will briefly spell out these three perspectives.

The first approach has mainly been explored by Aldo Leopold, Arne Næss, and John Baird Callicott. The philosophical basis of this approach is the interdependence of the different living beings – in this sense, pantheism (or panentheism) is the most adequate cosmology for this approach. Recalling Leopold (1949, p. viii) in his *Sand County Almanac*: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." He adds: "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (Leopold, 1949, p. 204). The concept of community is fundamental, here, since the value of every member consists precisely in belonging to that community. In this sense, our awareness of the mutual dependence of all living beings is the first step towards the recognition of an ethics that goes beyond human limits. The next step is "reverence" for this interdependence:

> Being responsible means being aware of our interdependence with the larger community of life and being informed about the state of the planet, the nature of our bioregion, and the harm and suffering that our actions may cause other people and nature (Rockfeller, 2016, p. 54).

And Brockelman (2016, p. 38) argues:

> Does not an effective ecological ethics, if it is to be more than an abstract set of principles, rest on a spiritual attitude toward the larger natural community to which we belong? Mustn't a serious and effective ecological ethics be grounded and founded upon a deeper and wider spiritual vision of life than seems available in the modern consumer societies?

The mutual dependence of every diverse form of life, at the ontological level, implies, thus, an ethical duty towards otherness. Næss (1973, p. 96) clearly points out this question:

> The so-called struggle of life, and survival of the fittest, should be interpreted in the sense of ability to coexist and cooperate in complex relationships, rather than ability to kill, exploit, and suppress. "Live and let live" is a more powerful ecological principle than "Either you or me."

In this regard, the human duty towards nature mainly refers to the structure of the world – or of the biotic community, to use Leopold's (1949, p. 225) words[8] – and springs from a sort of reverence (Rockfeller, 2016, p. 59) from the diverse and complex stream of life. Being a part of this biotic community – "citizens of the universe," (Rockfeller, 2016, p. 59) – we are called to care for the whole community.

The second approach mainly refers to the ideas of a transcendent God and to nature as creation, recalling the Christian tradition. In this sense, the value of every creature is conferred by God with the act of creation –which is a continuous creation. The dignity of the different entities is linked to the relationship they have with their Creator, and the human being has the duty to acknowledge this value:

> 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" (Mizzoni, 2014, p. 411).

In this regard, the human beings have a special role in the creation, due to their capacity to be responsible for otherness: "Of all creatures we are the only species able to destroy any other creature and to sustain and care for any other creature, and in this sense we reflect our Creator" (Dewitt, 2016, p. 101). Stewardship is, thus, the pivotal point of this approach: "The earth belongs to God, not to man who is merely his steward who has been given the responsibility to take good care of it" (Binde, 2001, p. 18). Therefore, the other living beings are not "in function of the human being" but rather, the human being must take care of them. This is clear if we look at Genesis: the "Garden" belongs to God, but under God's 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. In Binde's (2001, p. 18) words:

> Humankind's rule over nature must contain a moral element and be governed by reason and respect. Nature is understood to be vulnerable; it is not insensitive to the destructive activity of man, as is implied by the idea of "absolute rule." Nature is part of God's creation and has a specific purpose in his plan for mankind and the world, therefore nature should be respected.

This stewardship – spreading both from the creatural nature of every living being and the peculiar role the human being have in the cosmos – implies an adequate use of reason and development of virtues (Welchman, 2012, p. 306), as Deane-Drummond (2004, p. 43) points out: "I suggest that wisdom is particularly useful, in that it can act like a bridge between the philosophical concepts of prudence and theological ideas about who God is as Creator."

Lastly, the third approach invokes the duty (or responsibility) we have towards a "teleological nature," and has been mainly developed by Paul Taylor and Hans Jonas[9]. The responsibility we have towards "individual organisms as teleological centers of life" (Taylor, 2011, pp. 119–29) is precisely configured as a response to the objective structure of the existence of such organisms, which pursue their own good in their own way (Taylor, 2011, p. 128). This structure can be defined as follows: it is "a unified, coherently

[8] It is worth recalling the famous statement at the basis of Leopold's *Land Ethic*: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold, 1949, p. 225). Callicott (1989, p. 57) reformulates this as follows: "The integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community depend upon all members, in their appropriate numbers, functioning in their coevolved life ways."

[9] There are obviously many differences between the two authors, both at the level of ontological premises – e.g., concerning the notion of organism – and ethical conclusions – e.g., the scope of our responsibility. However, they both defend the same idea of linking our ethical response to some intrinsic properties of the organism.

ordered system of goal-oriented activity that has a constant tendency to protect and maintain the organism's existence" (Taylor, 2011, p. 122). To catch this structure, our consciousness of this organism needs to be "characterized by both objectivity and wholeness of vision" (Taylor, 2011, pp. 127–8), that is, our capacity to grasp the living being "as it is in itself, not as we want it to be" (Taylor, 2011, p. 126). This implies looking at the individual organism not "in terms of a role or function it may have in human life," but, on its own sake: life has a purpose *in se*, regardless of human will. This is the teleological of finalistic nature of life (Jonas, 2001, p. 86), which can be described as follows: "There is no organism without teleology; there is no teleology without inwardness; and: life can be known only by life" (Jonas, 2001, p. 91). This fact calls for a renewed responsibility for us towards life: our technological power is the main cause of the vulnerability of life, and we have the duty to control it. In Jonas's (1984, p. 7) words:

> The biosphere as a whole and in its parts, now subject to our power, has become a human trust and has something of a moral claim on us not only for our ulterior sake but for its own and in its own right.

Following Jonas, we may state that our responsibility is strictly connected to our power: it refers to our actions, and not to nature itself. We are responsible for the human behaviours that refer to the nature, which has an intrinsic value.

Conclusion

Three cosmologies and ethical paradigms for intrinsic values

This paper has presented some issues regarding the intrinsic value of nature, pointing out its relationship with different cosmological (both philosophical and religious) point of view. In this regard, the possible necessity of sacrality of nature has been deepened here. Finally, I pointed out three ethical paradigms concerning the three main cosmologies presented here. It is worth noticing that these paradigms – due to their connection to a more general cosmological background – also imply different human behaviours towards life. I will briefly recall these three paradigms in the following: 1. The pantheistic cosmology implies a reverence (or love) for life, since nature is sacred (God mainly coincides with nature): this is the basis of the intrinsic value of nature. The human being, thus, hasn't got a special role in the cosmos, but he/she is a part of an extended more-than-human community, that calls for respect and reverence. 2. Theisms reaffirms the value of reality starting from the idea of creaturality: every natural thing is good (has an intrinsic value) since it has been created by God, who is the source of that value. In this sense, nature is for the human being a means to get close to God, who should be loved by human beings: we love God, not nature. This implies, furthermore, a new role for human beings: we are the steward of creation, which is ongoing. 3. The finalistic idea of nature (which, in principle, is not opposed to the two previous cosmologies) sustains that life is an end in itself (*i.e.*, it has intrinsic value), and this purpose is beyond human utility. Also in this case, reverence and love towards nature are not essential: our responsibility emerges from both the value of life and our impact on the environment (mainly due to our technological power). In this sense, I tried to show how the issue of intrinsic value can be demonstrated (and grounded) starting from different cosmological, metaphysical, or religious approaches, without not necessarily implying a reverence for nature or divinity.

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RECEBIDO: 23/08/2023
APROVADO: 27/01/2024

RECEIVED: 08/23/2023
APPROVED: 01/27/2024