Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Religion and Ecomodernity ................................................................. 3

2. Is Green the New Red? The Role of Religion in Creating a Sustainable China ............. 13

3. From the Soil of the Earth: Theology Inspiring Sustainability in Oil-Producing Norway ....... 27

4. Religion and Climate Change in Ghana: Religious Actor Perspectives and Sustainable Climate Change Policy ........................................................................................................................................ 44

5. Inspiring Sustainability Beyond Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Ultimate Hindu Purpose ........................................................................................................................................... 61
1. Introduction: Religion and Ecomodernity

Nina Witoszek

A Premodern Turn?

Religion has long stood in the centre of debates on the environmental crisis of late modernity. Some have portrayed it as a *malade imaginaire* providing divine legitimation for human domination and predatory exploitation of natural resources; others have looked up to it as an inspirational force that is the essential condition of planetary revival. There is an ongoing battle of the books on the salience of religion in the modern world. Some trendy volumes declare: *God is Back* (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009). Others advert to *The End of Faith* (Harris 2006), harp the theme of *The God Delusion* (Dawkins 2006) or claim that *God is not Great* (Hitchens, 2007). Both sides provide ample evidence to support their adversary claims. In much of Canada and Western Europe, where religious establishments have courted or colluded with the state, religion has come to be viewed as the enemy of liberty and modernity. Not so in the US, where the Jeffersonian separation of religion from politics forced religious leaders to compete for the souls of the faithful – and thus to make Christianity more modernity-friendly, more reconcilable with the agenda of individualism and capitalist enterprise.¹

There is a subsequent disagreement among scholars as to the role of religion in creating a more earth-friendly world. Some claim that world religions and indigenous belief systems are already responding in highly dynamic ways to ongoing and projected climate changes – both in theory and practice. In the age of environmental, financial and social crises across the globe, many congregations and religions have increased vigour in tapping their sacred books to help to address the plight of the planet. In *Inspiring Progress* Michael Gardner draws attention to the ways in which the green elixir added to religious brew infuses a whole range of projects, from a highly influential, US based Evangelical Environmental Network, through the Interfaith Climate and Energy Initiative, to the Eco-Kosher movement in Judaism (Gardner 2006). There is also a plethora of organizations, from the Alliance of Religions and Conservation in the UK, to the National Religious Partnership for the Environment in the US, which bring together Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and Jews, and attempt to put all their different creeds and activities under one green umbrella.

¹ The US is the country of flourishing mega-churches, televangelists, religious shopping malls and “pastorpreneurs.” In many developing countries, more emotional forms of Christianity are enjoying a resurgence, with Pentecostalism in the lead. The evangelical Protestants’ emotional, literalist style has influenced Hindu mega-temples and the rise of Muslim televangelists like Egypt’s hugely influential Amr Khaled.
One of the most enduring, vibrant debates about religious environmentalism has focused on the re-enchantment of the efficient but spiritless Weberian modernity. Though the fascination with the East persists in postindustrial countries, the time when Apollonian, rational and dichotomous mind of the West longed to be fertilised by the rich alluvial flood of Eastern energy, seems to be over, and religion-starved souls look more and more into their own, indigenous resources. In *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* Sallie McFague points to what can be called a “counter-counter-reformation”: religiously inspired environmental projects based on growing things locally, driving on renewables, and educating ecologically literate people (McFague 2001). Many religious teaching programs use a combination of their holy books and the four sober pillars of the Earth Charter: respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, social and economic justice, and democracy, non-violence and peace (Bergman & Gerten 2010, Bergmann 2011).

What is perhaps most striking about these developments is that, imperceptibly, and at a long last, environmentalism – including green religion – have elevated their status. From being a marginal, “scoutish” project, it has become a subject for respectable academic research. It is enough to think of an academic program at Yale University in the ’90s that generated the Forum on Religion and Ecology and spawned nine volumes on ecological and religious themes. The new clerical-environmental alliances contribute to a dawn of a peculiar “Pastoral Renaissance” – not just a tide of projects and conferences, but a new-old mindset which aspires to reclaiming nature, culture and spirituality, influencing green architecture and furthering alternative models of consumption. Renaissance is not just a metaphor. If Enlightenment – the fundament of modernity – summoned us out of religion and in to reason, the advocates of Pastoral Renaissance – just like their Renaissance predecessors, Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Montaigne - propose to combine reason with spirituality and nature (Witoszek 2008). The question remains: Does this green spirituality signify a curious “premodern turn” in Western conceptions of human progress?

**Religion on Trial**

Before answering these questions one needs to acknowledge that the apparent greening of religion has not eluded critical scrutiny. In the sceptical responses to green-religious enthusiasm three arguments are pertinent. The first refers to a secret collusion between God-nature-peace projects and capitalism. Some books on “caring for creation” overlook faith-based commercial enterprises and often problematic alliance of religion and predatory big industry in the US (Oelschlaeger 1996). Slavoj Žižek, with his trickster’s brio, makes an original assault on this communion. “If

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3 See [http://fore.research.yale.edu/](http://fore.research.yale.edu/).
Weber was alive,” he argues, “he would have written the “Taoist ethics and the spirit of global capitalism.” According to Žižek, Buddhism plays the role of moral fig leaf for nakedly rapacious free market forces, both national and international. “They train you in Gelassenheit, but in reality they function as an ideological appendix to capitalism. Since the Buddhist ontology is based on the assumption that there is no objective reality, why then complain about the financial speculations? After all, the main source of our problems is not objective reality but our greed and attachment to material things.”

Other critics link the 21st century religious revival in many non-European countries to the growing fundamentalist threat. To quote but one: Christopher Hitchens, in a famous contention, insisted that organised religion is “violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism, tribalism, and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive to children.” Not only does it block peace in the Middle East, perpetuating poverty by subjugating women as inferior; it causes numerous conflicts including the genocide in super-Christian Rwanda.

In this reading, as a notorious agent of war and destruction, religion cancels the idea of a blossoming earth and flourishing humanity.

Many inquisitors question the forced nature of the re-enchantment of the earth. We need faith, it is said, a resacralization of nature which would change of our mechanistic perceptions of the environment. But faith is not acquired by reasoning. One does not fall in love with a woman or enter the womb of a church as a result of logical persuasion. “A faith grows like a tree,” as Arthur Koestler argued. “Its crown points to the sky; its roots grow downwards into the past and are nourished by the dark sap of the ancestral humus” (Koestler 2001:15).

The third argument, although accepting the green potential of world religions, calls attention to their manipulability. When Lynn T. White, in his famous j’accuse, charged Western Christianity with being a manufacturer of the environmental crisis (White 1967), many were spurned to re-inspect various ways in which the ostensibly peace- and nature loving Eastern religions have been deployed for ideological ends. One has pointed to the appropriation of Buddhism by Hirohito’s fascism, Burma’s bloody dictatorship, Lon Nol’s army’s in Cambodia, or by the forces in Sri Lanka that savaged the Tamils in the 1950s and 1960s. More recently, Hinduvta – a blood-and-soil, exclusive version of Hinduism – has embraced environmental campaigns in a troubling way (Mawdsley 2005).

In short, religion provides a contested toolbox in the project of a transition to a sustainable world. Is the dawn Pastoral Renaissance another providentialist illusion?

Conservative-Revolutionary Sacrum

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4 Slavoj Zizek, “Nobody has to be Vile,” Times Literary Supplement, 26 April 2006. Zizek claims that that is how Eastern spirituality has become a fetish which allows the Western executives to participate in the capitalist game while at the same time preserving the sense that they are not involved, and that what they really care for is their inner richness. In short, what seems a counter-capitalist stance is perfect ideological supplement and support of virtual capitalism”, [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n07/slavoj-zizek/nobody-has-to-be-vile](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n07/slavoj-zizek/nobody-has-to-be-vile).

3 The audience voted on the debate and preliminary results posted on the Munk Debates website show that the majority sided with Hitchens, with 68 percent saying that religion is more of a destructive than benign force in the world. [http://www.salon.com/2010/11/27/cn_canada_blair_hitchens_debate/](http://www.salon.com/2010/11/27/cn_canada_blair_hitchens_debate/)
Regardless of these assaults, many observers suggest that ecological stability, global justice and the human future are profoundly religious issues (Egri 1999). Transformational changes of the kind which are required cannot happen and survive without going deep into the realm of values and belief. It is argued that religion has a particular capacity to generate social capital, the bonds of trust, communication, cooperation and information. As a vehicle of value charged stories, religion is a close partner in human search for meaning; it satisfies desire for transcendence, and carries sanctions. “Among the institutions of our society, only the communities of faith can still posit some reason for human existence rather than constant accumulation of stuff,” insists Bill McKibben (McKibben 1998). The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski has gone so far as to claim that “Culture, when it loses its sacred sense loses all sense” (Kolakowski 1990:70). To reject the sacred i.e. to claim that everything is profane, undermines one of the crucial distinctions on which every culture rests. It leads to a structural void, where there is no distinction between sacred and the profane, war and peace, executioner and victim, invasion and liberation, equality and despotism. If we agree with Kolakowski, religion is the potential center that holds.

Intriguingly, history shows that religious sentiment has been political dynamite. Modern revolutions – from the Khomeini turnover in Iran, through the Polish Solidarnosc, to the Arab Spring, have been closely bound with religious allegiances and symbols (Shinn 1982). There is, then, an intrinsic paradox feeding the innovative potential of religions. Their natural proneness is to conserve and preserve – not to inspire change. The sacred order, which encompasses the realities of the secular word, has never ceased, implicitly or explicitly to proclaim the message “This is how things are m and they cannot be otherwise”. And yet, in numerous social upheavals God’s teachings have been invoked to ignite a social transformation.

This paradoxical, conserving-transforming role of religions is highly pertinent in the context of the green transition. For there is no doubt that there is a link. The sustainable mindset – very much like the religious one – is about limits to human pursuits and appetites. The affinity is there, and it has been eloquently spelled out by two thinkers who, in an almost clairvoyant fashion, predicted the trajectory of late modernity: Daniel Bell and Leszek Kolakowski. Already in 1970s Bell stated: “The theme of Modernism was the word beyond: beyond nature, beyond culture, beyond tragedy – that was where the self-infinitizing spirit was driving the radical self. We are now groping for a new vocabulary whose key word seems to be limits: a limit to growth, a limit to spoliation of environment, a limit to arms, a limit to torture, a limit to hubris – can we extend the list?”(Bell 1980;1991) In Bell’s view “the ground of religion is not regulative, functional property of society, serving, as Marx or Durkheim argued, as a component of social control or integration. Nor is religion a property of human nature, as argued by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, and religious phenomenologists such as Max Scheller. The ground of religion is existential; the awareness of the finiteness and the inexorable limits to human powers, and the consequent effort to find a coherent answer to reconcile them to that human condition.”(Bell 1980;1991:251). Similarly, Leszek Kolakowski in a seminal and half- forgotten essay, “The Revenge of the Sacred in the Secular Culture,” argued that “perceiving religion as no more effective than magic, a
mere technique in covering the gaps in our knowledge and practical abilities is the functionalist Durkheimian and cognitive Marxian fallacy.” (Kolakowski 1997:64-65).

For Kolakowski, religion testifies to the limits of human perfectability and thus to the inescapable fiasco of all men-like-gods projects. “Religion is man’s way of accepting life as an inevitable defeat. That it is not an inevitable defeat is a claim that cannot be defended in good faith….The utopia of man’s perfect autonomy and the hope of unlimited perfection may be the most sufficient instruments of suicide ever to have been invented by human culture….To reject the sacred is to reject our own limits” (Kolakowski 1997:73).

This is a value platform which gestures towards the Renaissance period because, while it embraces modernity, it also demands a self-limiting revolution in all spheres of human life. Its early eloquent advocates were Leonardo, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Mirandola and Machiavelli, who all promoted innovation and yet warned against man’s hubris, preaching restraint on human appetites and ambitions (Toulmin 1990:80).6 The main leitmotif of most Renaissance thinkers and writers – glorification of an individual and his potential – is balanced by the obsession with human weakness and warnings about downfall due to uncontrollable lust for power and glory.

This religiously inspired appeal for measure is salient in most religions - from Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism to the beliefs of most indigenous people. Perhaps it is no accident that the practitioners of the green Pastoral

Renaissance turn to religion as a tool of restraint?

In a striking prediction of this return, Bell wrote: “If there are to be new religions… they will contrarily previous experience, return to the past, to see for tradition and to search for those threads which can give a person a set of ties that place him in the continuity of the living, the dead and those yet to be born. Unlike romanticism it will not be a turn to nature, and unlike modernity it will not be the involuted self; it will be the resurrection of Memory” (Bell 1980;1991:359).

There are many signs which corroborate this augury. The resurgence of memory and tradition in the twenty first century is both a response to growing insecurities caused by the roller coaster of globalization, and to the environmental, economic and political turbulence in many parts of the world. In situations of threat, the questions of roots and identity become burning, while the memory of ancestors and the shift to spiritual realm are manifestations of the search for comfort and defense against dangers from the outside. In many parts of the world the 21st century the project of reclaiming the commons means, in fact reclaiming culture, spirituality and nature. The question is: how widely spread is this religious-ecological turn? Has it reached the countries of the wealthy, staunchly secular, Northern Europe or the communist China?

**Religion and Sustainability in Norway, China, Ghana and India**

The objective of this volume is to explore to what extent the resurgence of cultural memory is combined with religious innovation for sustainability in the postindustrial West, the

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6 See also Nina Witoszek, “Leonardo our Contemporary? The Self-Limiting Revolution of Renaissance Sages” (SUM; Oslo University, CERES.21.org)
fast growing political giants such as China or India, and in the struggling economies in Africa. In what ways does the dawn of Pastoral Renaissance nourish the self-limiting, environmental upheaval in countries as disparate as Norway, Ghana, China and India? Does religion in wealthy, super-democratic and mostly secular Norway – a country that believes in a “politically correct God” – play any role in cultural mobilization for sustainable future?

As is shown by Jens Grønvold, not only does religion spearhead in surprising ways the sustainable revolution; the young generation of Norwegian theologians advocates biocentric theology – one in which all God’s creation is equally important - and the wisdom of the indigenous traditions in the North, as the only way forward for the Protestant church.

The return to memory combined with religious renewal is highly intriguing in China, where the Chinese Daoist Association has undertaken an ambitious project to promote Daoism as China’s “green religion.” As James Miller shows, this “green Daoism” is not designed to restore a Karate Kid utopia of humans living in harmony with nature. Rather, it buttresses a nationalist agenda of patriotism and scientific development. This seems to be how conservation and nature protection function at the official level in China: as a beneficial side effect of an ideological project which appropriates sacred sites that are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Jospeh Yaro’s and Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo’s study of a greening of religion in a quintessentially religious country like Ghana, demonstrates that there is an overwhelming sense of connection between climate crisis and the abandonment of traditional norms and obligations towards nature. This crisis, most Ghanaians insist, springs from a disregard for the pre-Christian perceptions of nature’s sanctity, and of Christian and Islamic injunctions which invoke the ideas and of stewardship and trusteeship. The African “environmental infidelities” have been mostly attributed to the effect of Western cultural intrusion. The basis for a sustainable future, according to many informants, is the return to the Ghanaian tradition and to the ideas of stewardship and trusteeship.

India offers a cache of religious ideas which have informed both the ideas of environmental retreat and numerous civic projects reclaiming nature and culture. One of the most productive religious inspirations for the project of sustainable future is, according to Yamini Narayanan in this volume, the Purusharthas, or the four-fold path to self-actualisation as a green telos. The Purusharthas is a potential foundation of a green education in the sense that it teaches self-realization in the sense given to it by Arne Naess: transcending ego-gratification by deepening and widening the self so that it embraces other life forms (Naess 1990:10).

All four contributions point to religious creed as an actual or potential vehicle of a dawning ecomodernity.

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7 See for example the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa, spiritual head of Drukpa lineage, who has embarked on padyatra with 750 monks, nuns and other disciples from Manali to Leh to spread awareness about the hazards of non-biodegradable waste and treatment of kerosene burns, a common domestic accident in Himalayan villages. Ditto Akal Takhat, the highest Sikh temporal body, has embraced the save-the-environment mantra, telling Sikhs across the globe that is their moral and religious duty to take care of nature. And Baba Ramdev is leading a campaign to clean the Ganga from its source in Gangotri to Ganga Sagar where it drains into the Bay of Bengal. See http://www.gits4u.com/envo/envo21.htm

8 The term «ecomodernity» is here loosely defined as a
China – steered and manipulated as it is by the almighty state – is not just about state ideology; it is linked to the ideas of environmental protection and conservation. The question about the potency of this return to religion, memory and identity, is pertinent nevertheless. In one of the most iconic films of the century, Avatar, we see humanity’s dream of an ensouled, networked world which emanates spiritual bioluminescence. On an island of Pandora, a tribe of Na’vi worships the Tree of Souls – the center of Na’vi’s culture and religion. The Na’vi believe that the tree allows them to communicate directly with Eywa, their mother goddess. The roots of the tree form a special network with other trees and plants, which in turn are connected to each other, forming a gigantic, neural interconnection of life on Pandora. But most importantly: the tree preserves people’s memories and experiences, and in turn shares them with those who connect themselves to it. In short, the tree is the temple for the Na’vi.

There is just one hitch. While the film captures human yearning for transcending places, cultures, and the bodies that define us, it also captures the twisted nature of the dream of an earth-friendly world. The Na’vi are admirably precivilized and yet superbly hypercivilized, anti-technological and highly technologized. Implicit in their world is the view of religion as an add-up to, or support of, the networked technological revolution that allows the Na’vi to connect with nature. The Tree of Souls is a spiritual peak of this revolution. Does this mean that the condition of a transition to the psycho-environmental century is the right technology and adequate gadgets, not the hard work requiring the change of consciousness?

It remains to be seen if China’s green Daoism, Norwegian biocentric theology, Ghanaian syncretic stewardship, or Indian Dharma are the foundation of change, and if the global Pastoral Renaissance has a staying power. The opposite trend – based on politicization of religion and its link with the fundamentalist resurgence in the countries of North Africa, in Pakistan and Afghanistan – remains a crucial hurdle on the way to ecomodernity. The second obstacle, captured by Avatar, springs from human longing for a short-cut to the magic world of unity with nature, a technological fix which would allow us to feel what the plants feel and connect with our forefathers. The proverbial discount of the future is here joined with the desire for instant gratification without hard work required by religious teachings. The final obstacle springs from the pressure of the old carbon and nuclear modernity, both of them challenging the ecomodern mindset with the arguments of necessity and expediency. One is certain: in the emerging battle of modernities, religion has a crucial role to play, whether God is a delusion or not.

 modernity which advocates a shift from unrestrained growth to sustainable development at three levels: in culture, by combining the legacy of humanism with ecological wisdom and holistic thinking and practices; in industry, by highlighting renewable energy and post-carbon economy; in politics by advancing the ideas of sustainable development, partnered governance, and human rights. See Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun, “The Sluggish Dawn of Ecomodernity”, forthcoming.
References


2. Is Green the New Red?  
The Role of Religion in Creating a Sustainable China

James Miller

Abstract
The Chinese Daoist Association has embarked upon an ambitious agenda to promote Daoism as China’s “green religion.” This new construction of “green Daoism” differs, however, from both traditional Chinese and modern Western interpretations of the affinity between Daoism and nature. In promoting Daoism as a green religion, the Chinese Daoist Association is not aiming to restore some mythical utopia of humans living in harmony with nature, so much as supporting a nationalist agenda of patriotism and scientific development. At the same time, this agenda will deliver positive benefits in the form of protecting the local environments around important sacred sites that are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Is Green the New Red? The Role of Religion in Creating a Sustainable China
That religion might play a role in creating a sustainable future for the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases might seem at best to be hopelessly idealistic, and at worst a category mistake. Though the ideological frameworks espoused by China’s modernizers over the past century have undergone remarkable reform and revolution, they have remained consistent in relegating religion to the arena of reactionary forces that hinder China’s quest for political and economic autonomy. Religion, like global warming, the energy crisis, or social unrest, is just one more problem that China’s leaders have to grapple with in steering the Chinese economy towards a peaceful and sustainable future. Despite the recent resurgence of interest in traditional Chinese culture, religion has not been emphasized. In elevating Confucius to the status of national hero, for example, China’s rulers are hoping that the spiritual crisis afflicting China’s people, endlessly tossed about in a swirling sea of social transformation, will be resolved by the non-theistic, non-religious, and ultimately non-threatening values of filial piety, social responsibility and educational self-improvement. The government’s uncharitable and ideologically-charged view of religion is, unsurprisingly, not shared by China’s religious organizations. The Chinese Daoist Association, in particular, is working to construct an image of Daoism as China’s green religion and to position Daoism as a source of ecological wisdom that can make a positive contribution in China’s transition to an ecologically sustainable
economy. In so doing they are drawing on a wealth of philosophical insight, moral values and historical practice that is particularly relevant to the way the contemporary ecological crisis is culturally construed and represented in China. These values are oriented towards a nationalist agenda aimed at preserving elements of Chinese heritage and contributing to the future success of the Chinese nation.

**Cultural Frames for the Ecological Crisis**

In examining the role that religion can play in dealing with environmental issues, it is first important to understand that the ecological crisis is not simply amenable to scientific analysis and technological remediation. The ecological crisis has consistently been construed by Western social science and humanities theorists as a cultural and even spiritual crisis: it is a crisis in the way that human beings envision themselves in relation to their natural environments; and it is a crisis that has a specific cultural genealogy and normative taxonomy. In terms of genealogy, the ecological crisis has been associated most clearly with the values of instrumental rationality that arose in the European enlightenment era. The worldview that regards the nature as having only an instrumental value in relation to human teloi and not having any intrinsic value in and of itself is, according to this analysis, a uniquely modern, Western view. On such a basis, the ecological crisis has become identified on the cultural level not as a universal problem confronting human beings everywhere and always, but as a problem identified in particular with Western intellectual history, colonial aggression and industrial development.

Given this dominant cultural framing of the ecological crisis, it is hardly surprising that modern Western devotees of “environmentalism” should look beyond the West for sources of wisdom and value in addition to critically engaging their own tradition. The cultural genealogy of the ecological crisis in fact lends itself to a normative taxonomy of ecological wisdom that privileges modernity’s others. It is commonly assumed by my students, for instance, that Lynn White, Jr.’s famous essay (1967) is an indictment of Christianity as a whole: they tend to overlook White’s positive framing of Franciscan Christianity because it does not fit into their normative expectations regarding the Western tradition. Conversely, they are often positively predisposed towards Asian values to be found in Buddhism or Daoism for the simple reason that they view these traditions as “others” to the dominant discourse of modernity.

The genealogical identification of the ecological crisis with Western philosophy and history entails a corresponding cultural taxonomy of non-Western marginalized “others,” such as women, indigenous societies and colonized peoples. In the normative taxonomy of the ecological crisis adopted by environmentally-concerned cultural commentators in the West, these “others” become identified as possessing an ecological wisdom and living “closer to nature,” often without any concrete evidence one way or the other. (As regards women’s supposed affinity to nature, see Ortner 1974.) Indeed there exists a distinct body of research that questions the extent to which indigenous societies have exhibited cultures that can be construed as “environmentally friendly” by today’s standards (see, for example, Pine, 1982). This in itself is evidence of the power of the cultural
framing of non-Western others in relation to the natural world. As regards Daoism, for instance, Goldin (2005) takes pains to explain why “Daoism is not Environmentalism.” Although this mis-titled article focusses narrowly on the philosopher Zhuangzi who cannot properly be said to represent Daoism as a whole, its significance, like others of its type referring to non-Western traditions, is that it reveal the normative cultural frame by which such traditions have come uncritically to be associated with ecology and environment. The historical fact that such societies, traditions or groups may not have been as environmentally friendly as moderns might suppose is culturally meaningful precisely inasmuch as it challenges the normative cultural framing of environmentalism.

This reverse-Orientalist prejudice is one reason for the role Daoism could play in China’s quest for a sustainable future. Take, for instance, the way Daoism has been framed by Doris LaChapelle:

Now after all these years of gradual, deepening understanding of the [D]aoist way, I can state categorically that all these frantic last-minute efforts of our Western world to latch on to some “new idea” for saving the earth are unnecessary. It’s been done for us already—thousands of years ago—by the Taoists. We can drop all that frantic effort and begin following the way of Lao Tzu [Laozi] and Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi] (LaChapelle 1988: 349; quoted in Paper 2001: 10).

As Paper (2001) notes, this is a hopelessly simplistic view of Daoism, conflating over two thousand years of tradition with just two Daoists texts. But on the other hand, it would be wrong to dismiss the cultural power that this view may have. Indeed, the views of an academic scholar may pale in significance when faced with a dominant cultural paradigm, ill-informed and uncritical though it may be. If Daoism and ecology are identified in the public imagination simply because they are viewed as others to the dominant discourse of Western modernity, the disapproval of historically sophisticated scholars may be relatively unimportant. Note here that I am not arguing in favour of a kind of expedient ignorance with respect to China’s traditions. I am simply noting that one reason for the possibility of Daoism’s role in China’s quest for sustainability may simply be the fact that it is identified, rightly or wrongly, as an Other to the cultural hegemony of instrumental rationality.

The conceptual (respective) otherness of Chinese and Western philosophy has been noted by new Confucian intellectual Tu Weiming (2000):

The modern West’s dichotomous world view (spirit/matter, mind/body, physical/mental, sacred/profane, creator/creature, God/man, subject/object is diametrically opposed to the Chinese holistic mode of thinking. … Informed by Bacon’s knowledge as power and Darwin’s survival through competitiveness, the Enlightenment mentality is so radically different from any style of thought familiar to the Chinese mind that it challenges all dimensions of the Sinic world.

In this argument, Tu is explaining why Chinese modernizers paradoxically embraced Western values in their quest for national autonomy: it was, he argues, a strategic necessity. As such, the rejection of Chinese tradition is not, as it were, an ontological necessity for modern
China, but simply an expedient necessity that may be reversed. As China experiences the downside of Western-style industrial modernization, it is no surprise that it should once again return to its traditions, in a kind of “back to the future” moment: since modernization and Westernization were conflated in the politically-expedient cultural sleight-of-hand of China’s modernizers, logic would dictate that a questioning of those values should create cultural space for the reassessment and re-emergence of China’s traditions.

This is not to say, however, that the resurgence of tradition in contemporary China does not have its critics. He Zuoxiu, a noted theoretical physicist closely allied to the Communist Party, sparked a debate about the unscientific nature of Chinese medicine, and in 2005 engaged in a debate with environmentalists over whether or not the concept of “revering nature” (jingwei ziran 敬畏自然) was anti-scientific. He wrote (2005: 20):

I want to challenge the contention that people ought to respect and hold nature in awe, advanced by one professor. He asserts that mankind should not use science and technology to transform nature, but maintain an attitude of respect and awe. Such an attitude is “anti-science,” especially when we are confronting natural disasters like the tsunami or epidemic outbreaks. I hold the opposite view. We human beings should try our best to prevent and reduce losses incurred in natural disasters. Reverence and awe make no sense.

As this excerpt notes, science is associated with humanistic progress; conversely, being “anti-science” is regarded as a kind of reactionary nonsense. This is, in fact, an argument that goes back to the early days of China’s modernization. In 1915, Chen Duxiu, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, published a famous essay in his journal New Youth (Xin qingnian 新青年), in which he called for a new kind of leader to help modernize China: someone who was independent, not servile; progressive, not conservative; aggressive not retiring; and cosmopolitan, not isolationist (see Lawrance 2004: 2-3; Miller 2006: 31). This value system was used in particular to attack China’s traditional monastic forms of religion. Chen writes that “it is our natural obligation in life to advance in spite of numerous difficulties” (quoted in Lawrance 2004: 3). This meant that now was not the time to live in hermitages on remote mountainsides. In the worldview of China’s modernizers, informed by Marx’s theory of religion as a narcotic, to treat nature with reverent awe, or to introduce “spirituality” into environmental issues, could only be a step backwards. From such a theoretical perspective, religion cannot possibly do anything constructive in terms of dealing with environmental issues.

In responding to He’s charge, however, Liang Congjie, the head of Friends of Nature, China’s leading environmental non-governmental organization, criticized He Zuoxiu’s humanistic, anthropocentric values. Of particular interest here is the fact that Liang saw no reason to shy away from associating reverence for nature with China’s traditional values. “Numerous Chinese classical works,” he writes, “have shown that we have always placed great value on nature, far more than just being a tool” (2005: 14). This theme was also invoked by Vice-Minister Pan Yue of the State Environmental Protection Agency as early as 2003. In an essay on “Environmental Culture
and National Revival” he wrote that “China’s environmental culture is an inheritance from and further development of traditional Chinese culture,” and went on to cite numerous examples of environmental values in Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism (2007: 6-7).

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the association of traditional Chinese culture and environmentalism as a romantic return to some pre-modern idyll. Notwithstanding the fact that there is no clear historical evidence that traditional China was any more environmentally “reverent” than premodern Europe (see von Glahn 1988; Elvin 2004), the invocation of traditional Chinese values should rather be seen as a patriotic argument consistent with the development of Chinese national identity. As Pan Yue makes clear at the start of his essay (2007: 1):

The rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a century-old dream—the unremitting pursuit of Chinese people living all over the world. A key foundation of national revival is cultural revival. The rise in the culture of environmentalism in the world creates a great opportunity for the revival of Chinese culture. The development of a socialist environmental culture with Chinese characteristics is to strive for the revival of Chinese culture and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The association of environmental values with traditional Chinese culture is thus presented as part and parcel of China’s quest for self-determination. To be an environmentalist is to be a patriotic Chinese citizen and an advocate of Chinese values.

In the present ideological climate, therefore, while there is space in the cultural imagination within China and beyond for religion to play a constructive role in how humans come to envision themselves in relation to the wider environment, this space is ideologically charged—and by no means uncontested—in China in ways that are different from the West. In particular it seems that foreign religions, notably Christianity, will have little role to play; and there will be more space for Daoism to assert itself as a “green religion” not simply because of the normative taxonomy of “environmentalism” in a Western sense, but because Daoism is the indigenous religion of China. Rarely does Daoism appear in the Chinese press without the epithet “Zhongguo” (Chinese) attached to it. In the pluralist context of modern China, Daoism’s unique identifier is that it is the only truly “Chinese” religion.

**Daoism and Ecology**

Until recently, the main way of assessing the possible contribution of Daoism to the fostering of an ecological consciousness in China was either historical or theoretical. Indeed, the volume of essays produced in the Harvard University series (Girardot et al. 2001), which I co-edited, aimed to provide evidence that that affinity between Daoism and ecology was more than a romantic wish of contemporary environmentalists for an exotic non-Western Other. Rather, environmental values were actually grounded in the worldview of Daoist religion and concretely manifested in Daoist history.

This worldview is founded on the understanding of the “Way,” or Dao, a spontaneously emerging principle of cosmic creativity. This principle is manifested in the transformative powers of the natural world, leading to a core value of naturalness (ziran), and an ethic of non-assertive action (wuwei). Liu Xiaogan (2001:324) explains the
philosophical foundations of this ethic as follows:

Dao represents forever the unknown final reason of the world surrounding us, reminding human beings of their limitations. As average members of the ten thousand things in the universe, humans have no power to do what they wish without facing unexpected consequences. Therefore, prudent behavior and action, namely, *wuwei*, are important and beneficial.

The counterintuitive insight preserved in the Daoist tradition is that awareness of a fundamental mystery grounding the world should impel humans not towards technological dominance but towards creative engagement. In Liu’s terms, the ethic of non-action means “better results, not pure negating of all actions” (Xiaogan 2001:332).

It is also instructive to consider the application of *wuwei* in Daoist history. Take, for example, the early Daoist religious movement known as The Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao), founded in 142 CE, which constitutes one of the two main lineages of Daoism today. In its early days, this movement functioned through a text the Celestial Masters adopted and transmitted, known as the One Hundred and Eighty Precepts (Yibai bashi jie 一百八十戒).

In his study of this text, Kristofer Schipper (2001: 82-3) notes that “not less than twenty [of the precepts] are directly concerned with the preservation of the natural environment, and many others indirectly:

1. You should not burn [the vegetation] of uncultivated or cultivated fields, nor of mountains and forests.
2. You should not wantonly fell trees.
3. You should not wantonly pick herbs or flowers.
4. You should not throw poisonous substances into lakes, rivers, and seas.
5. You should not wantonly dig holes in the ground and thereby destroy the earth.
6. You should not dry up wet marshes.
7. You should not fish or hunt and thereby harm and kill living beings.
8. You should not in winter dig up hibernating animals and insects.
9. You should not wantonly climb in trees to look for nests and destroy eggs.
10. You should not use cages to trap birds and [other] animals.
11. You should not throw dirty things in wells.
12. You should not seal off pools and wells.
13. You should not light fires in the plains.
14. You should not defecate or urinate on living plants or in water that people will drink.
15. You should not wantonly or lightly take baths in rivers or seas.
16. You should not fabricate poisons and keep them in vessels.
17. You should not disturb birds and [other] animals.
18. You should not wantonly make lakes.

In answer to the question why the earliest Daoist communities were concerned with the state of the natural environment, Schipper draws the conclusion that the natural
The environmental functioned as a kind of sanctuary, in the sense of a sacred space, and in the sense of a place of refuge from the human world. There is also, he argues, a more fundamental point at stake here, which is evident in the language used: the precepts are directed at members of the community, and in fact we know that they were adopted as the code of practice for the heads of the Celestial Masters community, known as libationers (jijiu 祭酒).

The precepts, thus, are to be understood not as abstract laws (“it is illegal to light fires in the plains”), but rather admonitions directed at the community leaders (“you should not light fires in the plains”). The implication of the imperative “you should not” is that the libationer himself, and by extension the community as a whole, will suffer the consequences of failing to abide by the precepts.

Concern for the natural landscape in which Daoist sites were located even became a matter of national pride for sites that were the subject of imperial patronage. Mt. Wudang, for instance, attained national prominence in the Ming dynasty when it came under the patronage and protection of the imperial court. The court even issued edicts in 1417 and 1428 to prevent deforestation in the area and to protect the aesthetic balance of religious architecture and natural environment (Yang 2010). Even if the imperial court was motivated narrowly by the desire to preserve a site in which it had invested much religious and financial capital, it cannot be denied that the designation of a particular space as sacred motivated concrete measures to protect the environment.

A second example can be seen at Mt. Qingcheng 青城山, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. During a field visit in 2002, one of the several signs along the path that leads up the mountain recorded the actions of the abbot Peng Chunxian 彭椿仙 in the Repulican era of the early twentieth century. Abbot Peng decreed that all who would visit him “should plant a tree along the mountain path.” This, declares the sign, demonstrates the essence of Daoism’s “return to nature.” Although, according to Elvin (2004: 470-471), such instances were historically the exception rather than the rule, they nonetheless provide a historical basis upon which contemporary efforts to associate Daoism and ecology can be founded.

Such official efforts by the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) go back at least to 1995, the date of their Declaration on Global Ecology. On the final page, the declaration summarizes the ecological aims of the CDA in three bullet points:

- We shall spread the ecological teachings of Daoism, lead all Daoist followers to abide in the teachings of self-so or non-action, observe the injunction against killing for amusement purposes, preserve and protect the harmonious relationship of all things with Nature, establish paradises of immortals on Earth, and pursue the practice of our beliefs...
- We shall continue the Daoist ecological tradition by planting trees and cultivating forests. Using traditional hermitages as an organizational base, Daoists will conscientiously plant trees and build forests, thereby making the natural environment beautiful and transforming our hermitages into the paradise worlds of the immortals.
- We shall select some famous Daoist mountains as exemplars of the systematic task of environmental engineering. We
expect to reach this goal by the early years of the new century (Zhang 2001: 370).

This statement is instructive for understanding the contemporary engagement of Daoism and ecology because it locates this engagement not, principally, in an abstract theoretical statement about the Way of nature, but rather in terms of a practical concern for “environmental engineering,” which is to say, creating a particular type of environmental space that is conducive to Daoist practice. It is worth considering, then, that particular environments might have a topographical as well as historical significance in terms of the practice of Daoist religion.

Although the Daoist priestly tradition is one in which portable altars can be erected at any time and place to meet the liturgical desires of the community, the tradition has also favored specific locations and features for meditation. According to the Tang dynasty patriarch Sima Chengzhen, Daoists should meditate in chambers where light and darkness are in balance, and should sleep in rooms with their bodies facing south and their faces turned to the east (see Kohn 1987). The attention paid to the physical space in which meditation should take place, in this case the meditation chamber, gives a clue as to one reason why Daoists were anxious to preserve the natural environments in which monasteries were located. Such locations might be valuable not simply for historical reasons—that they were “sanctuaries” or “sacred spaces” inhabited by Daoists over the centuries—but because of their particular environments and topographies. Caves, for instance, are of particular importance as meditation sites because they provide a controlled environment that enable the practitioner to focus more readily on the meditative discipline of inner observation.

Indeed one might even make the argument that the urban Daoist’s “chamber of seclusion” was in fact modeled on the cave as the ideal space for Daoist meditation. Following this line of interpretation, it can also be argued that trees on mountains are desirable not only for aesthetic reasons, but because of their filtering effect on the sunlight: ample foliage creates a balance of yin (shade) and yang (sunlight) in the practitioner’s environment and thus lends itself to successful meditation. From this perspective, Daoism can be understood as a religion that demands the preservation of very specific environmental features for the continuance of its traditions. This denotes a religious sensibility that is not always present in other religious traditions and gives a specific reason why Daoists have historically engaged in the protection of their immediate environments. In this regard it may not have been concern for nature in and of itself that motivated Daoist environmental protection efforts but rather a concern to preserve those features of the landscape that were relevant to their religious activities.

The Maoshan 茅山 Declaration of 2008 and its accompanying Eight-Year Plan represents the CDA’s most recent attempt to systematize and oversee the practical engagement of Daoists with their local environments, and in so doing represents Daoist organizations and temples not simply as religious institutions but also as places of environmental education, demonstration sites of green technology, and spaces that are practically engaged with China’s future wellbeing. It is instructive to note that the focus of these plans is not to create sustainable environments in China’s rapidly expanding urban conglomerations, but to preserve a certain experience of nature in mountain Daoism. The association of Daoism and ecology is not general, but particular: it is
focused on specific sites and specific environments.

A field visit to Maoshan in 2010 gave significant insight as to the way Daoism and nature are represented together in contemporary Chinese culture. The evidence suggests that just as Daoist organizations are competing and also collaborating with local governments and other enterprises for control of the natural spaces in which monasteries are located, they are also engaged in ideological conflict over the meaning of these spaces. The battle over administrative control over natural spaces where Daoist sites are located is, like the debate between He Zuoxiu and Liang Congjie, an ideological contest over the meaning of nature. This suggests that in contemporary China, as in the West, the meaning of nature is contested in part by means of its association with concepts such as “the sacred” (see Szerzynski 2005 for discussion of this in the West). However, the precise meanings invoked in the conflict over nature and religion are somewhat different in China.

Evidence of ideological conflict can be seen in the use of signs that aim to offer visitors to Maoshan the “correct interpretation” of the natural spaces through which they are travelling. Two examples of this can be found in the Huayang Cave 华阳洞 and the Feichang Path 非常道. The Huayang cave was a site for Daoist meditation, associated in particular with the Highest Clarity Patriarch, Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536), who took as his epithet “Hermit of Huayang” (Huayang yinju 华阳隐居). The main entrance to the Huayang Cave, however, makes no reference to the religious significance of this sacred space, noting it only as a cultural relic famous for its wall carvings dating from the Tang (608-906) to the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Presently, however, it no longer functions as a living sacred space, but as a “cultural relic” under the “protection” of the Jiangsu Province Cultural Relics Protection Unit. Another sign close gives a geological explanation for how the cave came to be formed. The uninformed observer will thus be educated solely as to the secular, scientific value of the space, whose sacred quality exists solely as a cultural memory.

A slightly different story can be found in the Feichang Path. The term “Feichang Way” or “Feichang Dao” comes from the first line of the Daode jing, which states: “The Way that can be told is not the constant Way.” In Chinese, “not constant” is “Feichang 非常,” and the “Feichang Way 非常道” is a newly resurfaced twisting footpath that leads from the base of the mountain to the temple on top. At regular intervals along the path, verses from the Daode jing are carved onto wooden panels, beginning with chapter 1 at the bottom, and ending with chapter 81, the last, at the top. As climbers make their way to the summit, they are thus engaged in a meditative encounter with the text of the Daode jing, reputed to have been authored by Laozi, the mythical sage of Daoism, later revered as a high god. The space through which the traveller passes is thus textualized and sacralized and, through the encounter with the text, a firm association between the natural beauty of the mountain and the traditions of Daoism is established in the visitor’s experience.

This association is, however, not entirely unambiguous. Along the way it is possible to see evidence of earlier texts carved in rock which have not been restored and are difficult to read. Moreover, there are several small shrines along the path which appear to have fallen into disrepair whether through deliberate
neglect or otherwise. Although the mountain path is a sacred path, its sacred quality comes not from the maintenance of tradition, but rather from the presentation of a modernized form of Daoism, one that de-emphasizes concrete, material religion in favor of the more mystical and abstract verses of Daoist literature. Although Daoism and nature are represented and experienced together, it is a particularly modern, “Protestant” version of Daoism that is emphasized, in particular, a version that finds authenticity in a single founding text, rather than in the complex layers of institutional history.

Two further themes are in evidence in the Maoshan site and exist in intriguing juxtaposition to the nexus of religion and nature. The first theme to be noted is a deliberate attempt to educate people about environmental issues. Again, this is through the use of signs in Chinese and English which urge people to take care of the environment and respect the plants and animals that live in the space through which they are travelling. Such education also extends beyond the open space into the temple, where recycling bins exist side by side with regular bins, and injunctions to conserve water appear by the taps. Such small efforts at environmental education further reinforce the sense that the mountain space and the temple space are particularly deserving of careful respect. Indeed, the paved road up to the top is lit at night by lamps that are charged by solar panels during the day. This sense of environmental care, however, stands in stark contrast to the festive spirit of the many visitors whose principal objective in coming to the mountain peak is to participate in the spectacular and ostentatious offering of enormous sticks of incense. For people who do not get many opportunities to participate in traditional rituals in sacred natural spaces, it would seem particularly strange not to make as grand and joyous an offering as possible. In this sense, the “official” culture of conservation proclaimed throughout the site is studiously ignored by those for whom the site is chiefly a space for conspicuous ritual celebration.

The second theme that is juxtaposed alongside that of religion and nature is that of nationalism. The Maoshan site is significant in modern history not for its Daoist religious associations, but as a site that is sacred to the Fourth Army in its battle against the Japanese who invaded China in 1937. During my field visit, a school of army cadets was also visiting the site, which as well as featuring temples and cultural relics, is the location for a patriotic monument and grand museum dedicated to the army. An informant told me, in fact, that the renovation of the entire site had been carried out by the People’s Liberation Army, including the building of an excellent road to the monastery on the peak. As a result, the entire mountain complex is designated an AAAA tourism site, (only one step lower than the highest AAAAA designation), and it is a site for “red tourism,” a program established by the central government in 2004 to emphasize the “ideological essence” of “communist ideology, traditional Chinese virtues, and patriotism” (Li and Hu 2008: 158).

Conclusions

Historical evidence as well as contemporary fieldwork reveal a complex set of issues when it comes to the relationship of Daoism and ecology in China. These issues, furthermore, are somewhat different from what one might expect based on the normative taxonomy of “environmentalism” in relation to non-Western others, which structures popular cultural (mis-) understandings in the West. Far from Daoism’s
being construed as a pre-modern “worldview” sympathetic to a romantic feeling for wilderness spaces, Daoists have engaged in practical works to preserve specific natural spaces for specific religious reasons. Moreover, under the patronage of the state, whether in the Ming dynasty or today, sacred sites and their environments can also be protected for nationalistic and patriotic reasons. In these cases, the impetus to preserve the landscape of sacred sites may not derive from a particular “respect for nature” except inasmuch as the nature in question is unequivocally identified with a uniquely Chinese heritage. This would be similar to the way in which pandas are protected by the state because of their status as national icons.

Under this complex of cultural meanings, the meaning of “green” spaces such as Maoshan is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, “green” is associated with Chinese tradition and Daoist respect for life and the flourishing of nature. On the other hand, “green” is also associated with a patriotic agenda and with modern technology such as solar panels. The Chinese Daoist Association, in allying itself with a green agenda, is clearly aligning itself with the values of modern Chinese nationalism as well as technological development. In this sense, one could argue that “green is the new red”; it is a symbol for Chinese national identity and the technological development that will ensure China’s survival in a resource-hungry world. If Daoism has something to offer to the greening of China, it is not in the sense of fostering a worldview of a universal ecological consciousness or “saving the planet.” That is a trope that owes its origins to Christian millenarian theology and has little relevance in traditional Chinese culture (Kohn 2001: 379).

Rather, Daoism and ecology engage most clearly in the particular spaces in which Daoists have sought to engage in meditative cultivation. In this regard, Daoist ecology is thoroughly implicated in Chinese national identity. While the abstract modernity of urban living is seamlessly replicated from Shanghai to Stockholm, “nature,” it would seem, can no longer be construed as a universal experience. Instead, nature refers to a quality of experience that is the exception rather than the rule in the banality of modern urban life. In this regard, Daoism can make a positive and unique contribution to the preservation of green spaces in contemporary China. As John Lagerwey (2010) notes, the history of religion in China has been one of continuous contractual negotiation between the state and local society. As much as the green agenda of the Chinese Daoist Association may rhetorically serve the ideologies of nationalism and modernization, it may yet hold out the prospect of protecting marginal, local and natural spaces.
References


3. From the Soil of the Earth: Theology Inspiring Sustainability in Oil-Producing Norway

Jens Bjelland Grønvold

Abstract
How can religions contribute to a more sustainable future? Written from the perspective of a Norwegian theologian, this essay attempts to draft the constructive role religion can play in a rich, oil-producing Western country. With the Enlightenment era, modernism and the North-European movement of pietism as a background, Christianity in Norway around 1960 was shaped by two main factors: The theological idea that man was above nature and the definition of religion as a matter of the private sphere of society. Since then, and inspired by the modern environmental movement, the Church of Norway has attempted to face theological consequences of the knowledge that human impact on the earth is creating an ecological crisis. The result is a reorientation of classic, anthropocentric theology towards a more biocentric theology, in which all of creation is viewed as equally important. But for such a reinterpretation of theology to have an impact on society, faith has to become something more than the modernistic “holding certain ideas to be true, whether they accord with reason or not.” It has to deal with life outside the realm of feelings and the inner self. It has to become political. As a concretization of such a theology, this essay focuses on the “Theology from the Circle of Life” of the Sami theologian Tore Johnsen. From the perspective of indigenous traditions, Johnsen reinterprets the Christian worldview and dogma and presents a theology that invites us to lead sustainable lives. Johnsen’s work is an example of how Christian churches can address the global ecological crisis using their best tool: Theology.

Introduction
The relationship between humans and planet earth is existential. Danger for our planet, means danger for us. The earth provides us with what we need to live, and when we die, our bodies turn to dust and become one with it. We take part in the circle of life here on earth. And as scientists have become aware of rapid changes in the global climate, and our consumption of resources threatens fragile ecosystems, it is necessary to discuss the existential and religious aspects of the crisis we face. How do we relate religiously to the...
How can religions contribute to a more sustainable future?

As a theologian, it is my belief that developments in theology and religion have been important factors in creating the current ecological crisis. At the same time, I believe that theological and religious answers must be part of the solution as humankind seeks a sustainable future. Religious faith can be a very powerful agent of change in the lives of humans; being both existential and visionary, faith can inspire a whole new worldview and give life new meaning. In what follows, I will attempt to answer the question above from my perspective as a Norwegian Lutheran theologian. Still, as I believe that these truly are global issues, I hope that the insights presented here can be valuable also as other religious traditions seek to answer the challenges of today.

In this essay, I will present my suggestion for religiously based commitment to sustainability. Embedded in the reality of an oil-driven Norwegian society, I propose a reorientation of traditional, anthropocentric theology, towards a more biocentric theology. Inspired by the tradition of indigenous religions, represented by the Sami people in Norway, I will show how such a reorientation redefines central concepts in Christian faith and inspires a new commitment to faith-based action in the public sphere. To reinforce these ideas, I will demonstrate how a theology leaning towards biocentrism can criticize unsustainable modern day politics—and inspire societal change. This essay does not, however, present a roadmap of how to get to a utopian (?), completely “green” society. Rather, it presents a tool used by the Church of Norway as it seeks to fulfill its prophetic calling: To call its people to a life in harmony with God, our neighbors and the rest of creation. But firstly, to provide a framework for understanding the context of this essay, I will briefly present the awakening of the modern environmentalism movement that gave us the term sustainable future, the consequences this awakening had in the Church of Norway, and the scope and scale of religion in modern day Norway.

A Sustainable Future

It is not easy to pinpoint the birth of such a broad movement as the modern environmental movement. In different traditions, a commitment to living in harmony with nature has existed for millennia. However, as the world rapidly changed during the 20th century, a new form of engagement was needed—one that would address the perspectives of a modern economy, industry and globalization. In 1962, the New Yorker published over a series of editions, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Later published as a book, *Silent Spring* brought the polluting effects of pesticides on nature to the attention of the public:

Sprays, dusts, and aerosols are now applied almost universally to farms, gardens, forests, and homes— nonselective chemicals that have the power to kill every insect, the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, to still the song of birds and the leaping of fish in the streams, to coat the leaves with a deadly film, and to linger on in soil—all this though the intended target may be only a few weeds or insects. Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poisons on the surface of the earth without making it unfit
for all life? They should not be called 'insecticides', but 'biocides' (Carson 1962:13).

The book established that the rapidly evolving industrialization of Western societies had unforeseen effects on the environment, and that we needed to act consciously in order to protect nature from the harmful results of industrial expansion. The concerns of Carson were elaborated in Lynn White Jr.’s 1967 essay "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis". White pointed out that “All forms of life modify their contexts” (White 1974:1), and that humans too “have often been a dynamic element in their own environment”(White 1974:2). His main point was that our impact on nature had become so powerful that we could not see the long-term effects of what we were doing:

By 1285 London had a smog problem arising from the burning of soft coal, but our present combustion of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole, with consequences which we are only beginning to guess (White 1974:2).

In 1983 the United Nations established the World Commission on Environment and Development. The commission was asked to explore "a global agenda for change" (Brundtland et al 1987) towards a better future for all. In 1987 the commission presented its report, Our Common Future. It addressed how the unequal distribution of wealth and power between the rich West and the rest of the world was holding down developing countries:

The asymmetry in international economic relations compounds imbalance, as developing nations are generally influenced by—but unable to influence—international economic conditions (Brundtland 1987, chapter 3, §3).

With this holistic approach to environmentalism, the report introduced the world to the term “sustainable development”. The commission defines the term as follows:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland 1987, chapter 2, §1).

This goal implies a need for ethical considerations. To achieve sustainability, it is therefore essential that an ethical discourse accompany the development of our societies—a discourse in which we critically assess the way we organize and live our lives.

Interestingly, one of the churches to show the will to partake in such a discourse is the Church of Norway.

Environmentalism and the Church of Norway

The Church of Norway is a potentially mighty organization in Norwegian society, with 79.2 percent of the population as members (Dennorske kireke). As the modern environmental movement grew in the 1960s, people also found it meaningful to engage in environmental issues within the framework of the Church of Norway. Since then, ecology and care for the environment have been discussed in various religious forums. The Norwegian Church Aid, an independent organization affiliated to the Church of Norway, grew to become a leading global actor in the field of relief work and sustainable

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development during that time. In 1996 the Church of Norway employed its first national advisor for environmental issues and the last fifteen years have consequently seen an increased focus on ecology and climate in the church. A 2010 interview with the current national advisor for environmental issues, Hans-Jürgen Schorre, illustrated how the church has battled both itself and society on its way towards a greater environmental commitment:

When formulating a new communication strategy for the Church, we focused on four core values that were to shape the communication of the Church. The three first were openness, presence and honesty. The fourth was to forsake. When we presented this to our communication consultants, they said: “Gosh! How on earth are we going to communicate that—it is negative!” But for us, it was exactly what we wanted to communicate.11

Schorre also shared from his experience in the practical application of the environmental commitment in the Church of Norway. Through his job in the Church, he was a co-founder of Max Havelaar in Norway—a branding system for fair trade goods. He has also been chairman of the board of Grønn Hverdag (Green Everyday), a network organization within the environmental movement in Norway. In a meeting with leading environmentalists in 2001 he was given the following suggestion for how the Church could serve sustainability:

We asked them: “What can the Church do?” They said: “Don’t organize rallies and demonstrations like we can do. Rather, you should teach people to do nothing. To lower their shoulders and calm down. You could introduce something like a ‘silent week’, for example during lent, where people just sit down and enjoy the silence.” […] We are exposed to an enormous pressure, all the time: Buy, buy, buy. The church can offer a retreat from that.12

In 2007, Schorre was one of the main architects of the debate on ecological crisis at the annual Church Meeting—an assembly of elected laypeople and clergy that is the highest governing body of the Church of Norway. The result was the document Truet liv—troens svar (Threatened life—the answer of faith), in which the church passes a resolution filled with radical statements on theology, politics and economics. Among the things decided were to immediately execute a reform to make the organization itself sustainable by the year 2017. It also decided to challenge labor unions and the organizations of employers to recognize their common responsibility in hindering a continued growth in consumption. Finally, the document states that the economical philosophy of growth, which is governing both national and private economies, is immoral. The UN Development Program states that the consumption of resources in industrialized countries must be reduced to one tenth of today’s level to become globally sustainable. Political authorities must therefore execute the necessary reforms and demand something from us all (Den norske kirke 2007:5).13

As both the document and Schorre’s statements go to show, the Church of Norway has ambitions of influencing the development of society according to its religious conviction

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11 From an unpublished interview Feb 5, 2010.
12 From an unpublished interview Feb 5, 2010.
13 My translation from Norwegian.
that the current development and consumption of resources is immoral. This commitment has grown from being the interest of a few Christian environmentalists in the 1960s to becoming a movement deeply rooted in the Church of Norway today. As of December 2010, 207 congregations in the Church of Norway were certified as “green congregations,”\(^{14}\) a certification system governed by gronnkirke.no (translates “greenchurch.no”)—a network of churches working to promote sustainability. To achieve certification, congregations have to have organized measures to improve the environment locally and promote sustainability. It is difficult to say exactly to what extent environmentalism or ecological issues are fundamental to the activity of priests or average church members; there is little or no research available on this. But when the Church Meeting has democratically decided to adopt statements such as the ones from 2007, it represents the theology of the Church of Norway. What can be said beyond all doubt is that there has been a change in theological priorities in the Church of Norway over the last fifty years—and that environmental issues and the global ecological crisis have come out as one of the top priorities today. In its quest to find meaning, the Church of Norway has found that a meaningful life in 2011 is a life that seeks sustainability. It opposes using the earth in ways that do not allow for the rest of creation to develop alongside us, and attempts to face the political consequences of its theology. And to be sure, this is a huge task, given that both politics and the general public in Norway are fueled by an abundant, oil-dependent economy. In addition, there is also the question whether an argumentation based on religious conviction will be heard in modern Norway given that religion’s role in society is not what it used to be.

**Religion in a late-modern age\(^{15}\)**

When I started studying theology at the University of Oslo in 2004, my professors were clear about what paradigm we work within; we are post-modern theologians. The Western, white man’s ownership of Christianity was over and a new polyphony of voices formerly oppressed in our churches was to define new, contextual theologies. Studying the role of theology in the fight against apartheid in South Africa and the role of the Church in the liberation movements among the poor in Latin America, I saw how contextual theology contains an enormous potential for empowering people. But at the same time, when reading Western theological history I realized how developments in religion and society over the last centuries had diminished the role of religion in the West to the point where religion had little say in societal development.

One major challenge for theologians since the Enlightenment era has been how to relate to the overwhelming new knowledge produced by scientists. What was the role of religion in a situation where Darwin gave better answers than the Bible on the question of how humans came to exist? With modernity, a separation of religion from the public sphere, intellect from faith, church from state, and theology from natural sciences was launched. Religion

\(^{14}\) See complete list here: [http://www.gronnkirke.no/index.cfm?id=238402](http://www.gronnkirke.no/index.cfm?id=238402)

\(^{15}\) I am aware that there is vivid discussion going on in academia as to whether we today live a post-modern time or not. As I will argue that the modernistic view of religion still is dominating Norwegian society, I find the term late-modern more fitting. The term late-modern thus denotes that we today live in a time shaped by both modern and radically different, post-modern ideas.
became a private matter—a matter of the irrational, emotional side of humans. The results of this separation are still quite striking: In her article “Toward an Elemental Theology—A Constructive Proposal”, Ellen T. Armour explains that her students conceive religion as primarily a matter of faith, which they define as belief in something even though it cannot be proven. [...] what is fundamental—and salvific—is holding certain ideas to be true, whether they accord with reason or not (Armour 2006:44).

I believe this modernistic view is one that has been able to survive the post-modern scrutiny of religion quite well; I recognize the statement above from conversations with parishioners when I was working as a priest in Norway. The problems caused by this modernistic separation of religion and the public sphere is especially potent nowadays, as it is mixed with post-modern characteristics. Religion has had to tackle the fall of the meta-stories, the deconstructions of both identity and authority, and the claim that individuals are free to construct their own truths. People seem less concerned with epistemology and more concerned phenomenology—a good religion is the one that feels right. My point here is not to evaluate whether this is for good or bad; I would merely like to point to the challenge it creates when working for a more sustainable way of life. Bishop emeritus in the Church of Norway, Ernst Baasland, when comparing environmental commitment in the 1970s and today, writes:

Back then, the modernistic faith in progress and the possibilities of human sense set the agenda. Today, post-modernism, with its chase for experiences and a lacking ability to create collective solutions, is a threat to the environment (Baasland 2007:32).16

The bishop may well have a point. When facing a global ecological threat, institutionalized religions have less authority as prophets of sustainable life in a late-modern age. Men and women of the late-modern age want to find their own place with respect to religion, and in a globalized age, they are able to seek truth in a marketplace of religions, philosophies and faiths. As a reply to this, the Church of Norway now seeks to formulate a contextual theology that can empower people to meaningful, faith-based action. I agreed with Gary Gardner, Director at the Worldwatch Institute, when he said that “the world’s religious (but not indigenous) traditions have largely come to environmental issues late in the game” (Gardner 2006:67). However, I still believe that religions have both tools and perspectives to offer that can lead us to more sustainable lives.

Most importantly, religions can remind us of our place in creation.

**Humankind and Creation: From Anthropocentrism Towards Biocentrism**

In the Christian tradition, the discussion on the place of humankind in creation can be found on a line between the two counterpoints of anthropocentrism and biocentrism. While an anthropocentric theology puts humans in the center, a biocentric theology is a theology where all of creation is equally important. The definition of creation then includes all the living and inanimate things that constitute our

16 My translation from Norwegian.
world, as they are all created by God. Essential for both views are the understanding of the creation narratives in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. The anthropocentric tradition often quotes Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth.” God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.”

In the Lutheran Norway this tradition has gone hand in hand with pietism—a movement that started within the Lutheran church in the late seventeenth century and was a defining factor in Norwegian Christianity for almost three centuries. Pietism emphasized individualism in religion. It promoted the idea of universal priesthood, and stressed that laypeople as well as priests should follow a strict devotional practice and study the Bible closely. Pietism represented an increased focus on the salvation of the individual, typically expressed by the slogan “Jesus died for you.” Positively, one could say that this focus was founded on a belief in the inviolable value of all humans. However, the consequence of such an anthropocentric theology was the devaluation of the rest of creation. If man is special and above nature, then nature is below man. And as natural sciences during the Enlightenment era seemed to explain the ways of nature through scientifically based observations and proofs, a mechanic and instrumental view of nature became the companion of an individualized, pietistic version of Christianity in Norway.

In his essay from 1967, Lynn White Jr. claimed that the anthropocentrism of Christianity was an important historical factor for why humans have allowed development that led us to ecological crisis. White concluded that Christianity, in contrast to ancient paganism and Eastern religions “not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (White 1974). It is hard to dismiss White completely; the view of man as above nature is certainly reflected in modern day politics, especially in the field of energy supply in Norway. While the government is building unsustainable gas-based power plants and searching for oil in fragile areas to feed powerful industries, few—and no one in the Parliament—is talking about the need for actually reducing the consumption of energy. Since a reduction would pose a threat to economic growth—which means, by definition, increased consumption—the only truly sustainable solution remains unthinkable. It would seem that the ideas of growth-based capitalism stand above the needs of nature in a country where Lutheran Christianity still is the state religion.

White’s argument notwithstanding, the Christian tradition has from its very beginning also produced material that emphasizes the fact that humans depend on the earth. Looking at biblical texts, the concept of biocentrism too can be traced to interpretations of Genesis, especially in the second account of creation, found in Genesis 2:4-24. In this account, God creates man, in Hebrew adam (אדם), from the soil of the earth, in Hebrew adamah (אדמה).

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Man is thus not above creation, but made from it, shaped from the very ground he stands on. Adam of Adamah—man of the earth. The connection between the two is further established in the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, in Genesis 4. After Cain has killed his brother, the Lord hears the blood of Abel crying out to him from the earth and punishes Cain by cursing him (verse 10), so that the soil of the earth will no longer be fruitful to him (verse 12). An important point in the story of Cain and Abel is thus that through sin, the connection between man and the earth, adam and adamah, is corrupted. In a biocentric theology, this allegory becomes essential for understanding existence. In this view, a Christian life does not only seek reconciliation with God, but also with the earth.

Throughout history, anthropocentrism has dominated theology. Though we can find sporadic inspiration for biocentrism, theology has generally been shaped by the human tendency to put themselves first. However, in this essay, I shall focus on biocentric interpretations. Although humanity might never fully embrace biocentricity, the global ecological crisis at hand necessitates a turn towards biocentrism—towards a greater understanding of the value of non-human components of our planet. To achieve this, the church can contribute by promoting biocentricity, theologically speaking. Within Norwegian society, we don’t need to look far to find people who have based their worldview on a biocentric ideology. For over a thousand years—before Norway was founded as a Christian country in the year 1030—the Sami people inhabited the northern parts of modern day Norway, Sweden and Finland, as well as the northwestern part of Russia, following reindeer herds across vast areas. Today a largely Christian population—but still in touch with their indigenous roots—the Sami people play an important role in formulating a more biocentric faith in the Church of Norway. In the mentioned Church Meeting of 2007, Tore Johnsen, leader of the Sami Church Council, stated:

The lives of humans are set into the life of the earth. That is the indigenous perspective in this matter. In the age of a climate crisis, maybe we would see that it is by humbly kneeling to the ground that we reach the closest to heaven (Den norske kirke 2007:2).18

In what follows, I wish to draw attention to Tore Johnsen’s suggestion for a biocentric reorientation of theology. I will also look at how such a theology impacts the role of religion in society, as profound changes in theology lead to profound changes in the actions of the Church.

Theology from the Circle of Life

A reorientation towards biocentrism has several implications for the actual content of theology. Such a reorientation is a very powerful process, because when the Church changes its theology, it can change what people actually believe.

Tore Johnsen elaborates his theology in the article “Teologi fra Livets Sirkel” (“Theology from the Circle of Life”), in the Norwegian book Økoteologi from 2007. There, Johnsen explains how a theology based on Sami and North American indigenous philosophy represents a paradigm shift when compared to anthropocentric Western theology. A theology from the Circle of Life is based on the circle as

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18 My translation from Norwegian.
a symbol of a holistic and naturalistic reality. Creation is a community in which all are interdependently bound together. In contrast to the mechanistic view of nature, in which God is depicted transcendentally, Sami theology states that nature itself is holy. But, as opposed to pantheism, the belief that God is in all, Johnsen professes panentheism—that all is in God. This does not limit God to creation, and allows the concept of God to be immanent and transcendent at the same time: God is both in the Circle of Life and its center.

As sin has entered the world, and shapes the choices we make, humans are able to break the circle by acting selfishly. And as God is in the circle, the broken circle represents both a broken relation to God and to the rest of creation.

In this theological worldview, the incarnation of God in Christ is not just an expression of God suffering with humanity, but with all of creation, as he partakes in life inside of the broken circle. The reconciliation of salvation is consequently not just a restoration of the relationship between humans and God, but between all of creation and God—and between humans and all of creation. It is the return to the complete circle. The act of Jesus on the cross can thus transition from the pietistic “Jesus died for you” to become a cosmic event in which all of creation is restored to completion, a change which is a necessary consequence of our interdependency with the rest of creation. Just as the Liberation Theology of Latin American theologians in the 1960s and onwards chose to change its theological starting point to be from the option for the poor, Johnsen shifts the starting point of the Church of Norway’s theology from anthropocentrism towards biocentrism—the option of creation. With this as a key to interpreting faith, Johnsen points out, it is not just the first article of faith (“I believe in God the Father, Creator of the heavens and the earth…”)) that is connected to all of creation, but also the second and the third articles (“I believe in Jesus Christ…” and “I believe in the Holy Spirit…” respectively). The articles confess God as the Creator of creation, Jesus as the Savior of creation and The Holy Spirit as God’s presence in creation. Johnsen shows that, historically speaking, especially the second article of faith has been interpreted anthropocentrically, as Jesus primarily engages with humans in the gospels. In his own interpretation, however, this is reformulated:

Salvation is anthropocentric in its address. It is directed at humans as the cause of the disharmony in creation. But in this role, humans are the key to bringing creation back to completion. Salvation thus has an ecological horizon (Johnsen 2007: 222).

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19 My translation from Norwegian.
Johnsen’s biocentric reorientation of theology thus conjures an ecologically conditioned anthropology in which the role of humans is defined by its possibilities for either completing or breaking the circle of life. On that note, Johnsen ends his article with the following thoughts:

Our time demands that humans repent in their relationship to creation—and its maker. Mother Earth is hurt, and researchers tell us we have but short time to avoid dramatic alterations to the climate of the earth. In this situation, belief in the God of Life—the maker, redeemer and upholder of all things—should nurture an ecological faith that drives us to new actions and helps us to see ourselves and the mystery of life in a new way (Johnsen 2007:225).

With this last quote, Johnson makes a crucial connection between faith and actions. If a reinterpretation of theology is to have an impact on the world, then faith has to become something more than the modernistic “holding certain ideas to be true, whether they accord with reason or not.” It has to deal with life outside the realm of feelings and the inner self. It has to become political.

**Changing Religion, Changing Society**

The shift towards a biocentric theology encourages changes so profound that they would be a complete paradigm shift within the Church of Norway if achieved. Tore Johnsen shows how such a turn involves a reinterpretation of dogmas, but as we have also seen, the turn towards biocentrism in the Church of Norway has resulted in a new political commitment. While it is a general opinion that religion is a private matter, the Church is making it a public matter, engaging in the political development of our society, bringing faith-based argumentation into the public political debate. This is an essential part of the transformation that biocentrism brings to the church; it leads to a more extroverted form of faith. If the dialectic relationship between acts, policymaking and faith in a biocentric theology is not adequately communicated, it will end up a marginal phenomena, interesting only to academics theologians. But a biocentric theology that successfully transmits the need to act carries an ambitious vision—if we can change what people believe in, we can change society.

In Norway, the environmental engagement of the Church in politics may be especially necessary. As Gard Lindseth, advisor on international issues in the Church of Norway, points out, Norway has a special responsibility because of its status as a major producer of oil and gas. However, looking at the last decades, Norwegian climate politics and Norwegian production of oil and gas have been two distinctly separated spheres. While Stortinget (the Norwegian parliament) signed laws in the 1990s stating that Norway would return to 1989-levels of CO$_2$ emissions by the year 2000, numbers from 2004 showed that the levels had increased by 27% since 1990 (Lindseth 2007:231). Most of the increase came from the oil and gas industries. Lindseth goes on to point out that in the Lutheran tradition, the concept of the two regiments—the idea that the Church and the government are two separated institutions—has kept many in the Church of Norway silent in the debate on sustainability in Norway. But as knowledge about the impact of changes in the global ecology on the poor countries of the world has become impossible to ignore, the Church of Norway has decided

20 My translation from Norwegian.
to voice its opinion resulting in the shift towards a more biocentric understanding of theology and adoption of the idea that what is best for humans is what is best for nature, and that action on the behalf of nature is needed. The question is what, exactly, should it say? On the one hand, the Church of Norway has a history that has taught it the consequences of not standing up for what is right, as witnessed during the rise and spread of Nazism in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. But on the other hand the clergy does not wish to ally itself with political parties. Against this background, Lindseth sketches a possible role for the Church of Norway in public debates:

It should speak morally about what challenges face the earth and Norway. While politicians speak realpolitik, the Church has a long tradition for speaking prophetically. [...] Such a prophetic voice must reach clearly into the public sphere and at the same time be solidly founded in theology and in the Bible. It must not become a voice like all other political voices in society (Lindseth 2007:244).

I think Lindseth’s sketch is one that is valuable as the turn towards a more biocentric theology forces the church to engage in political debate. When the Church of Norway understands itself as a prophetic voice in society, it carries with it the dream that what is broken in this world will one day be healed. But it also carries the task of working every day to help heal what it can, situation by situation, case by case. In this work, the statements from the 2007 Church Meeting go to show that the church has sided with those calling for a more just distribution of resources and an alternative to a growth-based economy. It does not seek to reconcile its views with the current, unsustainable system, but calls for a reevaluation of how we organize our lives, pointing to the dream of the sustainable life it believes God calls us to. A recent example of the potential such a politically engaged prophetic voice can have, comes from Northern Norway.

Making an Impact: The Church of Norway and the Conflict Regarding Oil Exploration in Lofoten

The conflict regarding oil exploration in Northern Norway has been going on for almost a decade. Parts of these areas are vital to the traditional fishery-based economy of the region, and the environmental movement in Norway has been firmly united in its request to leave these areas out of future plans for oil exploration. In 2003, the Church Meeting addressed the issue for the first time. The result was a statement in which the Church warned against expanding the Norwegian oil industry northwards. This provoked Thorhild Widvey, at the time Minister for Oil and Energy, so much that at a meeting with church officials in 2005, she told the Church to stay away from oil politics and worry about filling up its empty seats (Lindseth 2007:241). Her warning was just a taste of what was to come.

In 2006, the socialist-center-labor coalition government presented its regulation plan for all of Northern Norway. The plan, which was revised in 2011 provides the framework for the development of business, tourism and nature conservation in the vast area. In 2009, in preparation for the revision, the news came that the government initially reacted positively to a request from the oil industry to allow a preliminary investigation of the possibilities for oil exploration in the fragile areas of the ocean around Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja,
all noted for their natural beauty. This time, Tor Berger Jørgensen, Bishop of the Church of Norway in the area, spoke up against the government. He was quoted in national media at a rally against oil exploration outside the parliament in Oslo, stating:

We do this because we have a common responsibility towards all of creation; that we don’t use it in a way that will not allow us to survive. This has been an issue the Church has been concerned with for ages; it is a fundamental side of being human that we show respect for God’s creation.  

In a Norway still very much shaped by the modernistic idea of the role of religion in society, the reactions were prompt and heated. That same evening, online news sites were full of famous public figures criticizing Jørgensen for being too political, for taking part in partisan campaigns and for meddling with things that were not meant for him. TV personality and professor in comparative politics at the University of Bergen, Frank Aarebrot, stated, “There is no eleventh commandment that you should not search for oil. This is ridiculous, and as a member of the church, it makes me upset.” In the same article, political editor of Norway’s most read newspaper, Olav Versto, said, “This is abuse of the authority of the Church. It is unwise and an example of how people use their positions within the Church when fronting political issues.” The case seemed clear: The modernistic view of religion would allow politicians in Norway to exploit nature without concern for religiously based arguments for conserving nature. Searching for oil in Lofoten was a matter of the country’s economy, not its spiritual health. Or was it?

In March 2011, Norwegian news media reported that the regulation plan for Northern Norway had been postponed many times over the controversy concerning oil exploration in Lofoten. The government was split; the Socialist Party and the Center Party both wanted a ban, while the dominating Labor Party wanted exploration. On March 10, it was reported that the government had reached a compromise: There would be no preliminary investigations for oil exploration in Lofoten for the next few years. For the first time in a very long time, the powerful coalition of the Labor Party, labor unions and the oil industry suffered a political defeat in spite of using their resources aggressively. For the environmental movement—including the Church of Norway—it was a success. Of course, no one knows what would have happened if the Church of Norway remained silent—but it seems likely that Bishop Jørgensen’s theological approach to the issue, naming Lofoten as “God’s creation”, challenged pro-exploration lobbyists’ focus on the economical upside of a possible future oil-exploration in the area and widened the scope of the discussion.

The case of oil exploration in Lofoten and surrounding areas is a useful example of how a theological orientation towards biocentrism reshapes the role of religion in society. It is also a good demonstration of how biocentrism is not merely a utopian vision of society, but a theological tool for churches around the world.

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23 Ibid.

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24 Aftenposten, March 10 2011: http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article4056735.cee
Speaking of the inviolable value of God’s creation, Bishop Jørgensen, with all his credibility as a teacher of morals, helped influence the course of our society, resulting in a more sustainable regulation plan for Northern Norway. The victory does not belong to him or his church alone, but to many parties involved in the case. Still, the important thing here is that the Church played the role of the prophet of sustainability based on religious arguments, and was heard in national media. Change is possible.

A Critical Aspect: Humanism and Biocentrism

So far in this essay, I have allowed myself to present a biocentric theology and the movement this theology is a part of in the Church of Norway, almost as a cohesive evolution from Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring to Bishop Jørgensen’s political commitment for the environment in his diocese. However, the idea of a more biocentric theology has not been spared criticism throughout its development. Most importantly, it has been criticized for losing sight of the humanistic aspect of Christianity.

In 2007, on the request of the Norwegian Church Aid, Paula Clifford of the NGO Christian Aid in England wrote the report “Skaperverkets Sukk og Lengsel - en teologisk tilnærming til klimaendring og utvikling” (“The Sigh and Yearning of Creation – a theological approach to climate change and development”). In it, Clifford attempts to lay a humanistic foundation for theologically based environmental commitment:

The starting point for this report is the fact that climate change primarily is a question of justice. Those who today are hit the hardest by global warming, are those who are the least to blame for it and have the least resources to deal with it. The fundamental theological question we therefore ask in this report is not why Christians should engage in environmentalism—but why they should engage in justice (Clifford 2007:4).25

With this as her starting point, Clifford goes on to promote a relational theology, which is as much focused on humanism as environmentalism: We should fight for sustainability primarily because fellow human beings are suffering unjustly under the current development. On this basis, she criticizes Christian environmentalism (and biocentrism) for what she sees as a lack of focus on inter-human relationships:

Christian environmentalism teaches us something about the relationship between God and humans, God and nature, and human beings and nature. It does not, however, show us anything about the relationships between human beings themselves—which is crucial in discussing the unjust effects of climate change (Clifford 2007:13).26

Clifford’s humanistic approach poses crucial questions. Does a biocentrically-focused theology undermine the crucial step on the way towards sustainability which could craft a new relationship between the rich and the poor people of the world? I hope not. That is to say, I believe Clifford’s idea of the shortcomings of Christian environmentalism applies only if we let the pendulum swing too far. An eco-theology so focused on the human-nature-God triangle that it does not address inter-human relationships has left out a central part of life.

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25 My translation from the Norwegian edition.
26 My translation from the Norwegian edition.
Thus, Clifford’s criticism is a valuable balance to overzealous eco-theology. However, for Tore Johnsen’s theology from the Circle of Life, the point is to construct a holistic theology—a theology in which all sides of life are included and intertwined. It is a theology that will not allow us to forget our human neighbors, as they are also included in the Circle of Life. An important point of the holistic approach is precisely that it expands, rather than limits, the horizon of our theology. Hence an integral part of living out the biocentrically based theology proposed by Johnsen is to address and change the crooked relationships between us that allow the unsustainable and unfair development Clifford describes. A theology inspired by biocentrism does not necessarily fail to address the relational challenge it is that many of the societies hardest struck by environmental change are struggling also with poverty and lacks the resources to resolve the problems they face. But it chooses to see this problem in relation to our mistreatment of the rest of creation as well.

In conclusion, when considering humanism and biocentrism as theological starting points, I am concerned that an eco-friendly humanism would condone the continued subordination of nature by man. Indeed, as this essay attempts to show, a move towards a more biocentric theology is the consequence of an excessively anthropocentric history. However, this movement is not one that rejects the anthropocentric tradition completely; rather it seeks to conserve its positive sides (such as emphasizing the value of humans) while at the same time developing a theology more capable of dealing with the challenges that face us today.

Summary and Conclusions

This essay has been written to answer the question: How can religions contribute to a more sustainable future? Writing from the perspective of a young, Norwegian theologian, I have attempted to draft the constructive role religion can play in a rich, oil-producing Western country.

The role of Christian theology has been in need of rethinking since the modern environmental movement succeeded in spreading awareness about the costs of environmental negligence and introducing the goal of a sustainable global society. As my contribution to this reevaluation, and as my answer to how Christianity can contribute to a more sustainable future, I point to a paradigm shift—redefining both the theological contents and in the role of Christianity in society—that I believe is in the making in Norway. The alternative to classic anthropocentric theology that this essay presents represents a reorientation towards a biocentric theology. Such a reorientation can provide the foundation for action to meet the ethical demands of sustainability. As a goal, biocentrism represents the complete Circle of Life, the dream the church carries with it. But as a tool, it represents the everyday struggle of the church to lead our society towards that dream. As influential and well-organized institutions, Christian churches must now seek to carry their part of the responsibility for how the world is developing, and address the ecological crisis we face using their most powerful tool: Theology.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created – when the Lord God made the earth and heavens.
Now no shrub of the field had yet grown on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground.

Springs would well up from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. The Lord God formed the man from the soil of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. [...] The Lord God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it. (Genesis 2:4-7, 15)
References


Verdens Gang (VG), February 17th 2009: "Slakter kirken etter oljeutspill".

4. Religion and Climate Change in Ghana: Religious Actor Perspectives and Sustainable Climate Change Policy

Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo and Joseph Awetori Yaro

Abstract
The impacts of climate change on the Ghanaian economy and Africa as a whole are already exacting unbearable consequences on people’s livelihoods and government budgets and plans. Adaptation demands innovative approaches based on appropriate perceptions and beliefs of people with regard to the problems at hand. Therefore, religious adherents’ perceptions of the problem of climate change and the corresponding responses they offer are crucial in a nation that is religious. This paper aims at empirically exploring how religious perspectives and responses to the challenges of climate change are relevant for achieving sustainability using the values and principles of stewardship or trusteeship. Whilst offering what we describe as generic causes of the crisis, religious faithfuls also attributed causes to deviations from divine norms and obligations and to foreign cultural intrusions and modernity which have altered the Ghanaian’s relationship with natural environment. All the religions claim their beliefs and practices have high environmental resources that will inform current debates, efforts and practices on adaptation to and mitigation of climate change. There was unanimity on reinserting and reinforcing of the religious values and principles, which requires stewardship of humanity, back into society. This will mean a re-orientation to the sacred interiority of the natural environment.

Introduction
Globally, there is a record number of religions’ involvement in climate change debates both at academic and faith community levels of society. Examples such as the National Council of Churches in US ecojustice initiative, the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) now based in Yale (Wisner, 2010); the Evangelical Climate Initiative in the US which in February 2006 challenged the Bush administration on global warming with their ‘Evangelical Call to Action’ (Wardeker et al., 2009); the World Council of Churches ecojustice initiative’ and the European Society for the Study of Religion and Nature (EFSRE) resident in the Department for the Study of Religion and Archaeology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

A point of departure for this article is that although religions may not be able to provide all the answers to the current crises of the
natural environment, because some religious beliefs, practices, teachings may even contribute to environmental problems, religion may be able to contribute towards the answers. This they could do through enforcing the values and principles by which people live in order to conform to their stewardship of the earth and also by informing a pragmatic public policy ‘which makes use of all the scientific knowledge of nature and associates it at the same time with the deepest insights of religious traditions about the place of man in the universe, his responsibility towards this world which s/he is now able to destroy but not to rebuild’ (Klostermaier 1973: 142).

The main question for this paper is how religious peoples’ perceptions and values of God’s good earth contribute to their responses to climate change (stewardship) and to their resourcefulness to public policy on sustainable development in Ghana. The argument we pursue in this article is that religious perceptions and responses to climate change do influence the values and principles by which religious people live and also for the sustainability of the environment. This becomes obvious in a country such as Ghana where religion still conditions both public and individual lives and largely motivates moral decisions and choices. The argument is explored using the concept of stewardship and/or trusteeship, which has become popular in contemporary environmental debates.

**Sources of data**

The data examined in this study stem from interviews with members and leaders of selected religious groups in Ghana, specifically Christian, Muslims and Indigenous African Religion. Ten members each of the Islamic faith, Indigenous African Religion, mainline Christianity and neo-evangelical Christianity, making a total of forty respondents have been interviewed. Additionally, sixteen leaders of the three religions were interviewed. Among the leaders, were the chief of the Wungu traditional area of northern Ghana, Naa Zoori Saaka and the earth-priest, the Kpanadana, representing the voice of the Indigenous religious leaders. Also three Islamic leaders (Imams) and three leaders of neo-evangelical Christianity, specifically Charismatic churches, were interviewed. For the views of leadership of mainline Christians, three executive members of the Christian Council of Ghana, which represent a broader voice of mainline Christianity, were interviewed. We also interviewed two scholars at the Institute for Islamic Studies who provided perspectives from orthodox Islam. There were an initial qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with some religious leaders in May-June 2010 and additional interviews with members, Imams and neo-evangelical leaders in May 2011.

Our major objective was to explore the understanding of climate change among the leadership and members of these religions; what they perceive as the root causes and impacts of the problem of climate change; how their religious grouping have responded to the problem; and how their religions provide avenues for dealing with the challenges. Assessing the extent to which religion is a force for sustainable action against climate change, is our major goal.

**Changing Climate in Ghana**

Climate change influences temperature, rainfall and sea level, as well as modifies the functioning of geophysical, biological and socio-economic systems. An impact describes
a specific change in a system caused by its exposure to climate change. Over the past three decades, Ghana has experienced about a 1°C rise in temperatures, with rainfall decreasing by 20% and runoff by 30% (EPA 2000D). Based on future scenarios, it is projected that annual rainfall totals will decrease by 9-27% by the year 2100 (Minia 2004). There has been a sea level rise of 2.1 mm per year over the last 30 years with a projection of 1 meter rise by 2100 which will inundate large parts of the east coast of Ghana. Declining rainfall has been reported throughout West Africa over the past 50 years and may be viewed in the long term as part of a general southward shift in the seasonal migration of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) (Weldeab et al. 2007, Owusu and Waylen 2009).

The coastal savannah region is said to be the most vulnerable to sea erosion resulting from rising sea levels. Flooding has also been severe along the sprawling urban cities and towns of coastal Ghana due mainly to increasing frequency of storm activities and poor urban planning. Indigenous fishing communities are affected the most in terms of lost of physical assets and livelihoods. The viability of agriculture in the northern savannah is on the decline due to unreliability of rainfall, which leads to a process of deagrarianisation, as people especially in the dry north abandon farming in search of alternative urban employment or/and relocation to the wetter rural south for farming. The climate change challenge is important because of the direct impacts on the livelihood activities of over 60% of the population who are farmers and depend basically on rain-fed agriculture and the harvesting of free ecological services of the environment. Indirectly, all sectors of the economy and social systems will suffer its ramifications due to poor resilience and capacities.

**Religion in Ghana**

Ghana is a liberal secular and a religiously pluralist country where several religious perspectives contest in the public space, with none of them having the sole right of public influence. Religious activity in Ghana is very vibrant, as there are diverse forms of religions including three dominant faiths such as Islam, Christianity and the Indigenous African religion. There are also minority faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism. Among the dominant faiths in Ghana today it is Christianity and Islam that are most popular, with Christianity at the lead. Omenyo (2006) notes that available data from the Ghana Statistical Service, based on the 2000 census, indicates that Christians constitute 69 percent of the Ghanaian population, Muslims 13.92 percent, the Indigenous Traditional Religion 21.61 percent, and the other faiths 11.82 percent.

The extent of Christian presence in Ghana is such that according to Gifford (1998), about 50% of vehicles have Christian inscriptions and stickers and even business ventures frequently are given Christian names. Clearly conspicuous in the Christian landscape in today’s Ghana are the mainline churches such as the Methodist, Evangelical Presbyterian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches. There are also the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches such as the Church of Pentecost, the Lords Pentecostal Church, the Assemblies of God, the Christ Apostolic Church, Winners Chapel, International Central Gospel Church, Action Faith Ministries, Lighthouse Chapel International and thousands of others all over Ghana. The neo-Pentecostals are particularly
important in the context of this paper because of the orientations and focuses of majority of them on prosperity and material wellbeing – a trend we consider as an important development for the understanding of the role of Christianity, and of religion in the protection and mitigation of further damage on the environment. With an orientation to a dominion imperative which they interpret as manifesting in wealth creation, prosperity and the good life, which they regard as the highest value of being the ‘sons of God’ and poverty, and a life of struggle and hardship being of the lowest value, these neo-evangelicals strive for affluence, opulence and environmentally worrying lifestyles.

On the Islamic front, there have been developments in terms of size and forms emerging from doctrinal differences and theological orientations. Conspicuously present on the Ghanaian religious scene are Muslims from two main groups: the Orthodox (Sunnī) and the Ahmadiyas. The Sunnis are further divided into two groups namely the Al-Tijaniyah and the Al-Sunnah. There are further undocumented sources indicating that there is emerging a Shi’ite grouping as one of the main Islamic groups in Ghana.

The indigenous religion of Africa, otherwise known as African Traditional Religion, is also very vibrant in Ghana today, not least within the context of environmentalism. Whilst the view is held that modernity and foreign religions have impacted negatively on the indigenous religions of Africa, there are evidences of, at least, religious objects, symbols, rituals and functions that attest to the continuous existence of the ancient faith. While very recent data is unavailable, the prevalence of African traditional religion is indicated, at least, in the frequent claims and invocations of indigenous traditional worldviews and teachings on the natural environment as resources for ecological management in Ghana. This has been one area the Environmental Protection Agency of Ghana focuses on, as exemplified by their publication *Biodiversity Conservation: Traditional Knowledge and Modern Concepts* (Amlalo et al. 1998).

**The Stewardship Ideal**

From a religious perspective, the stewardship ideal is that which considers humankind as stewards in the care of God’s creation and the term stewardship is used in this broader sense to explain the expected role (responsibilities) of man in nature. The view further attests that humans are trustees and, as a trustee, they are not only responsible for the care of the earth but they are also answerable for the way they deliver their roles as stewards (Attfield 2003). In the context of environmental challenges, present human beings will be answerable to both God, the present generation of humanity and also to future generations who will inherit their environmental legacy.

In Ghana there is the agreement in all the three religions that humans do not own the earth but the earth belongs to the Ultimate reality and that humans are just vice-regents with the responsibility of superintending over the earth as stewards. All these faiths have ascribed a supernatural origin to the created order. They all have stories of the beginning which indicate that an Ultimate Being is behind the creation and who created it perfectly for human habitation. As a result of this notion of the earth as not owned by humankind and that humans are stewards of the earth, it makes it a religious and moral duty for people who ascribe a divine origin to the earth to turn towards the earth.
For instance in Ps 24:1 of the Bible the earth is understood as belonging to God with land understood to be held as leasehold (Lev 25:23) and is subject to ethical conditions including taking care of the poor (Lev 25; Deut 15) (Attfield 2003). Furthermore, there is an argument to the effect that the fate of the earth is linked to the fate of humanity to the extent that it is only the goodwill and responsible stewardship of the human beings that guarantees a thriving earth (see Rom 8:14; Isa 44:23).

Among Muslims, the concept of stewardship is embedded in the notion of Khilafah which is defined as the role of guardianship and which, according to Muslims, is the sacred duty that Allah has ascribed to the human race (Khalid 1998). This is the belief that humankind has a special place in Allah’s scheme, and that we are more than the friends of the earth. According to the Islamic perspective, we are earth’s guardians and this bestows on us a sacred duty or obligation. This obligation is the special place given to humankind to maintain a just balance by recognising the needs of the rest of creation with references to Qur’an 6:165; 17: 70; and 7: 181 (Khalid 1998: 22)

Although the notion of stewardship is not a rigid concept and defies any direct translat ability from Western understandings of concepts, the notion exists in forms of beliefs, norms and practices and rituals of the people. This is more explicit in the notions of land among the people which has divine and ancestral underpinnings. This evokes positive values and a responsible attitude towards the environment. These are seen as duties required of the living by the ancestors and the deities. For instance, among the indigenous Ashanti of Ghana, the earth itself is a deity, Asase Yaa. This understanding has prevented the Ashantis from coveting the earth and destroying it especially during pre-colonial/pre-capitalist era.

Attfield (2003) notes that both secular and religious beliefs in stewardship suggest that human beings are not the owners of the earth but they hold the earth in trust, not least for the future generations. The view further attests that as a trustee, human beings are not only responsible for the care of the earth while using it for their needs but they are also answerable for the way they deliver their roles as stewards. In relation to the choices, priorities and policies that we make towards saving the environment in our contemporary society, according to Peachy (2003: 235), stewardship is “finding the best all round options to mitigate human impacts, not just a few actions focusing on only one type of impact, to the exclusion of all others .... This may require the eliminations of some social ‘wants’, but should be acceptable if we are truly concerned about saving the earth for the benefit of future generations.”

Therefore although there may be variations in the beliefs, norms, teachings and practices, ideally, stewardship according to the three faiths under study, underscores that humans are to nurture and protect the natural world but not to destroy it, because the ‘destruction, desecration, or waste of resources is an affront to the generosity and beneficence of God’ (DesJardins 2006: 39). Stewardship, then, will be considered as a holistic approach towards responsible lifestyles and choices on the earth that we have the possibility of destroying if we lose sense of our responsibility, both as individuals and as groups or communities of people.
Religious Perspectives on Climate Change in Ghana

Religious groups and adherents in Ghana, however ordinary they may be, are becoming increasingly aware of the challenges of climate change. This is corroborated by the well-informed view of Naa Zoori Saaka when he said:

Generally the climate today is much drier and hotter than what we used to experience in the past …. As we sit today, how do you see the weather? It is very warm and that tells you that the situation has changed over the years. The weather is becoming warmer and drier over the years.

Generally, members of all religious groups indicated various climatic change indicators, such as unpredictable weather patterns, drier and warmer seasons during periods that were previously known to be very cold; heavy rains and flash floods as well as droughts and poor agricultural yields. For instance, the Imam of the al-Tijaniya sect stated that, he knows climate change to pose a threat on mankind and its livelihood. His counterpart from the al-Sunnah Sect also stated that, climate change is about the changes in the conditions of the earth different from how it was years back. Both leaders identified environmental change to involve poor rainfall pattern, drought, and diseases among others.

The above confirms that awareness of climate change and the crisis of the environment and their impacts are widespread in Ghana. Religious adherents unanimously mentioned radio, television, newspapers, seminars and conferences as the main sources of information and knowledge on climate change. However, some respondents indicated personal experiences and observation of the environment as another means through which they came to the awareness of climate change. For instance a traditional informant indicated

We see these problems every day. As at now, we want the rain to fall to enable us sow but the place is dry. This wasn’t the case previously. We no longer get good yield, our houses are constantly threatened and destroyed by floods and there are more diseases. This is not how we knew the climate to be in the past. I don’t think we need any body to tell us that, the climate has changed.

Regarding causes of climate change the generally mentioned factors were the removal of vegetative cover; pollution; over logging and the exploitation of natural resources; poverty and agricultural practices such as slash-and-burn; the over-dependence of wood fuel; and lack of proper enforcement and implementation of environmental regulations - basically anthropogenic causes. Some, they believe, are just part of life, when a protestant respondent indicated that

the things we do and the way we live contribute to the problem. Being a Christian does not prevent anyone from contributing to the problem. This is because the things we do are part of our normal life, for example having too many cars. For instance, a Christian will not say that because of pollution he or she will not drive car from home to the office.”

Similarly, a Roman Catholic respondent argues “the cause of the problem is as a result of human activities such as burning of fossil fuel and since the Roman Catholic Church has quite a number of vehicles they are also contributing to the cause of the problems”.

49
Strikingly, there were some responses which are particularly significant because they point to issues of faith and are specific to particular religious discourse. For instance, the adherents of the indigenous African religion believe in the metaphysical causality of things that occur on the mundane earth. Some informants have insisted on the divine roots of climate change which they connect to humankind’s disconnectedness from the divine will. The kpanadana (chief priest) of the people of Wungu Traditional Area affirms this when he sees the triggers of climate change springing from the disregard for the people’s traditions, the violation of the sacred places, and the neglect of the gods—all which have continuously incurred the divine displeasure. This is what he has to say:

Our sacred places have been destroyed and all these cause drought. As we continue to disregard our tradition and violate the sacred places we will continue to incur the displeasure of our ancestors and the consequences are great... We have gods which give rain and when we call on them we get the rains. The current problem is because we have neglected the gods by not making regular sacrifices to them. For instance, in the past, anytime there was drought, we sacrificed animals and dried flour to tingbantitali, (the principal deity) and the rains instantaneously came tumbling in. Today it does not happen. Christianity and Islam are destroying our tradition and we are losing a lot, including rainfall. We are paying the price for the failure of our chiefs to make sacrifices and honouring our gods and ancestors.

The informant’s perception of causes of environmental challenges is that environmental problems are a price to pay for the people’s failure to attend to the gods and their wills. He indicted Christianity and Islam for their role in this process.

According to the two Islamic scholars interviewed, the factors identified as underlying climate change spring from humankind’s irresponsible lifestyles in the world today. They mentioned, for instance, how people recklessly relate with the environment in ways that contravene the responsibilities that go with the mandate given to humankind by Allah to be in control of the earth. This has been corroborated by an Imam respondent who said

Temperatures will rise and calamities will befall mankind due to his bad deeds. It has happened before, when God destroyed generations before us because they deviated from His path. This could be a punishment from God for our bad behaviour despite His merciful heart towards mankind

One other Muslim respondent had this to say:

Man is the cause of climate change. Islam sees man as God’s representative on the earth who has to live according to the wishes and laws of his creator. When he does that, anything he needs will be assured by his creator. When he goes contrary to God’s rules he has to suffer the consequences.

In the views of another respondent of the Islamic faith, people have become disobedient to their creator, adopting Western lifestyle and engaging in all sort of acts that are not acceptable. If God were to have the heart of man, the world should have ended.

He further indicated that whenever humankind goes contrary to the wishes of God they are
bound to suffer the consequences; and they are convinced that global climate change is an attestation of our disobedience to God’s laws. Therefore, our irresponsibility and reckless use of the natural environment and its resources lies at the heart of the problem.

Christian respondents share the view that the will of God is evident in the Bible, where humankind has been admonished to take care of creation. They aver that the attitudes of Christians, which are a diversion from and disobedience to the divine mandate to take care of the creation to a neglect of the natural environment are factors underlying climate change. An Evangelical Presbyterian Christian informant submits that when it comes to the problems of the natural environment

The church seems to have ignored certain important things in life such as environmental issues. For example they focus on salvation and much attention is not being paid to the safe-keeping of the environment.

A leader of a neo-evangelical faith submits that, when it comes to the Charismatic circles, teachings on the environment doesn’t really matter to us a lot. All we think about is prosperity basically. Ministers within the Charismatic domain don’t really think about this.

What is quite fascinating about the responses in terms of causes linked to disobedience and inattentiveness is the unanimous response of informants that they place a sacred value on the natural environment and that they were aware that God is concerned about the natural environment and how humans deal with it.

With regards to the impacts of climate change, there was consensus among informants that climate change and environmental problems affect the living standards of the people, especially the rural poor. Informants identified effects such as drought and poor harvest; unreliable rainfall pattern; desertification and low food productivity; the loss of medicinal plants; food problems (hunger) and the rising cost of living – all which affect the physical and material well-being of Ghanaians. They also mentioned effects such as emigrations of people to urban conurbations thereby leaving the elderly and the vulnerable at home. Naa Zoori had this to say:

Formerly all the people were farmers who rely on rain for their activities. Because our farms are no longer productive, our children are migrating to the south leaving only the elderly ones at home. We also have frequent bush fires, and people going into charcoal burning just to survive. When there are heavy rains too, it destroys our farms and houses. Our Fulani herdsmen are also now on the move all the time in search of pastures and water for our animals. The result is that, we are not able to monitor the animals well and they get lost, while some destroy farm produce.

Our Islamic informants likened environmental damage to self-murder or assassination. In their eyes the destruction of the environment is the destruction of oneself, which goes against a verse of the Quran which states ‘do not assassinate yourself because He is very merciful to you.’ Therefore to induce one’s death through environmental destruction is against God’s laws and will.

While views such as those above, smack of anthropocentric and utilitarian reasons for environmental care, they nonetheless indicate the people’s knowledge of the effects of
environmental problems and climate change on their quality of life.

**Religious Responses to Climate Change in Ghana**

When the Kpanadana of the people of Wungu was asked what the way forward is for climate change mitigation and adaptation, he had this to say:

> We need to encourage people to plant trees; we need dams to store water for dry season farming, empowerment of chiefs to enforce law and order, encouragement of youth meetings and the effectiveness of council of elders and opinion leaders in the administration of law and order.

Firstly, according to some of the indigenous people, some of the typically religiously inspired ways to adaptation and mitigating further anthropogenic damages to the natural environment range from enforcing indigenous religious prohibitions on and ethical regulations of natural resources such as streams and rivers, land and farming seasons; and the maintaining of sacred groves and shrines. However indigenous religious leaders lamented their inability to effectively do these because the secular state has hijacked their roles and that this has been worsened by the infiltration of foreign religions and secular values. Other challenges mentioned were poverty which constrains them from having access to fertilizers and farm inputs and equipment, and which in turn constrain them to adopting environmentally unsustainable and religiously unaccepted environmental practices.

Adherents of the Islamic faith interviewed were of the view that the Hadith and the Quran offer credible and resourceful materials for adapting to climate change and mitigation. They noted that Allah loves the doers of good things. One respondent said: “For example the planting of a tree brings benefits to you while on earth, and after you die you will continue to reap its benefits through people’s use of it.” This he supported with Quran 4:134 and Quran 7:56 which states that “Do no mischief on the earth after it hath been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts) for the Mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good.”

The respondents also revealed that the prophet commands his followers to keep the environment clean and that a central pillar in Islam is cleanliness. Informants indicated that the leaders of the religion try to educate their followers in the provision of the Quran and the Hadith on environmental care. They, however, lamented some inherent challenges that make them vulnerable to climate change and are likely to affect their adaptation to and mitigation of the phenomenon. Some of these are: the high rate of illiteracy which limits people’s understanding of the issues of climate change; the possible misinterpretation of the faith and what it teaches; and the low representation of Muslims in national decision making bodies. They also mentioned widespread poverty as militating against their adaptation to climate change, not least the marginalisation and a culture of apathy towards Muslims in the community.

The Christian Council of Ghana educates and disseminates information on climate change among its member churches through seminars and workshops. According to the Council, this is meant to strengthen the capacity of its member churches to achieve justice, unity, reconciliation and the integrity of creation. The communiqué issued by the Ghana’s Catholic Bishops Council on surface mining at the end
of their 2010 conference and the environmental focus of the recent 2011 Annual Conference of the Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes (GABES) are just some of the very recent Christian environmental concerns and responses in Ghana.

Informants from the CCG mentioned that their churches have dedicated a day of the year known as the Arbor Day for environmental activities, seminars and outreaches. On these days, workshops, seminars, tree planting exercises and clean-up campaigns, mostly in their environs, were some of the activities also initiated from the churches. This is corroborated by a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian church who said:

Our church has an office at the headquarters (Ho) which deals with environmental problems and other issues. We also have a demonstration farm at Akoefe where leaders are sometimes taken and educated on the environment and how to preserve what we have.

Both members and leaders of the neo-evangelical faiths indicated that their respective faiths have what it takes to address the environmental problems and climate change but it is more in theory than in practice. They claim that, although they are aware of the climate problem, they are more concerned with spreading the gospel and teaching prosperity, than being concerned with environmental issues. Members indicated that among other things, their respective faiths can plant more trees and educate the public and members on the need to protect the environment. However, when the question was followed with what their respective faiths have done or are doing, this is what the WC member indicated, ‘none that I am aware of’. Another member indicated that “the major focus of teaching in my church is economic liberation,” otherwise known as prosperity preaching.

Generally, Christian respondents indicated that the resources for adaptation to climate change and mitigation of further environmental despoliation is the Bible which teaches humankind to live in harmony with nature. The Bible contains explicit directions that constrain reckless human activities that spoil the environment. The most mentioned verses are Genesis 2:15, “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (KJV) and Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (KJV). These verses spell out the responsibilities of humans as stewards over God’s beautiful and valuable property, the earth.

However, Ghanaian Christianity is beset with some weaknesses that serve as obstacles to any attempt at meeting environmental challenges. One of these they mention as the misinterpretation given to sections of the Bible, especially Genesis 1:28, “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (KJV)

Psalm 8:5-8 reads,

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;
the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

This is evident in the environmentally disastrous lifestyles and activities of some Christian groups, especially neo-Pentecostals, who derive material prosperity blessing from scripture and who have claimed the earth and its resources as a divine bequest, courtesy of biblical injunctions to have dominion.

**Religion and Sustainable Action on Climate Change**

What has become obvious is that religious groups and adherents in Ghana, however ordinary they may be, are becoming increasingly aware of the climate change challenges. This is because they practically experience and also hear of these changes in their daily lives and activities. What is also evident in all the three religious perspectives on causes of climate change is human individuals and communities living in ways contrary to that expected of him/her by the divine - God. The view that humanity has made unprecedented alteration to the natural environment as results of disobedience to divine laws and mandates is popular in the Ghanaian religious discourse on climate change. Therefore the need for re-inserting the religious modality back into modern Ghanaian society, for a sustainable future, has been advocated by them. For instance, an indigenous informant submits that,

If we uphold the traditions our great grandfathers left for us, the earth would be a better place to live. The practice of sacred places; days people are not supposed to engage in certain activities; protection of certain plants and animals as sacred elements; among others were friendly to the earth. Let’s go back to cherish these things and see whether the earth would not recover from its present predicament.

In other words, religious people reckon that changes in the thoughts and attitudes of people, courtesy of the religious teachings towards the origin, telos and value of the environment is that which is crucial for mitigating and adaptation to climate change. There is unanimity in the responses from the three religions that God is concerned about the earth and its well-being, because God has created the earth for the sustenance of life. Therefore, living and intervening in the rhythms of nature in ways willed of God enhances life on earth and the opposite is also true. These, to some extent, reflect the oft-said religious notoriety of the African (Mbiti 1990) and the fact that in the African worldview and cosmology the distinction between the secular and the sacred is artificial because life in the secular is highly conditioned by the sacred.

Emerging specifically from indigenous African perspective is the apparent panantheist view of the natural world. This is the understanding of the natural world as infused with the divine presence and hence sacred. This view further attests that the divine is involved in His creation to the extent that the natural world is not outside His reach. It is for this reason that in the African indigenous religion, there are spirits animated in trees, rivers, animals etc, while among the Asantes and the Ewes the land itself is a goddess. This view of the sacredness is less emphasised in Christianity and Islam. This deep theological view of the creation demands that humanity treats the natural environment with respect and care.

Therefore from a typically religious perspective one can conclude that generally
emerging from the various religious diagnoses of climate change and what religious stakeholders reckon as a force towards effective adaptation to and mitigation of climate change is humanity assuming the role of taking care of the earth. This is the core of the theological language and/or model of stewardship which we have observed as dominant in the perspectives of the religious stakeholders interviewed in Ghana.

However, there are some theological inconsistencies and practical challenges that have the tendency of limiting the potential of religion in providing sustainable solutions to the problems of the environment.

The first is the understanding and appreciation of the problem of the environment from the typically divine point of view where the causes of the problem, and possibly its solutions, borders on a positivistic response to the will and dictates of the divine. While the notion that the problem may be traceable to humanity deviating from a sustainable approach to the earth is plausible, it is too simplistic to reduce environmental problems to the mere disobedience of the sacred and the neglect of the gods and traditions. This notion is also trailed by the environmental model of conservation which contextually may not be practicable in today’s Africa characterised by high demand for nature’s resources and poverty.

The second challenge relates to the prosperity preaching, especially the neo-evangelicals. This is a theological inconsistency, because these Christians underscore their divine duty to protect the environment and at the same time preach prosperity and materialism and practically engage in profligate consumerism, with disregard to their environmental consequences. Emerging affluent and consumerist lifestyles in Islam can be seen in this light.

An apparent challenge is a seeming inaction by some religious people towards the problem of the natural environment, courtesy of their interpretation of the environmental problem in relation to a realised eschatology. This is the thinking that environmental problems are simply signs of the end times, and therefore humans have no control. The implication is that the solutions are left to God who has absolute control over the earth and the destiny of all.

The challenges posed by modernity and its attendant structures and cultures, especially those of scientific rationality and commoditisation of nature’s resource, condition the functioning of religious modalities today. An informant from the indigenous religion indicates:

Unfortunately, our chiefs have reduced the mother earth to a tradable object with all the disrespect, which is due to greed. The Tindamba (earth priests) were people who understood the language of the land and seek for its protection and pacifying it whenever it was defiled, but today, chiefs for their greed have taken over selling every land including fetish groves. This has brought hardships and calamities on the people.

This, to a large extent, borders on the legitimacy of claims to religious norms and resources as well as their potential strengths and roles in sustainable action on climate change. The authority of traditional religious leaders, specifically, to enforce indigenous environmental regulations and norms is consequently diminishing.
Such challenges are obvious because, according to Beyer (2000) contemporary global society does not have structures that favour and support the religious modality, especially its moral claims and considerations. However inasmuch as Africans lay claims to being religious and religions ‘are of far greater significance than the varying socio-political influence of organised religions would suggest’ (Klostermaier 1973: 140), the relevance of the religious modality in regulating and motivating human attitudes, which unarguably, underlies environmental problems cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, religion and religious perspectives can become very crucial in the regulation of attitudes towards the environment.

Related to the above, is the rather too frequent references to the past when Africans have lived close to the natural environment which they considered sacred but which is not necessarily the case today. As reflected in the statement of the Kpanadana, earlier quoted above, there has been the too frequent indictment of foreign cultural intrusion, resulting from Ghana’s colonial past and its postcolonial ramifications, which have altered this relationship. This is said to have occasioned the coming of the Westerner and his culture which has ushered in a new culture and a new way of seeing the world – modernity. Another traditionalist informed us that

Many lands were considered sacred, not to be disturbed, today all these noble values are destroyed under the cover of modernity and new religions.

It is important to note that such indictments of the colonial past and its consequences, especially in their culture and religious forms came from traditional people. This, we consider as obvious when one considers the fact that the other two religions used in this study are both regarded as foreign with their own cultural orientations and religious teachings that contradict the traditional religious belief in many ways, not least their monotheism, which is a core issue in such indictments. It is important noting that this position has been profound when one goes through the literature on mitigating climate change and the care for the environment in Africa, more typically from those who favour the religions and lifestyles of indigenous people as tutors to the Western thought and way of life and also as a solution to the menace of climate change. However, none of the respondents clearly mentioned colonialism as direct cause of environmental problems.

**Implications for Environmental Policy**

By its nature, stewardship makes practical and actionable demands and widespread responsibilities on individuals, policymakers, communities and societies towards the earth. In environmental discourse the idea grounds and finds expression in the secular discourse of sustainability and sustainable development. It is at this level that stewardship informs policy and is particularly relevant to it. The notion of stewardship resonates with sustainable development which is defined by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) in its report ‘Our Common Future’ (WCED 1987) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The environmental economist P.G. Brown asserts that ‘A much more promising way to think about climate change and the moral
foundations of environmental policy generally than that provided by the neo-classical framework is that of trusteeship’ (Brown 1998:17). While we are aware that different religious perspectives of the creation has the tendency of shifting the type of stewardship/trusteeship in question (Wardekker et al, 2009), and criticisms of stewardship as being too managerial and domineering (see Attfield 2003:23), we consider the stewardship ideal as relevant to climate change policy in Ghana. Against the backdrop of the religious perspectives and some of the challenges outlined earlier, we propose what Wardekker et al (2009) label of ‘developmental preservation’ as foundational for climate policy in Ghana. Developmental preservation is the discourse that shares in the core values and beliefs of those religiously inspired proponents of strict-climate policies, the conservational stewardship discourse, which sees creation as good and must be preserved as it was created, with science and technology seen as possible threats. These discourses contrast developmental stewardship, representing the views of those religiously inspired opponents of strict climate policies. However, unlike conservation stewardship which sees development and technology as threats to preservation and therefore holds a negative view of humanity, the discourse on developmental preservation “holds a more positive view of mankind. It presents a belief in (God-granted) human ingenuity and technological and entrepreneurial capacity to prevent conflicts between development and preservation” (Wardekker et al 2009: 517). Therefore, the developmental preservation discourse, while sharing in the conservative stewardship discourse also acknowledges that creation is changing therefore progress and preservation should be combined, courtesy the creativity and ingenuity that God has given humans to find solutions (Wardekker et al. 2009). We consider this discourse of ‘developmental preservation’ as reflecting the theological position of the three religious worldviews discussed in this study. From the discussions therefore, one will expect that an environmental policy that is sustainable, pragmatic and which reflects the beliefs, hopes and aspirations of Ghanaians, in terms of enhancing the welfare of both humans and the natural environment will be one that blends scientific knowledge and technological innovations with deep religious insights of the transcendental origin, telos and value of the natural world. In line with ‘developmental preservation’ it will seek to use the earth’s resources for the welfare and sustenance of humans while not forgetting and externalising the welfare and sustainability of the natural world.

**Conclusion**

Religious environmentalism has seen a global upsurge in recent decades which is an attestation of how religious groups and people have been paying attention to the issues of climate change. Religious perspectives from Ghana on the issues reveal a blend of religious and generic views. However the religious discourse in Ghana ascribes a divine origin and purpose of the natural world, with a corresponding role of humankind as responsible stewards of the earth. They are to use the earth’s resources for enhancing their well-being and improving their lifestyles while preserving the earth as a divine task and obeisance to the will of the divine. The religious diagnosis of climate change asserts that humankind’s disregard for the terms of their stewardship lies at the roots of climate
change. In other words religious discourse affirms that climate change is anthropogenic with consequences on the well-being of both humankinds and the natural world. They therefore see the need to put in place strict climate policies and other institutional structures that enforce the protection of the integrity and rhythms of God’s good earth from the wanton destruction of humankind.

The analysis of the religious perspective further point to the fact that institutional and contextual challenges within the Ghanaian society determine that climate policies aimed at a sustainable development needs to strive for a balance between enhancing the well-being of the people and improving their lifestyles on the one hand, and maintaining the integrity and harmony of the natural world and its systems on the other, which is the interiority of responsible stewardship ideal they affirm.
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5. Inspiring Sustainability Beyond Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Ultimate Hindu Purpose

Yamini Narayanan

Abstract
The fundamental sustainability tension may be said to lie in reconciling want and greed. This places the human self or the human soul as a moral battleground where desire and duty constantly attempt to triumph over each other. However, desire must be understood and integrated as part of a fully self-conscious human self in order to enable a consistent and unwavering performance of duty. In this paper, I propose the Hindu notion of the Purusharthas or the four-fold path to self-actualisation as one illustrative example of a green telos. The Purusharthas prescribe a path comprising of material and sensuous experience, in obedience to dharma or duty, such that moksha or a state of complete self-awareness may be achieved. I suggest that the stage of dharma is thus where the most profitable connections between Hinduism and sustainable development might be made.

Introduction
Hinduism’s overt emphasis on the self, and the danger of this veering into a legitimisation of individualism and standing in the way of urgent, pragmatic, collective action is often seen as inherently antithetical to sustainable ecological activism, and responsible for sapping the process of its much-needed vitality. While Hinduism does have abundant scriptural wisdom at its disposal and certainly has inspired ecological action such as the Chipko Movement (Dwivedi 2000, Tomalin 2009), it has not played a sufficiently instrumental role in addressing the several and extreme environmental emergencies that India faces today; on the contrary, Agarwal (2000: 172) argues that “certain practices of Hinduism itself contribute to this [environmental] breakdown. Hinduism is a highly individualistic religion. It looks into the self, emphasizing the atman as the key to spiritual ascent.” This, he says, “failed to create a culture in which institutions could grow.” Even the Hindu understanding of pollution is uniquely individualistic, concerned solely about the pollution to the self (Agarwal 2000). Pollution can be tolerated as long it is at a physical distance from one’s self. He argues that the interconnections of the Hindu self with the greater environment are thus weak, which is further exacerbated by the contemporary materialistic society.
Undoubtedly there are many troublesome interpretations and outcomes to an individualistic interpretation of the self. However, inquiries into the nature of the self are increasingly important, even fundamental, to addressing the gamut of global ecological crises. If a distorted sense of self is one of the core reasons for environmental destruction, then reinstating a sense of green, sustainable self must surely be central to its resolution. In this paper, I examine specifically the Hindu conceptualisation of the self as stated in the Purusharthas or the four-fold path to self-actualisation, and argue that embedded within this scripture is a sophisticated understanding of the fundamental human nature which is essential to conceiving of a self-amenable to ecological and social sustainability: that want and desire are central human aspirations. Any democratic collective action however well-intentioned risks failing unless the individual selves that form the collective are oriented towards a greater self-understanding that self-consciously embraces morality and selflessness.

Immanuel Kant, the 18th century Enlightenment philosopher drew the conclusion that the moral life was indeed, the free life, because it was above all, self-liberating. The argument that a selfless life is the most authentic means to human self-liberation and authentic freedom, namely inner freedom and therefore, genuine happiness has extraordinary resonances for a modern consumer society at a time of catastrophic climatic events and sustainability emergencies. The success of the grand meta-narrative on sustainability depends on a fundamental shift in individual human lives. However, as Hamilton notes (2008: 243) the good life based on the enjoyment of material and physical pleasures has its vocal advocates; the moral life or what he calls the “meaningful life” which involves a devotion to a higher cause, based on morality, selflessness and virtuosity, has few champions who may “stir in the hearts of others a deeper intuition that leads them to transcend the phenomenal preoccupations of lives pleasant and good.” And yet it is clear that the transformation towards more sustainable lives in order to preserve the planet’s integrity and future must occur in both the deeply personal as well as the political realms. Hamilton (2008: xii) writes:

The source for the kind of transformation that is now needed lies beyond the cultural, political and social philosophies that have formed the bedrock of progressive thought. We need to look to metaphysics – ideas about knowing and being that are beyond the psychological and social structures that condition everyday experience – to discover what unites us all in our humanity.

It is also clear, nonetheless, that fundamental human nature is characterised by a strong urge to want once need is satisfied. Hedonism or the longing for sensuous and material pleasure is an important aspiration of most of humanity; this basic reality must be acknowledged, for regarding this vital fact will constantly undermine the most committed and honest efforts towards self-development. In my view, the fundamental sustainability tension lies in reconciling want and need. I argue that for the majority of humankind, the material experience is more pragmatically integrated into the journey towards transcending the phenomenal. However, far from recommending a path of untrammelled consumption – which is nothing but the single-minded pursuit of the good life – I suggest rather that self-conscious experience of the good life is a vital way to living the
meaningful life and thus ultimately, for ecological and social sustainability.

Here, one of the world’s oldest political canons on want and need – the Hindu notion of the Purushartha or the four-fold path to human self-realisation offer inspiration. They prescribe a path comprising of material and sensuous experience, in obedience to dharma or duty or ethical values, such that moksha or a state of complete self-awareness may be achieved. The entire cosmos, and the state of moksha of the individual seeker are mutually dependent (Chaudhri 1979), extending self-realisation to “ever-widening identification” with all that lives in the cosmos (Macy 1993). With a secular and a spiritual aspect, the Purushartha offers itself equally to the theistic, atheistic and the agnostic seeker, in its quest for self-realisation.

Inner freedom, avers Hamilton (2008) is perfect, authentic freedom. In a similar way, Gandhi (1949) also argued that self-liberation was perfect freedom, and he was convinced that perfect freedom for individuals would lead to a perfect society. The Purushartha teach that ultimate bliss through complete self-consciousness or self-realisation is possible only by adhering to a moral life. The moral life – seen another way, a sustainable life – is thus the means to the end – the end, which may be variously understood as inner freedom, self-liberation or moksha.

Sustainability is a “fuzzy concept” (Markusen 2003: 702) and yet, it not necessary to be clear on the notion for the purposes of this paper. The state of moksha – or inner freedom – or indeed, a sustainable society – is indescribable – however, the Purushartha offer the means to the goal, through self-conscious experience of want and desire. They convey that once the goal is clear, it was more important to focus on the means used to reach the goal (Kuppuswamy 1977).

Thus in this paper, I propose that the experience of want is a necessary part of the journey towards a meaningful life that can lead to care for the environment and social justice. However, such experience must be shaped by a clear moral code or ethics, which are necessary to drive the individual seeker towards greater self-consciousness, rather than merely encourage consumption. Embedded within the Purushartha are a set of moral injunctions at the third stage of dharma, which has both a secular and a spiritual dimension. The challenge in applying the wisdom of ancient texts to contemporary life lies in finding relevant ways of illuminating and practicing them. The science and methods of sustainability may be enormously useful in informing the secular notion of dharma while the metaphysical aspect of dharma may assist in enabling sustainability. I thus consider that the third stage of dharma is where the most profitable connections between Hindu religion and sustainability may be made.

Therefore, I make a genuine effort to explore if there is any inspiration and merit in enriching the notion and practice of sustainability based on a particular Hindu/Indian interpretation. This paper is thus structured: I first provide an overview of the Purushartha and its relevance and applicability in the sustainability context. Here I anticipate concerns that the Purushartha may be seen as anthropocentric, in advocating and even legitimising material experience, only to serve human self-liberalisation. I then provide an overview of the notion of moksha, the highest aim or what may be variously understood as inner freedom, self-liberalisation, self-actualisation or
transcendence. I also explore moksha as an experience that may be achieved in the current and not in the after-life. In the subsequent section, I arrive at the heart of my paper and propose the notion of a ‘dharmic sustainability’ or a dharma-informed sustainability ethics, which may inform the legitimate experience of the last two notions – artha or the experience of material pleasure and kama or the notion of sensuous pleasure, which are explored in the last part of the paper.

The Purusharthas: A Discussion

Scholars of political philosophy have pointed to the importance of political theory in creating conditions for a meaningful life (Parel 2008). Current global and national politics, in obedience to WTO, IMF and the World Bank injunctions to privatise, consume and follow a neo-liberal capitalism form of development, is largely concerned with creating conditions to lead a good life. In India, politics and religion are tightly intertwined, and as such, politics can become intimately connected with the journey to self-realisation.

In India, after British colonisation, Western political thought almost fully obliterated the function and validity of an older Indian political canon, the Purusharthas (Parel 2008). The Purusharthas literally means “that which is sought by human beings” (Kuppuswamy 1977: 49). The Purusharthas, which seek to create cultural conditions “for the pursuit of the four great ends of life – ethical goodness (dharma), wealth and power (artha), pleasure (kama), and spiritual transcendence (moksha)” (Parel 2008: 41), demonstrably seek to acknowledge the importance as well as the ways of living the meaningful life, through the pleasant and the good life. Artha, kama and dharma fulfil both the secular and the transcendental needs of human beings (Scharfe 2004: 251). However, pursuit of artha and kama does not justify exploitation of social, economic or environmental resources. In the Bhagvad Gita, Lord Krishna explains that correct and steadfast obedience to the first three stages is important to enter into moksha or the fourth stage, which as per classical understanding, releases the self from the pain and suffering of this world, and from the burden of rebirth (Radhakrishnan 2005).

However, moksha is also consonant with enlightenment (Kuppuswamy 1977) and has resonances with Hamilton’s notion (2008: 218) of “inner freedom, the freedom to act according to one’s own considered will [emphasis mine].” Hamilton considers inner freedom to be the only absolute and true freedom and the ultimate human aspiration. Such action through “considered will” or “enlightenment” is necessary for a complete integration of the human self and consciousness with the rest of the cosmos or what we may understand, as the global ecosystem.

Contemporary scholars, in various ways, have pointed to the lack of an adequate social and political context to enable soul-searching, as a critical cause for much of the ecological violence, social agitation and lack of community that we witness today (Tacey 2003; Griffith 2003). The Purusharthas may offer provide again the lost political context, to engage in meaningful self-reflection. Thus in the current political context, in order to reach moksha – or inner freedom – I suggest that a philosophy and practice of dharma-informed sustainability, or a dharmic sustainability, may serve as the means for the correct experience of artha and kama.
The *Purusharthas* offer a particularly interesting context to a sustainability critique. The fundamental tension of sustainable development lies in its ability (or lack thereof) to reconcile want and need, and sustainability is constantly concerned with the question: how much is enough? ‘Restraint’ has been the battle cry of environmentalists for instance, as opposed to the tendency of capital-oriented groups to consume more. Hinduism has often reduced scholars to despair with its range of principles and prescriptions, which are often seemingly contradictory. However, Hinduism is consistent in offering a realistic recognition of human nature and emphasising that want or desire is legitimate.

Want and desire is a critical part of the evolutionary process, both at the level of the human self and the human society. However, the *Purusharthas* teach that wealth and sensual desire are likely to strongly retard the process of self-realisation and distract the seeker; therefore, their experience is necessary for the seeker to be able to revert his or her consciousness back to the main goal of *moksha* or self-liberation. Kuppuswamy (1977) explains that *moksha* is not a state of freedom that one experiences posthumously, but something one strives to attain in living itself.

However, to ensure that *artha* and *kama* are not used to justify untrammelled consumption and self-indulgence, the third guideline, *dharma* provides a critical check. In fact, where there is any apparent discord between the *Arthashastra* [laws governing *artha*] or the *Kamasutra* [laws governing *kama*], and the *Dharmashastra* [laws governing *dharma*], the latter always prevails (Vittal 2001). Viewed in this context, the *Purusharthas* recommend neither self-indulgence, nor self-mortification; rather, they suggest a balanced middle path to livelihood, conduct, aspirations and rapture, and view self-actualisation as a fruit of sustained self-development, rather than divine grace.

The philosopher Wilhelm Halbfass (1994: 130-32) noted in the *Purusharthas* the distinctions of a quintessentially Hindu anthropology, “for these goals, values, and orientations define one’s being and constitute...humanity”. It is tempting – though problematic in the Hindu context – to view humans as being goal-oriented. Indologists such as Erich Frauwallner have argued that the nature of the *Purusharthas* is essentially “a pure nature philosophy” (Scharfe 2004: 258) but others such as Halbfass insist that all stages of the *Purusharthas*, including – and especially – *moksha*, which was added to the path in a later phase– are goal oriented. While some scholars and texts tend to emphasise *artha*, or *kama*, or *dharma* as more important than the other two milestones, the agreement is generally consistent that all three ends are equally important (Scharfe 2004 255). In Manusmriti (2.224, in Scharfe 2004: 255), Manu the law-maker says:

The chief good is said to be [the combination of] righteousness and purpose (*artha*), or desire and purpose, or righteousness alone, or purpose alone. But the correct decision is that it consists of the aggregate of the three.

Thus in its sanction of material want and sensuous experience, Hinduism inserts the critical clause that the path of such experience is merely one stage of the whole totality of human experience and purpose, and for the most spiritually fulfilling experience of want and desire, has to be followed in obedience to what may be loosely understood as a set of socio-cultural doctrines. However, the
fundamental sustainability problem comes from the fact that religious messages are selectively institutionalised. For instance, in the Hindu context, the message of artha is vulnerable to being particularly emphasised over dharma, as a way for a capitalist society to justify its value of over-consumption (Narayanan 2010).

How then might the conversation between the concept of sustainability and these spiritual principles begin? Can a Hindu worldview lend itself to creating a spiritually-enlightened sustainable mindset? One impediment that immediately springs to mind is that the four-fold path in its quest for human self-awareness, appears very human centred. Where is a Hindu concept of nature, and of human beings’ relationship to nature, that is so central to the sustainability concept? A second concern is that at some level, the four-fold path seems to authorise unrestrained consumption and wealth generation, even if it only does so as a learning experience, as an opportunity to discover how fundamentally unsatisfying it is. At the same time, the movement towards enlightenment and self-realisation, and the notion that adherence to conscious and self-conscious living is the route to moksha has clear resonances with the concept of achieving sustainability through judicious utilisation of the earth’s resources and exercising restraint.

The first argument that the Purusharthas is anthropocentric is of concern only if anthropocentrism is to be regarded solely as an eternally offensive selfish human preoccupation, always with detrimental impacts on the social and ecological systems. Exclusive human self-obsession is certainly at the core of the various global crises that threaten the very existence of the planet; it is for precisely this reason that focussed and sustained self-reflection is vital to restoring the order back to health. In his provocative book A Species in Denial, Jeremy Griffith (2003: 24) argues that the near total paralysis of the human capacity to acknowledge or understand the reality of the human condition has been the “agony of the human condition”: “The real problem on Earth is humans’ predicament or condition of being insecure, unable to confront, make sense of and deal with the dark side of human nature.” He refers to Plato’s oft-quoted allegory of the cave as perhaps best illustrative of the notion that humans generally live in a cave and negotiate only with the shadowy, unclear and superficial dimensions of existence, which the “light of the fire” at the entrance of the cave reveals – the fire prevents the humans from getting past it into the natural bright sunshine outside, indicating that the ‘real’ experience of human existence may be theirs if only they work on releasing themselves from bondage. Working with a similar perspective, the liberation or salvation theory that is contained in the Purusharthas determines that the core of the struggle for a sustainable, good life is in the human consciousness or self-understanding.

The second concern about self-actualisation ‘requiring’ unrestrained consumption has been differently noted by American sociologist Ronald Inglehart, who formed his post-materialist theory on the precept that after a sustained period of affluence and materialism, people may become ‘post-materialists’ and place a higher value on life values such as civic life, democracy, nature, and preservation and respect for public wealth. Post-materialism however, he warns, typically depends on a prior “super-materialism” or hyper-consumption. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was problematic, because he also tended to view the process of ‘wants’ leading to ‘self-
actualisation’ as linear. However, the Purusharthas are not a series of successive milestones like Maslow’s table or Inglehart’s index – experience of materialism and sensuous desire is not followed by civic concerns, so much as guided by them. Dharma must constantly guide the experience of artha and kama.

The interconnectedness of the cosmos theory that is intrinsic to the Purusharthas holds a central perception of nature in Hinduism that is interwoven with the goal of self-realisation. The human relationship with nature is that of the sishya or the disciple, to the guru or the master: “nature acts precisely as the human guru does; proposing through words and by example a path leading to insight and realization” (Klostermaier 1989: 320). The pursuit of self-realisation thus inherently encompasses the relationships of human beings to nature. Ecofeminists and ecophilosophers have long complained that human beings tend to disassociate themselves from the natural environment as ‘superior’ to it (Shiva 1993). However, as part of its spiritual practice, Hindu spirituality in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, in fact, extorts humans to elevate nature to a higher status than humans [as their guru], and thus makes care and respect for nature a spiritual duty.

An authentic and true awareness and understanding of nature is believed to deliver the individual from “any need to transform nature into consumer goods” (Klostermaier 1989: 320). The Patanjali Yoga Sutras, for example, speak of the reality of the human condition and its possibilities by meditating on “the nature of nature” (Klostermaier 1989: 333). Yoga may be described as the means of “fitting into the universe”; “the true yogi is a person who ‘fits’ into the whole and thus is at peace with himself [or herself] and the world” (Klostermaier 1989: 333). This sense of complete peace and balance, variously described as ‘self-actualisation’, ‘self-transcendence’, ‘self-liberation’, ‘complete enlightenment’ or ‘supreme consciousness’ is moksha, the ultimate human purpose, according to Hindu religion.

**Moksha or self-actualisation: The Ultimate Hindu Purpose**

In this section, I explore moksha as inner freedom, and suggest that the state of moksha forms the state of a fully self-aware sustainable self, that in turn makes for a sustainable society. The self may be regarded as the smallest unit of the function of sustainability; seen this way, it then also becomes the very core of the function of sustainability. If the ecological crisis may be viewed as fundamentally a spiritual crisis, then the self-development of the individual human self becomes the crux of global sustainability.

Almost unanimously, and particularly in the later scriptures, moksha is regarded as the highest and the most supreme of the four Purusharthas. Moksha may also be described as ‘salvation’ or ‘emancipation’ and in

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27 The following story (Klostermaier 1989: 320) illustrates this. In the Bhagavata Purana (11.7.9), the young saint Dattatreya describes how he achieved self-awareness by following twenty-four gurus, all of whom were from nature. The Earth guru taught him for instance that “existence in a body is a being-for-others to be lived out in humility and forbearance”; the Fire guru was an example by “being full of splendour…not sullied by what is consumed…sometimes hidden, sometimes visible…burning up past and future sin”; even the honeybee guru teaches him to “collect the essence from all the scriptures”. The last guru was Dattatreya’s own body, which vulnerable to both life and death, teaches him to contemplate transience, and makes him realise that the body is really only meant for the service of others. These lessons make Dattatreya aware of the “the true nature of things”.

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classical texts, it refers to liberation or freedom from rebirth (Klostermaier 2004: 288). *Moksha* essentially means the release of the human consciousness from bondage into enlightenment. If enlightenment may be understood to be a state of complete self-awareness, then it is possible to understand enlightenment as a state of “inner freedom...guided by the moral self” (Hamilton 2008: 219). For the self to be guided by morality is imperative in the self’s experience of want and desire.

In order to conceive more fully of *moksha* or the state of enlightenment and inner freedom, the unsatisfactory nature of the mundane human condition is essential to understand. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* thus describes the human condition – that human beings are plagued “by fear and hunger, by old age and disease, by time and matter, by death and rebirth. The satisfaction given by wealth, long life, family, and heaven does not suffice” (Klostermaier 2004: 289). Life defined by material considerations alone ceases to have enduring or meaningful value, and such life is instead regarded as a meaningless cycle that ceaselessly repeats itself. It is humans’ exclusive entanglement in the finite world that is the fundamental cause of human misery; thus, the real evil is not physical deficiencies but “spiritual darkness”, or in other words, ignorance about the true nature of our real self (Klostermaier 2004: 289). The *Upanishad* does not so much denigrate the material world, as seek to acknowledge the metaphysical dimension to human existence. The basis for a good ecological and sustainability ethics may be grounded in both the physical and the metaphysical.

The state of *moksha* or complete enlightenment may be best described, not as a state of “beatitude” but of “power”, of complete self-awareness and self-control (Chaudhri 1979: 314-315). Furthermore, *moksha* is a dynamic state of being as are the other three stages of the *Purusharthas*: they all have an “introvert expression” and an “extrovert expression” (Chaudhri 1979: 316). These expressions are the *Jnana Marga* or the Way of Knowledge and the *Karma Marga* or the Way of Action respectively (Chaudhri 1979). They are both steadfast in their pursuit of “the desire to overcome the limits to human existence” so that they may attain a spiritual experience based on non-attachment (Chaudhri 1979: 316). One of the most beautiful verses in the *Upanishad* scriptures calls thus (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.28):

Lead me from non-being to being;
Lead me from darkness to light;
Lead me from death to immortality.

Inherent in the quest for immortality and indestructibility is the recognition of the interrelatedness of all things. Immortality in this context does not imply the continued life of the physical body. Rather, it refers to the integration of consciousness of one’s ‘oneness’ with the cosmos and thus indestructibility at some fundamental level. The entire cosmos, and the state of an individual’s *moksha* or self-awareness, are thus mutually dependent (Chaudhri 1979). Indestructibility or immortality was possible based on the following premise, which according to Chaudhri (1979: 317) was subsequently validated by modern physics:

[Hindus believed] that behind all manifested phenomena which were subject to change

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28 Physics explains the same in the following way: ‘matter can neither be created nor destroyed’. 
and therefore also to destruction, there existed, consubstantial with them and yet inaccessible to the senses, an unmanifested, attributeless, unchangeable and all-pervasive element which was eternal and indestructible. They also formulated the corollary that phenomena were only parts of a general and absolute reality.

How might such a conceptualisation of moksha have operational resonances in our contemporary lives? Modern religious thinkers such as Gandhi worked ancient tradition with the modernity that was introduced decisively in India through British colonisation, and inspired by the Bhagvad Gita, reconceptualised moksha based on the concepts of satya (truth) and ahimsa (non-violence). For Gandhi, self-enlightenment would be achieved only through social service and by engaging fully with this world, and not through retirement from this world. He was consistent in his belief that freedom from colonial rule alone would be meaningless without authentic freedom or self-liberation and he was no less disciplined with himself in his quest to that end. For Gandhi, freedom or swaraj had four dimensions: national freedom, human freedom, economic equality, and above all, self-liberation (Hunt 2003) and he wrote (1966: xii):

What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of that goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.

The difficulty with Gandhi’s otherwise clear-sighted vision of moksha, however, was his lack of sympathy for the frailty and weaknesses of the human condition. Gandhi believed in absolute abstinence from want and desire, and expected the same of his followers. Nonetheless, Hinduism believes that both experience and denial are valid paths to self-actualisation and it takes the view that experience, as opposed to denial is the pathway for most people (Chaudhri 1979). Gandhi himself took the path of experience as a householder, and embraced celibacy subsequently. However in its quest to conform to a balanced path, the Purushasthas recommend that experience be guided by the dictates of dharma. I suggest that the agenda of sustainability may most meaningfully engage with Hindu religion at this stage.

**Dharma and sustainable development**

In this section, I attend to the core of my argument, namely, that the stage of dharma in the Purusharthas is where the most productive union between Hindu metaphysics and sustainability may be made. This stage offers the most potential to reconcile the conflicting dimensions of want and need, desire and duty, by prescribing that desire be attended to in deference to a set of prescribed code of conduct. This code may be usefully informed by both metaphysical injunctions as well as the voluminous body of knowledge that is now available on various aspects of economic, ecological and social sustainability.

Dharma is not given to exact translation in any Western language, and is variously understood as ‘duty’, ‘law’, ‘righteous conduct’, ‘justice’, or ‘ethics’ etc (Flood 1996: 52). Dharma is one of the most important concepts in Indic

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29 This has also been the path of Gautama Buddha, an apostle of enlightenment in the Buddhist religious tradition.
religions, including Buddhism and Jainism; generally, there is no distinction made between dharma and religion itself. Gavin Flood describes dharma as an “all-encompassing ideology” to govern ritual and moral behaviour. The Hindu code of law, the Dharmaśāstra, provides a set of regulations to govern individual behaviour. Dharma, with its emphasis on ethics, may also loosely be interpreted as law, albeit spiritual law (Donald 2007). Donald (2007: 333) writes:

Dharma in Dharmaśāstra encompasses the prescriptions for, the acts of, and the effects of ritual, purification, diet, statecraft, and penance in addition to rules for legal procedure, contracts, property, corporations and partnerships, inheritance, marriage, and crimes of various sorts. However, no distinctions are made between these rules and acts that would correspond to a distinction of law and religion – they are the same; they are dharma.

In order to contextualise sustainable development clearly in dharma, it is useful to refer to the Bhagvad Gita’s commentary on dharma. The Gita explains that dharma may be fulfilled through both jnanya-yoga – renunciant traditions which eschew material comforts and retire from the world in favour of the pursuit of knowledge of the ultimate reality – and karmayoga, prescriptions for those who choose to follow the path of action. The path of action is the one undertaken by the majority of humankind, and this path is also the path of material and sensuous experience.

At the heart of the Gita theory on dharma lies the clearest explanation in Hinduism of the true nature of the human self. Lord Krishna, in the Gita, declares that it is the ignorance of this reality that causes suffering and misery (Radhakrishnan 2005). The true nature of the self is that the self is separate from activity or action. This does not absolve the individual from the responsibility for incorrect action; in fact, dharma prevails upon the seeker to act according to ethical law. Rather, by separating the self and action, the individual is consigned to neither despair nor allowed to indulge in vanity. Rather, the seeker encouraged to constantly develop his or her self, instead of being bound by resignation or complacency brought on by the consequences of action. In recommending action as a way of realising ultimate reality, the Gita cautions that it be ‘desireless’ action, for it is not action that holds the seeker in bondage, but attachment to the fruits of the action. Mistaking the self and action to be the same holds humans in continued bondage, though karma-yoga continues to impose the responsibility of right action on the doer. Action must be maintained, according to the Gita, for non-action will not release humans from bondage. Dharma or duty must not be neglected. However, investment in action must not go beyond the performance of the actual action itself – and this must also be right action.

The stage of dharma is where the most exciting and profitable connections between sustainable development and Hinduism, and where the most beneficial connections between science and spirituality may be made. Gavin Flood (1996) describes dharma as the syncretic amalgamation of all the wisdom gained by humanity, spiritual and secular. Thus it is here that I propose a notion of dharmic sustainability or awareness of scientific wisdom and material logic that translates into action, inspired by values and ethics. The challenge is to be conscious that desire and consumption are informed by dharmic
sustainability such that an important route to self-realisation is not compromised.

A *dharmic* sustainability would be based on the complementary strengths of science and spirituality. Sustainability planners and practitioners typically have a vision for sustainable development based on their scientific and technical expertise. *Dharma* provides the moral and spiritual basis that is essential for the political and social reform required for sustainability. Importantly, *dharmic* sustainability would depend on the commitment to the ‘right means’. Gandhi (1951) was convinced that the right means would necessarily lead to the right ends; for this very reason, he spent no time on elaborating on the details of an ideal society, and was devoted entirely to the *means* by which such a society might be achieved. Seen this way, if *dharma* is the value, then sustainability becomes the strategy by which to live and realise the value.

This argument is based on my view that sustainable development as action and spirituality as belief are intertwined, and must be addressed together. While the scientific knowledge and logic to be sustainable exists in abundance, spiritual wisdom and resources provide the impetus, motivation and inspiration to be sustainable. Trigg (1998: 70) points out that science alone has been regarded as the “epitome of human reason” and that in contrast to science, religion and spirituality have been considered to be “the product of anything but reason”. The idea that “what was inaccessible to science could not exist”, the rigid and limiting understandings of rationality, and the politics of language, has caused the impoverishment of religion and spirituality, much to the disservice of human happiness (Trigg 1998: 71). Trigg correctly points out (1998: 71): “Science may tell us ‘how’ and religion ‘why’.” Dharma and sustainability may thus provide spiritual and the secular enlightenment – the perfect means to a perfect freedom. In the ensuing two sections on *artha* and *kama* respectively, I discuss the experience of material dimensions of living as guided by *dharmic* sustainability.

### Artha and Sustainable Development

*Artha* or the pursuit of material wealth, worldly materials and experiences, has been long recognised, both in Indian and Western philosophical thought, as one of the fundamental driving motivations of human lives. In ancient India, *artha* was more commonly invested with an enterprising or an extroverted dimension, of attending ‘to the matter at hand’ (Scharfe 2004) but post-Buddhist influences clarified the notion more specifically, “as ‘object’ or ‘objective’ of various actions, and *artha* acquired meanings of substantial and material content” (Scharfe 2004: 249). In Kautilya’s *Arthashastras*, one of the most authoritative treatises on *artha*, *artha* also refers to a range of political goals such as good statecraft and political duties, and an “object of commerce or agriculture” (Scharfe 2004: 249), the pursuit of which is central to the process of settling down to the privileges and duties of a householder. As such, *artha* has two major aspects – good statecraft, and pursuit of personal wealth, and is as such, “a secular, not religious category” (Parel 2008: 53).

The *Arthashastras* recognised that a healthy society and state require economic growth and political participation. Therefore, the state was deeply invested in the married life of the individual for it was only the householder who
was engaged in activities related to economic development of the state such as the production of food and goods, and paying taxes (Scharfe 2004: 261). Wandering monks and saints, who are held in esteem in more ascetic Indic religions such as Jainism and Buddhism, are regarded with some impatience in Hinduism, unless they have devoted an earlier part of their lives to some form of economic labour (Scharfe 2004: 261). Thus work, which forms the central means of barter within economics, assumes a higher implication as dharma or duty in the value system of spiritual economics informed by artha. Spangler (1983) comments thus:

To work lies at the heart of being human. It is a gift itself, the gift of being productive, of honing our talents, of expressing our creativity, of enriching the whole of which we are also a part...in a physical economy, we seek work as necessary for survival; in a spiritual economy, work is necessary for growth [emphasis mine].

Without explicitly intending to, Mahatma Gandhi infused artha with meanings of dharma through service, by arguing that work within economics was synonymous with self-reliance, which he deemed necessary for healthy economies, particularly indigenous and local ones (Iyer 1990). Swadeshi calls for dedicating one’s work and services to the interests of one’s immediate community, and requires one to discharge one’s legitimate duties in obedience to dharma through fair and not foul means. The Sarvodaya Shramananda Movement in Sri Lanka, the Chipko Movement in India, the Swadhyayaya Movement in India etc are all successful examples of the integration of spirituality and economics in order to achieve social justice and environmental preservation. As Sfeir-Younis (2001) argues, in order to witness a truly meaningful “transformation of the world”, it is imperative to practise economics differently, because it is not possible to practise economics in a “moral, ethical and spiritual vacuum”. Gandhi said (Iyer 1990: 366): “Swadeshi contains pure economics.”

The second major dimension to artha is the recognition that wealth provides personal gratification. The scriptures note that wealth may be experienced by human beings in three ways: charitable and altruistic donations, through enjoyment, and lastly through ruin (Scharfe 2004: 260). If it is not given away or enjoyed, it is certain to bring on ruin. Charity is clearly the superior choice; however, the donor is also beholden to be responsible for his own welfare for as Mahadevan (1967: 154) writes: “A certain measure of economic security is essential...to keep body and soul together. There is no virtue in poverty.”

Traditional religious texts have pointed out that spiritually sustainable economic growth is not consonant with no economic activity, for this is needed to raise the poor out of inhumane living conditions

30 In the Dhammapada (No. 203), for instance, the Buddha said, “one of the causes of immorality and crimes is poverty [daliddiya]...rulers should find ways to raise the economic standard of the people” (Rahula 1978: 33, in Mendis 1994: 198). However, in Dhammapada No. 204, the Buddha also said: “Health is the highest gain, contentment is the greatest wealth” (Mendis 1994: 198). Implicit in this is the view that human welfare must be measured in material and physical terms, as well as spiritual terms though complete absorption in material life will lead to misery. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the renowned Indian statesman and philosopher (2005: 192) wrote: “Absorption in the mechanical and material sides of life leads to a disbalanced condition of consciousness.” Jesus quotes from the Old Testament: “Man doth not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3).
material realm, without justifiable need, is to be avoided.\textsuperscript{31}

Consumption is both a personal and an institutional choice and way of living. In the context of Hinduism, the institutional approval also comes from a religious authority – the problem arises when this is seen as being unattached to dharma-based conditions. For example, eminent columnist Jug Suraiya (2007) advises his middle-class readers to go on a “gilt trip”, rather than a “guilt trip” in the weeks leading up to Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. He insists that austerity is the core belief of Semitic religions; he writes (2007): “In the Indian tradition, on the contrary, far from being a sin, wealth is a goddess, Lakshmi, to be rejoiced in and not shunned.” He reassures his readers that they are only doing their “bit for Lakshmi” by indulging in hedonistic behaviour. However, pursuit of artha through hedonism (or through cheating the poor and helpless, intimidation, illegal means, and in current contexts, degrading the natural environment etc) is not based on a desire for a decent and pure life, informed by dharma or righteous behaviour. Pursuit of artha through such means lacks compassion. Artha must come from proper conduct and sources – wealth frittered away irresponsibly or accumulated through hurting others will lead to grief (Scharfe 2004: 254).

Enlightened experience of wealth and responsible spending of resources is thus seen as a critical way to mature self-understanding. Mahatma Gandhi pondered at length the question (Iyer 1990: 94), “does economic

progress clash with real progress?” If economic development means accumulation of wealth and profit without limit, then, Gandhi believed, “economic progress…is antagonistic to real progress” (Iyer 1990: 97). Gandhi viewed “real progress” as the path that lead to moksha. Moreover, as Herman Daly put it, infinite economic growth on a planet with finite natural resources is an “impossibility theorem” (de Fonseca et al 1993).

In a different way, scholars of development have also been recognising that sustainable economic development must be consonant with value and ethics-based spiritual principles, to deliver both economic growth and economic justice. However, modern economic development has capital accumulation as the single most important indicator of success, and such a conception has clearly lead to exploitation of the socially and politically weaker peoples of the planet. Former World Bank economist Alfredo Sfeir-Younis said (2001): “Economics, as a major source of diseases and unhappiness must be challenged accordingly. Economic values and economic decisions permeate almost all we do in this global society and, as a consequence, we see major dysfunctionalities at all levels.” The healing of society would occur, he maintains, only when economics and spirituality are reconciled (Sfeir-Younis 2001).

\textbf{Kama and sustainable development}

In this section, I explore kama or desire, another of the great motivations for human evolution and existence. Kama, popularly translated as ‘desire’ and typically, the urge to gratify one’s own desire, is a constant feature of human experience. Kama is one of the four great ends of human life, as explained in the

\textsuperscript{31} The Bhagvad Gita instructs that the true seeker of spiritual knowledge has to engage with dhyana yoga or meditation to overcome the desire for wealth and pleasure. The Gita explains that such a practise of spiritually sustainable lifestyle must be satatam, or constant (Radhakrishnan 2005: 192).
Purusharthas. The most understood expression of kama is the sexual aspect as described in the Kamasutra; however, Hinduism recognises and addresses several other non-sexual manifestations of kama – for instance, the creative power behind the birth of the universe – and this is what gives desire a spiritual, rather than a purely secular aspect. Kama has undoubtedly led to some of the most impressive intellectual, material, scientific, technological as well as philosophical achievements of humankind. Nevertheless, unselfconscious and unregulated desire is also responsible for some of the greatest human miseries.

Kama typically refers to any desire; in this section, I am specifically concerned with non-sexual desire, focussed on consumerism and the rampant materialism that marks the current times. Desire has been the pivotal force of the modern capitalist society. One of the promises of capitalism was the eradication of poverty through rapid growth. It was also believed that after reaching a certain standard of material wellbeing, human beings would naturally turn their focus on nonmaterial priorities that bring true happiness, such as family, community and the natural environment. However, the focus has been, particularly in Western societies and the middle and upper classes of developing countries, intensified on the accumulation of material and physical luxuries, leading to what can be described almost as a psychological affliction: affluenza. Affluenza-expert Jessie O’Neill provides a description (Hamilton and Denniss 2005: 7):

The collective addictions, character flaws, psychological wounds, neuroses, and behavioral disorders caused or exacerbated by the presence of, or desire for money/wealth… In individuals, it takes the form of a dysfunctional or unhealthy relationship with money, regardless of one’s socio-economic level. It manifests as behaviors resulting from a preoccupation with – or imbalance around – the money in our lives.

High consumption has a high cost “on the overconsumers themselves, on society and on the natural environment” (Hamilton and Denniss 2005: 8). The real issue is not even the material objects themselves, so much as “our attachment to them and the way they condition our thinking, give us our self-definition and rule our lives” (16-17). To “tackle the problem of poverty” therefore, it becomes imperative to first “tackle the problem of affluence” (18).

Poverty and environmental degradation are closely interwoven with over-affluence and excessive consumption.

The rampant desire for material things and power has seen humankind inflict the worst kinds of abuse and humiliation on each other and the environment. Desire may be seen to stimulate a range of passions, including anger and violence. And yet, as per classical interpretation, kama binds the seeker most strongly to the curse and suffering of rebirth – freedom from desire is imperative in order to achieve moksha. This freedom may be attained only through a dharmic experience of desire.

In the Mahabharata, Bhima passionately argues that kama or desire is the most important of the four Purusharthas because it motivates every single other action, and Manu, in Manusmriti claims that there is no such thing as “desireless action” (Killingley 2004: 275). The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.4.7, in Killingley 2004: 276) further states that when the mortal human is freed from all desire, then he [or she] becomes immortal. From this
perspective, the final determinant of moksha or inner freedom or self-actualisation is desire.

The task of market capitalism is however, to constantly stimulate desire by offering an increasing number of choices. The social and economic construction of ‘choice’ by market capitalism can be seen as a major inhibitor of true individual autonomy and hence, inner freedom or moksha. Ruhl (2002: 645) notes that citizens’ choice in democracy is based on the assumption that we ‘own’ our lives, and thus autonomous beings, and also, that we can presume for ourselves free will, responsibility and power, and rationality. It also assumes that we are universally equipped to make the right choices. However, choice can only exist in “the performance of a particular gender”, race, age or ethnicity (Granzow 2007: 49). Rather than an idealized notion, choice is limited to and may even be enforced by the options in the marketplace. The clarity of choice is further confused by its assumed commonalities with “what a lived experience of choice might be” (Granzow 2007: 43). In this way, choice might even be consonant with constraint and control. And choice combined with a lack of self-restraint leads to a weak sense of self.

Cultivating agency may be one way of thwarting such imposed market constraints, by being attentive to the injunctions of dharma on their enjoyment, such as the imperative to consume only those products that are fairly traded and/or grown in deference to ecological sustainability and the principles of social justice. The Purusharthas in fact assume that the right choices can be made only through disciplined self-reflection and following the right path (Kuppuswamy 1977). It may be considered therefore that an experience of kama requires that the dharma of self-reflection and enlightened spending must precede consumption and expenditure.Inner freedom is only possible when morality informs it; “being free and being moral are inseparable” (Hamilton 2008: xii).

It is true that agency is marked by strong oppositions from the dominant culture, and resistances may well be almost unfeasible (Granzow 2007). And yet, constant striving through self-consciousness is what the Purusharthas call for, even as the seeker lives in the material world. To make this possible, they seek to put in place an enabling political context. In a different context, Hamilton and Denniss (2005: 193) also call for a new politics based on “a political philosophy of wellbeing, one that focuses on those aspects of our personal and the social structure that do improve our welfare”, and reverse the process of commercialization.

The notion of kama as a way to spiritual salvation and inner freedom is a highly contested one. The Katha Upanishad (4.2) reiterates the distinction between the search for material and sensuous desires, and spiritual salvation: “Fools go after outward desires; they enter the snares of widespread death. But the wise, who know immortality, do not seek the stable among the unstable things of this world.” The nature of desire is such that it is multiple, and therefore, “time-bound and unstable”; as emphasized by the Chandogya Upanishad (1.10.3), “Many are the desires within a man [and a woman], and multifarious” (Killingley 2004: 276). The seeker thus has to progress from this multiplicity to unity, or a single salvation. The dharma of non-attachment may begin to have deep resonances for sustainability by reducing want, greed and thus exploitation of people as well as resources.
Conclusion
Lyn White’s (1967) famous essay described the ecological crisis as essentially a spiritual crisis. The *Purusharthas* offer a valuable insight that substantially links the ecological crisis to a spiritual crisis. The *Purusharthas* may be considered problematic and offensive when offered as a sustainability approach because of its sanction of material and physical experiences. In its injunction to experience want and desire in obedience to ethical law, it may even be viewed as a life-denying philosophy, rather than a life-affirming one.

However built within the *Purusharthas* is the potential for a truly transformative approach to human wellbeing that provides an introspective context that may ensure that enjoyment of material experiences is consonant with ethical injunctions. The ultimate goal of the four-fold path is complete self-understanding or the attainment of inner freedom, which is vital for an authentic autonomous sense of self. A weak sense of self leads to the acceptance of choices which may well be dishonourable, irrational or immoral, but the need for the weak self to gain social or political acceptance is stronger than the will to make and abide by the right choice (De Botton 2000). The *Purusharthas* are attentive to the consistent strengthening of the individual self, including and especially through the stages of material hedonism and power, by enabling the seeker to make the right decisions on the choice and experience of the stages, thus ultimately seeking to offer a fulfilling and a morally acceptable way of physical and sensuous experience. Indeed, such an experience may be even argued to be necessary in order for the seeker to experience the final stage of complete self-realisation. The stage of *moksha* and the self-conscious journey striving towards it, are essential for a dharma-based sustainability, exhibiting concern for the greater community and the environment. The *Purusharthas* are thus a celebration of life form – a fully self-conscious life form – following a moral path at every stage.

Why is morality to be prioritised over pure hedonism? Innumerable studies irrefutably demonstrate that increased wealth and personal freedom have not served human happiness; rather, depression and an increased range of mental psychoses ail human health. Furthermore, the natural ecosystem itself is at grave risk of collapse and extinction, a reflection of the state of human health. Restoring the human spirit to state of equilibrium is vital to addressing the health of the larger natural order. The *Purusharthas* offer one such path that realistically recognises the existence of human want for denying this experience can lead to a paralysis of the journey towards self-realisation, but suggests that dharma or a moral code governs their experience.

The wealth of information on ecological, economic and social sustainability may be a way of illuminating the ethical injunction of dharma in the contemporary context. The cultivation of human self-consciousness is vital to alleviating the global spiritual and ecological crisis. In other words, for human beings to be happy and liberated, *for dharma* to be truly lived and for sustainability to become a conceivable reality, development policy will have to think beyond technical strategies and analyses, and begin to consider, in philosophical and pragmatic terms, the meaning of life. Such a viewpoint helps in accepting the unknown that is an integral and tremendously influential aspect of human life, and hence, inevitably at the core of a deep and true dharmic sustainability.
References


