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Roots of (and Solutions to) our Ecological Crisis. A Humanistic Perspective

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Received: 10 December 2022; Accepted: 20 April 2023; Available online: 11 May 2023

ABSTRACT: Research into the sources of contemporary ecological crisis as well as ways to overcome it has been conducted for several decades. Rich academic literature provides numerous attempts to identify the causes of the crisis and its solutions. The ecological crisis is extremely complex and variously conditioned. Therefore, I focus on determining only two sources of the crisis and, respectively, two solutions. Since the late 1960s, monotheistic religions, Christianity in particular, have been made responsible for the environmental crisis. Christianity is accused of forwarding two theses which are harmful to the environment: 1. The sole purpose of nature is to serve man. 2. By God's will, man is endowed with unlimited power over nature. I attempt to overcome this understanding of the source of the crisis by showing the interpretation of the Bible which contradicts the above-mentioned theses. Moreover, I show "the ecological potential" of the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions. As the second source of the crisis I indicate modern thought: 1. Man's alienation from nature as the result of the Cartesian division of reality into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. 2. Francis Bacon's program: the study of nature is the task of natural sciences alone; nature is devoid of value in itself. 3. The mathematization of nature made it possible for the natural and technical sciences to develop rapidly, which contributed to the industrial revolution. I look for an antidote to this cause of the crisis in Klaus M. Meyer-Abich's idea of man's peace with nature which he developed as part of the practical philosophy of nature. I believe that revealing our inseparable bond with nature and showing compassion towards nature may help overcome the destructive consequences of modern thought.

Keywords: Ecological crisis; Religion and ecology; Practical philosophy of nature; Lynn White Jr; Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich; Christianity and ecology; Islam and ecology



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1. Introduction

It was in the beginning of the 60s that the discussion on the ecological crisis gained momentum. The common experience of the crisis triggered important questions: What is its cause? Is it possible to overcome it? If so, then how?

Several decades have passed since the beginning of the debate. We have reached a relative agreement that what we experience is a global crisis. Also, we are conscious of the complexity of the crisis and the fact that it cannot be overcome only with technology, politics and law. Thus, the voice of those who represent social sciences and the humanities is extremely important as they broaden the scope of studying the crisis and, due to their interdisciplinary research, raise hope for finding comprehensive solutions.

However, the role of man in bringing about the crisis is still being discussed. The vast majority of academics claim that the environmental changes are anthropogenic. While searching for the solutions to the crisis, we must return to the questions regarding its roots as well as the character of man's presence in the world. For it is only by finding proper answers to these questions that we may hope to find an effective strategy to alleviate the crisis. Source literature most often finds the roots of the crisis in religion and modern thought. I discuss these religious and modern causes as well as the ways to overcome the crisis itself.

2. Religious Roots of the Ecological Crisis

One of the first academics who blamed religion for the ecological crisis was Lynn White. He claimed that Christianity had "a huge burden of guilt" for the environmental crisis [1] (p. 1206). He thus justified his viewpoint: "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. [...] Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" [1] (p. 1205).

According to White, Christianity notably prompted the elimination of animistic religions. This contributed to the ecological crisis because animists believed that every tree, spring or hill was endowed with protective spirits, which imposed religious constraints on the abuse of natural resources. Christianity, on the contrary, sees the spiritual dimension only in man. Thus, it removes the conviction that the spiritual element may be found also in other forms of life. Subsequently, human curtailment of the irresponsible exploitation of nature is destroyed: “By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects” [1] (p. 1205).

White believed that the present ecological crisis would develop unless Christian teaching on nature were rejected: “We shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” [1] (p. 1207).

Arnold Joseph Toynbee, a renowned historian of civilization, was yet another academic who shared White’s outlook on the religious sources of the crisis. He found all monotheistic religions to be blamed for the abuse of nature. In polytheistic religions, on the contrary, man’s attitude toward nature was friendly: “For pre-monotheistic man, nature was not just a treasure-trove of “natural resources”. Nature was, for him, a goddess, “Mother Earth”, and the vegetation that sprang from the Earth, the animals that roamed, like man himself, over the Earth’s surface, and the minerals hiding in the Earth’s bowels, all partook on nature’s divinity. For primitive man, the whole of his environment was divine, and his sense of nature’s divinity outlasted his technological feats of cultivating plants and domesticating animals” [2] (pp. 142–143).

According to Toynbee, in the religion of ancient Greece, divinity was inseparable from nature. It was ascribed to springs, rivers and seas; to wild oaks and cultivated olive trees; to earthquakes, thunder and lightning. Greek deities were present in all these phenomena. In the Hellenic tradition there was a pantheon of deities, and not one omnipotent and superhuman God. When Christianity was adopted, the ancient conviction that nature is divine was substituted with the belief in one, transcendent God [2].

Toynbee believed the Book of Genesis to be the ground for the nonchalant satisfaction of human needs as well as irresponsible use of natural resources. To him the Book allows man to use nature in a carefree manner [3]. “Some of the major maladies of the present-day world—in particular the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature’s irreplaceable treasures and the pollution of those of them that man has not already devoured—can be traced back to a religious cause, and this cause is the rise of monotheism” [3] (p. 6D). Toynbee was certain that the only way to overcome the ecological crisis and to avoid the destruction of our civilization was to discard the monotheistic outlook and to adopt a pantheistic one [2].

White and Toynbee were some of the first academics who joined the debate on the role of religion in bringing about the environmental crisis. However, the debaters have been numerous, and so have been the source materials on the subject. The debate itself has been held for over 50 years [4–9].

3. Modern Causes of the Ecological Crisis

The concept of man and nature as separate ‘beings’ seems to have contributed to the ecological crisis. In the long history of Western civilization, the idea that man separates himself from nature occurred before, but they take definite shape in modernity [10].

In antiquity, nature is considered to be fully alive and indivisible. In ancient culture, practical applications of theoretical knowledge are disregarded. The acquired knowledge is not applied in practice and is not used as a tool to control nature [11].

In the Middle Ages, man’s attitude toward nature changes. However, nature is still treated as a whole of which man is an integral part. The source of the change lies in the conviction that God left traces of his existence in the creation and that one can know Him through these traces. The Church Fathers are quite straightforward here: God left us two books in which we can seek the truth about Him: the Bible and nature [12]. Another important idea inspired by the Bible (Wis 11:20) which contributes to the medieval concept of nature is the concept that God created the world according to a certain order, and there are immutable laws that govern nature [13]. Thus, man is encouraged to know nature so as to discover its laws as well as learn about the Creator.

It is in modern times that the approach to nature changes significantly. We can indicate at least three basic ideas that underlie modern separation of man from nature:

1. Francis Bacon’s program;
2. Descartes’ dualism;
3. Mathematization of the world.

Even though there were thinkers who had shaped the modern concept of nature before Bacon, it seems that his program was the first clear conception of man’s dominion over the world by means of science and technology. This mode of thinking was later taken over by Descartes, Hobbes, Galileo, Kepler and Pascal. It is they who determined the direction in which the Western civilization developed [14]. Unlike medieval thinkers, Francis Bacon finds hope for our happiness and supremacy in the world not through the religious or moral improvement, but in the new natural science.

Bacon seeks to achieve his aims (ensuring common prosperity and eliminating diseases) by means of the progress of science and technology. He expresses his idea in the well-known words: “Human knowledge and human power meet in one” [15] (book 1, no III). According to him, power equals dominion over nature. It is achieved by cognizing nature’s laws with the empirical method

and technology. Although Bacon agrees that man is part of nature, he considers him to be an exceptional part because of the capability of erecting, even with violence, an independent ‘empire of man’ (Lat. *imperium homini*) in the midst of nature [15]. In this way Bacon affirms man’s belonging to nature and yet he claims that man radically opposes nature with his knowledge and science with which he tries to control it [16].

The next stage of changing our understanding of nature is associated with Descartes. According to him, material is devoid of subjectivity. For this reason *res extensa* passes into the hands of natural sciences which are the only ones capable of studying nature. Thus, the unconscious and valueless becomes a graceful object of mathematical inquiry which studies reality only in terms of extension. In the Cartesian outlook, organisms are reduced to material mechanisms and as such are no longer a subject of interest to ethics or other branches of the humanities [17,18]. Man, *res cogitans*, is quite on the opposite side [19].

Descartes believes that man alone is endowed with consciousness and as such he is superior to nature, both inanimate and animate. This creates an insurmountable abyss between man and the rest of nature—man is no longer a member of ‘the community of life’ and becomes ‘an alien’ in the world of nature [20]. Thus, the idea of man as ‘the master and possessor of nature’ ushered in by Bacon is explicitly continued by Descartes [15,21].

At that time the new model of developing science initiated by Bacon and supported by Descartes was gaining significant momentum partly due to the progress of mathematics that took place in the 17th century. The new mathematics changed the conception of reality—it was no longer a reality to be perceived but one to be described with numbers. This influenced the way that the subject of scientific inquiry was understood—it ceased to be a quality perceived and became a measurable quantity. As a result, the scientific inquiry shifted from the attempt to define the essence of things to the search for connections and dependencies between phenomena. The 17th century scholars ceased to study the metaphysical essence of being and engaged in practical applications of science. Searching for interdependencies between phenomena by means of mathematics contributed to the discovery of general laws which are calculable and verifiable.

Descartes’ philosophy largely precipitated the mathematical conception of the world and, as a result, the dynamic development of natural sciences and the entire system of modern thought. His division of reality into *res cogitans* and *res extensa* as well as their attributes: consciousness and extension respectively, is a radical break with classical mode of thinking. Cartesian division into a thinking substance and extended substance rejects the classical division—reality no longer consists of living and dead objects but conscious and unconscious ones [19,22].

Descartes’s concepts give the world an explicitly anthropocentric character and contribute to the ‘disrespect’ toward the non-human world which is subject to the inquiry of the natural sciences. The objective of the new science is to be useful and to impact the everyday life of man. This leads to the rapid progress of modern science, and, as a consequence, to the technical revolution, which was one of the main factors that shaped the contemporary Euro-Atlantic civilization. It is generally acknowledged that modern thought has been conducive to the unquestionable success of Western civilization and, at the same time, the ecological crisis [23].

Currents of thought proposed in modern times trigger changes on a scale unknown before. The new mode of our activity, generated by modern thought, is focused on creating our own environment by means of knowledge, technology and work. It is in technology that man sees his autonomy from the world, as technology makes it possible for his way of life to change fundamentally, which entails a transition of his attitude toward nature. Consequently, the resources of the planet are exploited. The changes that occur are irrevocable and their scale is unprecedented. This phenomenon is even more dangerous because it is nowadays supported by economic practices, institutions, and assumptions that focus mainly on private property and personal profit. Due to the almost unlimited technical possibilities, this phenomenon causes enormous ecological destruction and social suffering [24].

4. Exemplary Concepts of Overcoming the Ecological Crisis

The source literature gives us numerous proposals on how to overcome the ecological crisis. I will discuss only two of them. They are the answer to the religious and modern sources of the crisis. Since the sources are religious and philosophical, so should be the solutions.

4.1. A Religious Answer to the Ecological Crisis

Firstly, I attempt to indicate that certain accusations that White and Toynbee level against religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in particular, fall short of the mark. Secondly, I aim to show religion’s contribution as far as protecting the environment and counteracting the crisis are concerned.

In addition, pointing to the Abrahamic religions as the main factor causing the ecological crisis seems insufficiently justified. These religions originated from the Middle East, and their common patriarch is Abraham. Scholars differ on the dating of Abraham. Some scholars indicate that he lived in the Iron Age, whereas others that in the second millennium BCE. At the same time, archaeological data confirm that significant environmental degradation in this area took place already in the Bronze Age [25,26]. In comparison, the first states in this area rose much earlier. Benati and Guerriero believe this was possible thanks to the combination

of technology, cooperation, and institutions. This process, in turn, made it possible to implement large-scale irrigation projects in Mesopotamia. It significantly changed the environment and contributed to its degradation long before the rise of Judaism [27,28].

One of the fundamental accusations that White and his followers bring is that Christianity justifies irresponsible use of nature in order to meet human needs [1]. White claims that the biblical tradition teaches that the only role of nature is to fulfill our needs. However, this viewpoint is hardly justifiable. It was already in the ancient times that there were concepts which encouraged man to make use of nature freely. Also, the Bible explicitly emphasizes that the creation has two basic purposes: to show the glory of the Creator and to serve man. The Holy Scripture explicitly says that man's capability of using nature is limited.

It was the ancient culture, unlike the biblical tradition, that stressed man's right to use nature at will. Aristotle shares this viewpoint. In his eyes, man is on top of the pyramid of beings, and as such should be served by all creation. It is exactly being of service to man that is its sole purpose [29,30]. The Stoics wrote in a similar vein, though sometimes more ambiguously. For example Cicero in his *De Natura Deorum* claims that "It must, then, be admitted that this wealth of things was provided for man, unless, perhaps, it is the great abundance and variety of fruits, and the pleasantness not only of their taste, but also of their smell and appearance, that throws a doubt upon their having been bestowed by nature upon man alone!" [31] (no II: LXIII).

Christian thinking about the purpose of creation is unequivocal. Contrary to the suggestions of White and his followers, the purpose of the creation is not confined to the service of man alone. Christian reading of the Bible undoubtedly states that God did not create the world so that it satisfies man's needs unconditionally—He made the world also to reveal His perfection [32]. Thus Christian concept of the purpose of nature emphasizes two reasons for creating the world: to reveal God's glory and to serve man. This is also confirmed by the Judaic interpretation of the Bible [33,34].

Various scholars also seem to challenge White's interpretation of the Book of Genesis. Without going into details we may state that the linguistic analysis of the description of the world's creation (Gen. 2) shows man in the service of nature rather than nature being in the service of man [35]. Man is depicted not as the master of the garden but as someone who tends to the garden and is dependent on the garden just like a servant depends on his master [36,37]. This interpretation radically undermines the accusations that the Bible supports the outlook that the sole purpose of nature is to serve man.

The charge against Christianity and other monotheistic religions that by eliminating animistic religions they removed the protection of nature is also controversial. One can agree that Christianity and Islam displaced animism, but one cannot agree that they weakened the precepts that guarded nature. For these two religions have introduced rules which, though for other reasons, preserve the creation [38]. Surprisingly, Christianity and Islam in a similar manner encourage the believers to care about the creation. Numerous excerpts from the Bible and the Koran prove this point [39]. They show why those who follow the main monotheistic traditions ought to protect the environment:

- It is not man, but the Creator who is the Lord of the world: the Bible (Ps. 24:1–2; 1 Chron. 29:11–12), the Koran (35:3; 36:81).
- The Creator looks after nature: the Bible (Wis. 11:26; Gen. 9:9; Ps. 104:10–11; Job 12:10; Job 38:25–27; Lev. 17:3–4; Deut. 22:6), the Koran (21:16; 38:27).
- The creation reveals that God exists and indicates His attributes: the Bible (Wis. 13:1; Isa. 49:26; Rom. 1:20), the Koran (13:3–4; 27:60).
- The creation gives praise to the Creator: the Bible (Ps. 148; Ps. 66:1–4), the Koran (17:44).
- The Creator limits the rights of man over the creation: the Bible (Gen. 2:16–17; Wis. 9:1–3; Ex. 16:23–30; Lev. 25:1–7; Deut. 15:1–18; Lev. 26:13–22), the Koran (7:74).

White initiated a debate on the role of religion in bringing about and overcoming the ecological crisis. As a result, in the 90s the Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) was set up. It attracted numerous scholars from various academic and scientific disciplines as well as religious traditions. This exceptional assembly gave rise to a new reflection on issues concerning religion and natural environment. As a consequence of a vivid cooperation there was even an attempt to create a new branch of knowledge called *religion and ecology*. Its purpose would be scientific reflection on the interdependencies between religion and the ecological crisis [40,41].

Mary Tucker and John Grim emphasize that all religions have ecological assets that may be used for the benefit of the planet's ecosystem. The diversity of religious traditions and the variety of doctrines means that each of them has something to offer. Moreover, they all share the belief that the reality is the creation entrusted to our care [42]. Religions teach us about the unique character of the creation and about our right to avail ourselves of the gifts of nature. Thus there is a constant tension between the respect for nature and the right to make use of its resources. It seems that religion's role is to support us in our self-limitation so that we sustain the balance between our care for the creation and its exploitation.

The analysis of the heritage of particular religions has revealed their ecological potential and contributed to acknowledging religions as important partners in fighting the crisis. The book *Inspiring Progress. Religions' Contributions to Sustainable Development* aptly shows how the mentality of people engaged in protecting nature changed as far as their approach to religion is concerned. The publication shows the role of religion in highlighting the ethical plane which is indispensable for effective implementation of sustainable development [43].

The significance of the world religions' role in overcoming the crisis and building a sustainable world has been noticed by academics. In one of its reports, the Worldwatch Institute has pinpointed five crucial assets of religions as far as shaping pro-ecological attitudes is concerned [44] (p. 154):

- Capacity to shape cosmologies (worldviews);
- Moral authority;
- A large base of adherents;
- Significant material resources;
- Community-building capacity.

Research explicitly proves that our religious convictions impact our everyday choices. In the years 2006–2008, the Gallup Organization conducted studies in 143 countries. It turned out that globally over 80% of people take their religious beliefs into account while making choices every day [45].

However, it seems that the ecological potential of religion is changing dynamically. On the one hand, we may observe secularization which weakens our religious convictions, makes us treat them selectively or abandon religion altogether. These processes are intensifying particularly in developed countries. However, they are also present in the poor ones in which so-called westernization strengthens consumerism while enfeebling religious beliefs [46]. Undoubtedly, these phenomena undermine religious motivation to protect nature.

On the other hand, however, religions get more involved in preserving nature. It is more common for the official representatives of the biggest world religions to get engaged in ecological issues as well as for the faithful to involve in grassroots initiatives in this field. At present, many holy books are being interpreted from the perspective of their message regarding nature. Mary E. Tucker claims that religions are now entering a new, ecological stage [40]. Interestingly, due to the process of secularization, some believers approach religious requirements selectively and, at the same time, they usually do not question the teaching on ecology.

We also observe a great scholars' interest in research on the relationship between religion and ecology, as well as numerous publications on a new interpretation of theological issues from an ecological perspective. Studies of this type are conducted in all major religious traditions. Scientific literature is very rich in this regard [47–57].

Ecological involvement of world religions' leaders, ecological movements of religious provenance and the participation of religions representatives in the most important assemblies (which decide about e.g., the reduction of greenhouse gases) prove the ecological potential of religion. The aim of this paper is to show this potential as well as the impact of religious motivation on our attitude toward the natural environment.

Acknowledging religion as an important partner in fighting the ecological crisis has prompted religious leaders to support scholars, politicians and ecological activists not only in their academic reflection but also in their fight against the crisis. This heralded multiple forms of cooperation and engagement in the protection of our planet's homeostasis. As a result, religious leaders got involved in individual and common environmental initiatives which involve communicating messages, lobbying and showing the moral dimension of the crisis. Thus, the faithful have been encouraged to take immediate actions in order to build a sustainable world.

I may emphasize the great mobilization of the world leaders of religions who, inspired by the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, undertake various ecological initiatives. Due to the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology we may access multiple official statements by various religious assemblies representing all great religions of the world. Moreover, FORE supplies materials which enable ecological organizations of religious provenance to be active and to undertake new initiatives [58].

We should also emphasize grassroots ecological initiatives which take shape within various religions. Inspired by their leaders, the faithful undertake specific actions to fight the crisis on a local, national and even global plane. The scope of the engagement of religious milieus in fighting climate changes is described in the report *Religious Organizations Taking Action on Climate Change* [59]. Particular attention may be paid to the movement initiated by 'the ecological encyclical' of Pope Francis who encourages Christians from all over the world to take pro-environmental actions [60].

4.2. The Concept of Peace with Nature as an Answer to the Ecological Crisis

The concept of man's peace with nature was devised by Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich, one of the main philosophers of nature in Germany [61]. Meyer-Abich is a proponent of the so-called practical philosophy of nature which may be thus characterized [62–64]:

- Man is an integral element of nature;
- Man is the main representative of nature;
- the concept is of practical character.

Zbigniew Łepko, while characterizing the practical philosophy of nature, formulated its chief thesis in a short expression: 'nature in man and man in nature' [65] (p. 85). The concept explicitly breaks with modern thought according to which man is

separated from nature. It not only underlines man's bond with nature but also the fact that man is its integral part. However, man is its unique element for he is a manifestation of nature's most developed form. According to Meyer-Abich, it is in man that nature literally expresses itself [62,66]. Moreover, by referring to Aristotelian distinction between practical and theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy of nature speaks of seeking the truth of human actions. Thus, it faces contemporary challenges concerning the ecological crisis [61].

When man identifies himself as part of nature, it is possible to perceive the environment not as *Umwelt*, but as *Mitwelt*, connatural world. Thus, we may abandon the confrontational mode of being in nature understood as *Umwelt* and begin peaceful mode of being in *Mitwelt* [67]. Given this understanding, man may be regarded as the most reliable representative of nature, for it is in man endowed with exquisite cognitive capacities that nature expresses itself and 'communicates' dangers that threaten it, wounds that have been inflicted and the necessity to help it. It is exactly because of this that man is an opportunity and hope for nature's peaceful future [62,63].

Man is capable of discerning bonds that unite him with nature as well as its value. As such, only man may take responsibility for nature [68]. As a consequence, man takes action to protect nature and to overcome the antagonism between nature and culture [66]. Showing compassion toward the natural environment is an important factor which influences our involvement in nature preservation. When man shows empathy toward nature, he respects it for its own sake [61].

Meyer-Abich's concept of man's peace with nature is both political and philosophical. Its objective is to reconcile the possibilities of nature with political and economic activity of the industrial society. However, Meyer-Abich warns against radical changes as, according to him, societies will not be able to accept them. 'An armistice' should be the starting point of making peace with nature [63]. Acceptance of the present stage of nature's degradation or of the project to restore the original, intact nature do not come into the picture. The prime objective should be restoring the state of nature as it was a century ago. However, it must be assumed that we shall face environmental problems for a long period of time. Only gradually will they be eliminated. Introducing legislation that guards systematic improvement of nature's condition is an indispensable element of man's peace with nature. The protection of nature should have its part in the legal system on a constitutional level.

In the long-term perspective of building peace between man and nature one should take into account the interests of nature, man and the related economy. When these interests are conflicting, tensions should be resolved without favoring either side. Introducing 'the legitimized anthropocracy' should guarantee a sensible balance between the needs and capabilities of both man and nature [66], for it is man who reigns—and will reign—over nature. Nevertheless, our reign should be limited by law whose foundation is our responsibility for the whole of nature [67]. Only in this way can genuine peace between man and nature be introduced, peace that will secure the future of both industrial society and nature.

5. Conclusions

The roots of the ecological crisis are still being identified. My aim was to discuss two of them related to religion and modern thought. I realize that there are many diagnoses of the crisis in the literature on the subject. However, this paper analyzes these two causes as they are commonly present in the discussion on the origin of the contemporary ecological crisis. What we currently know allows us to confirm that the ecological crisis is a complex and variously conditioned issue. Therefore, it would be naïve to indicate merely one cause as well as only one solution. My purpose in analyzing these issues was to put certain approaches in order and to hint at possible elements of the strategy to emerge from the crisis. It seems that just as the present state of nature is the result of numerous factors so should the remedy be the result of manifold solutions. Only such a conception of the problem gives hope that we can end the crisis.

Therefore, proposing two solutions is the result of identifying the religious cause and modern thought as the origin of the crisis. These two proposals are merely part of the factors which, when combined, can overcome the emergency. Since the aforementioned causes refer to religion and to modern thought, the proposed solutions are of a similar character.

On a religious plane, we should overcome the approach which allows man to use nature freely because the Creator's will, allegedly, is that nature should serve man and 'fulfill all his whims'. Even a cursory analysis of the Bible and the Koran (the holy books of the largest monotheistic religions whose faithful make up over half of humanity) shows that this outlook is groundless. Both the Bible and the Koran give us numerous arguments that Christians and Muslims should care about the creation. Even though the monotheistic religions eliminated animistic ones together with their precepts of environmental protection, they have introduced new principles which, though for various reasons but with no less effectiveness, seem to preserve the natural environment.

It seems that the practical philosophy of nature is an apt antidote to modern thought which separates man from nature. Practical philosophy of nature, on the contrary, emphasizes close ties between man and nature and stresses that he is a unique and integral part of nature. The concept of man's peace with nature which stems from these premises is an attempt to refer to our responsibility for nature and to legally regulate the interests of nature and the industrial society. Within this agreement, we should gradually, though consistently, aim to achieve such a state of nature where it is possible to secure its basic needs while limiting the needs of man.

Significantly, man's emotions are taken into account in both solutions. Reference to religious convictions and spiritual motivations reaches deep layers of our existence. In the so-called ecological encyclical, Pope Francis underlines the need to see the

beauty of nature and to admire the creation [69]. We are not allowed to reduce nature merely to resources required for life. Like Meyer-Abich, the Pope underlines the need to experience our unity with nature out of which human responsibility for nature is born. Moreover, he draws attention to the need to feel empathy for nature due to which man can see nature's value for its own sake not for the sake of its utility.

Nowadays we are more and more aware that referring solely to rational and legal arguments is insufficient as it does not bring about a significant change in man's attitude toward nature. And we universally agree that crucial changes in our approach to environmental issues are indispensable. Also, we know that these changes should take place on a global, national, regional, local, family and individual levels.

However, being aware that changes are necessary does not mean that we bring them about. We are faced with Plato's *akrasia*—the inability to take appropriate and necessary actions [70]. For years we have seen that scientific arguments or even legal regulations are of little use when it comes to altering our attitude toward nature. It seems that in order to overcome this inability to make appropriate decisions (*akrasia*) we should broaden our argumentation by referring to religious beliefs, esthetical tastes and emotional factors, for it is only by referring to subtle and very personal 'layers' in man that we can prompt him to take indispensable actions.

Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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