DOI: 10.62461/ASVD110125

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Inter-Creationality among the Community of Beings: An Interreligious and Cosmological Perspective

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Reimagining Community

In his satirical novel *Small Gods*, Terry Pratchett wryly critiques anthropocentric assumptions through a deceptively simple question: "Does a falling tree in the forest make a sound when there is no one to hear it?"[1] His answer—there is always "someone" in the forest, whether a badger, a squirrel, or "millions of small gods"—subtly reminds us that the world is never devoid of observers or participants. The forest, like the wider cosmos, is not an empty stage awaiting human perception but a vibrant, relational space teeming with sentient and even sacred presences. Pratchett's humorous quip challenges the reductionist view that awareness and meaning are confined to human consciousness, inviting instead a deeper reflection on the interconnectedness and vitality of all beings.

This essay proposes the paradigm of inter-creationality as a way of understanding and reimagining the relationships among all entities in the cosmos—human, non-human, and inanimate. Inter-creationality is a theological and ethical paradigm that affirms the intrinsic interconnectedness, mutual interdependence, and shared moral value of all created beings within a dynamic cosmic community. Rooted in diverse religious and philosophical worldviews, it recognizes the cosmos as a relational whole where every being contributes to and participates in the flourishing of all. It also calls for moral virtues such as gentleness, compassion, moderation, gratitude, and reciprocity to guide human interaction with the rest of the community of creation. It challenges dominant human chauvinistic worldviews, especially those shaped by Enlightenment

[1] Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods* (HarperCollins e-books, 1994), 2.

rationalism, that regard nature as passive, fragmented, and utilitarian. By contrast, this outlook emphasizes the cosmos as a community of beings, animated by relationality and grounded in reciprocal care.

While the term creation carries theological connotations most explicitly in the Abrahamic traditions, this study adopts an inclusive understanding that encompasses all beings, sentient or not, as contingent and interconnected, whether their origins are understood as theistic, cosmological, or cyclical. Even religious traditions that view the world as eternal, such as some schools of Buddhism or Hinduism, affirm the origination and interdependence of beings within that continuum. Within this broadened theological and philosophical context, creation is not merely a doctrinal category but a relational condition, marking beings not by their genesis alone but by their embeddedness within a larger whole.

This inclusive use of "creation" is not without precedent in interreligious discourse. For instance, the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, comprising representatives from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions of India[2], adopted the term in its 2022 declaration "10 Spiritual Principles for Climate Repentance."[3] In that document, "creation" is used interchangeably with "nature," and humans are described not as masters over creation but as participants within it, called to humility, gratitude, and care. One principle states, "Within creation, and between humans and other parts of creation, as well as among religious communities, there is interdependence… each element both receives and gives influence, impact, love, and growth."

This essay seeks to deepen that vision by engaging religious and philosophical insights from some of the major faith traditions. These spiritual systems, while differing in cosmology and doctrine, each offer ethical and spiritual resources for rethinking our place in the web of existence. This study argues that inter-creationality functions as both a theological orientation and an ethical imperative, one that challenges us to move beyond domination, beyond stewardship, even beyond sustainability, toward mutual flourishing. In a time of ecological crisis and spiritual fragmentation, reimagining the world as a sacred and dynamic community of beings is not just an intellectual exercise; it is a moral and existential necessity.

Religious Foundations for Inter-Creationality

In this section, we present the fundamental religious principles that support the paradigm of inter-creationality. It must be stated that the term 'creation' refers to both human and nonhuman entities within the cosmos. However, for the sake of brevity, in this paper, I will employ the term 'human' to refer to human creation and 'creation' to refer to nonhuman creation. In other places, nonhuman creation will be referred to as

[2] The Elijah Interfaith Institute, "The Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders," https://elijah-interfaith.org/about-elijah/the-elijah-board-of-world-religious-leaders.

[3] The Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, "10 Spiritual Principles for Climate Repentance," https://climaterepentance.com/the-spiritual-principles/

nature. This usage is only for the sake of convention and does not imply that humans are somehow removed from or not a part of creation or the natural order.

Buddhism

In Theravada Buddhist cosmology, all beings live within a vast universe (*loka*) made up of six realms, each with different levels of suffering. The lowest of these is the hell realm, where those who have done great evil in their lives are reborn. It is a place of intense pain, with fire, ice, and many forms of suffering caused by the weight of negative actions (*kamma/karma*).[4] To avoid being reborn in this realm, people are encouraged to follow the path of the Buddha by diligently practicing mindfulness, living ethically, and developing wisdom. Through these efforts, they can purify their *kamma* and move toward a better life and spiritual freedom.

At the opposite end of the cycle of existence (*samsāra*) lies the heavenly realm, the most elevated and joyful among the six realms in Theravāda Buddhist cosmology. This realm serves as a temporary abode of bliss attained by individuals, including laypersons, who have lived ethically and cultivating great virtues.[5] Through the accumulation of *merit* from their virtuous conduct, they are reborn into this realm. Time is experienced differently here; one day in the highest heaven is said to equal 1,600 years on Earth.

Despite its serenity and delight, the heavenly realm remains impermanent.[6] Buddhist teachings say that no state within *samsāra* offers ultimate or lasting happiness. When the merit sustaining a being's presence in this realm is exhausted, they will inevitably be reborn into another realm. Unlike certain Christian conceptions of eternal heaven or hell, Buddhist cosmology views all realms as transient. Even beings in heaven and hell remain bound to the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, interconnected with all other forms of life in the cosmic order.

Human beings dwell in the realm positioned between animals and demi-gods within the six-fold cycle of existence. These realms are interconnected, allowing beings to move between them based on their actions. Those in lower realms of suffering may gradually accumulate enough merit to be reborn into more favorable conditions, while those enjoying the pleasures of heaven will eventually exhaust their merit and return, often to the human realm, before they can attain final liberation. Likewise, human beings who engage in immoral acts can quickly generate negative *kamma* and fall into one of the lower realms of existence. In this view, your favorite pet dog may once have been a human, or may become one in a future life, illustrating the fluid and interconnected nature of all beings in the cycle of rebirth. This vision of reality highlights a central Buddhist insight: human and non-human beings are not separate or isolated, but deeply entwined in a shared journey through *samsāra*. Humans and animals, for

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[4] Punnadhammo Mahāthero, *The Buddhist Cosmos: A Comprehensive Survey of the Early Buddhist Worldview* (Canada: Arrow River Forest Hermitage, 2018), 99.

[5] Roderick S. Bucknell, *Reconstructing Early Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 261.

[6] Punnadhammo Mahāthero, *The Buddhist Cosmos*, 315.

example, not only face similar conditions of impermanence and vulnerability but also inhabit the same physical world. All sentient beings strive for release from suffering and seek lasting peace, making the human journey part of a broader, collective path.

Among all realms, the human state holds special importance. It is uniquely suited for spiritual progress because humans possess the ability to reflect, choose, and act ethically. Through mindfulness, insight, and the cultivation of compassion and wisdom, humans can break free from the cycle of rebirth. This capacity for self-awareness and moral growth marks the human realm as a precious opportunity, one not to be taken for granted. The human experience also offers a valuable balance between pleasure and pain. Unlike the extremes of other realms, life in the human realm provides just enough suffering to motivate spiritual growth and just enough comfort to sustain the effort. This balance prompts reflection on the fleeting nature of worldly pleasures and inspires the desire for lasting liberation.

In this grand web of existence, all sentient beings face common challenges and aspirations. As humans, our ability to reason, choose, and act ethically gives us a unique role: to bridge the gap between suffering and liberation, not only for ourselves, but for all beings. Through our experiences of joy and sorrow, we develop empathy and solidarity with other beings. Indeed, the heart of Buddhist moral training lies in helping individuals move beyond personal suffering and self-interest.[7] It calls us to ground our actions in universal empathy, recognizing that the pain of any sentient being is reason enough for compassionate response. As we embrace this vision, we begin to see the deep interconnection that unites all life, breaking down the illusion of separation and nurturing genuine care for others. In this shared reality, we are called to be agents of compassion, bridging the divides not only between different realms of existence but also within our own human society. Our lives, shaped by both joy and sorrow, become the foundation for developing empathy. With open hearts and minds, we are invited to turn our experiences into a commitment to ethical living, one that honors the suffering and dignity of all beings.

Confucianism

The idea of a shared bond between humans and non-human creation is not only central to Buddhism but also deeply rooted in Chinese religious thought, particularly Confucianism. Although Confucianism presents a distinct worldview, its cosmology affirms the interconnectedness of all beings through a vital force known as *qi*. This life energy animates and sustains everything—humans, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, and even inanimate objects. *Qi* is also the essence of natural elements such as air, earth, fire, and water. The Chinese character for *qi* evokes the image of steam rising from rice, symbolizing nourishment, transformation, and flow. In human beings, *qi*

[7] John J. Holder, "A Suffering (but Not Irreparable) Nature: Environmental Ethics from the Perspective of Early Buddhism," *Contemporary Buddhism* 8, no. 2 (2007): 123.

harmonizes body and spirit by uniting mind and heart into an integrated whole.[8] This holistic view breaks down dualisms—between humans and nature, body and mind, matter and energy, affirming the unity and interdependence of all things.[9]

In classical Confucian thought, *qi* connects the cosmos and humanity and serves as the animating force of both nature and human life. Neo-Confucian philosophers later expanded this idea, recognizing *qi* as the underlying essence of all living things and identifying its presence across both material and energetic dimensions of the universe. From this perspective, the cosmos is composed of layered realms structured and sustained by *qi*.[10] The dynamic function of *qi* is inseparable from the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, complementary forces that shape all existence. Their continuous interplay governs both natural and social phenomena, from the movement of the stars to human emotions. The balance between these opposites—light and dark, active and passive, high and low—generates transformation and maintains harmony in the universe. This ongoing process of change and interrelation reveals the profound continuity at the heart of all existence.[11]

In Chinese cosmology, *qi* operates through the dynamic interactions of the *Wu Xing*, also known as the Five Phases or elemental processes: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Each phase embodies specific qualities: wood (growth), fire (transformation), earth (stability), metal (clarity), and water (adaptability). These are not static substances but dynamic forces that interact in cycles of creation and transformation, shaping both the physical world and human life. The Five Phases influence everything from natural patterns to moral development, and they metaphorically represent tastes, emotions, seasons, and virtues. Importantly, these elements are not seen as separate entities, but as expressions or stages of the life force (*qi*) in motion.[12]

While the precise relationship between *qi* and the Five Phases has been debated, their interplay is generally understood to govern the processes of growth, change, and renewal throughout the universe. This interaction influences the rhythms of nature, the movements of celestial bodies, and the health of human life. Maintaining a balance among these elements is essential for individual well-being and ecological harmony. Although these ideas originated in early Chinese history, particularly during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), Confucian scholars took a particular interest in utilizing these natural philosophical concepts in order to apply to concerns of personal and social ethics.[13]

Confucian cosmology thus reveals a deep interconnectedness between humans and the universe. Recognizing this connection encourages us to live in harmony with

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[8] Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Confucian Cosmology and Ecological Ethics," in *Living Earth Community: Multiple Ways of Being and Knowing*, ed. Sam Mickey, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 111.

[9] Tucker, "Confucian Cosmology and Ecological Ethics," 111.

[10] Nicholas S. Brasovan, *Neo-Confucian Ecological Humanism* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2017), 57.

[11] Brasovan, *Neo-Confucian Ecological Humanism*, 17.

[12] John H. Berthrong and Evelyn Nagai Berthrong, *Confucianism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 61.

[13] Berthrong and Berthrong, *Confucianism*, 89.

the natural world, understanding that our well-being is intimately tied to the balance of *qi* in nature. When this balance is maintained, vitality flourishes; when disrupted, suffering and disorder follow. This worldview underscores the ethical responsibility to foster harmony in all our relationships—with people, nature, and even inanimate things. It reminds us of the ripple effects of our actions, influencing the well-being of ourselves and the cosmos. Self-cultivation becomes crucial in aligning our conduct with the patterns of nature and helps to facilitate the unobstructed flow of *qi* and maintaining order in the universe.

This perspective also affirms a profound kinship between humans and the "ten thousand things" of the universe. Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhang Zai (Chang Tsai) expressed this in his *Western Inscription*: "Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters and all things are my companions."[14] Zhang's words reflect a deeply relational cosmology in which ethical conduct arises naturally from the awareness of shared existence with all beings. He concluded, "In life I follow and serve [Heaven and Earth]. In death I will be at peace."

Ultimately, Confucian teachings emphasize living in accordance with nature through ethical behavior, respect for life, and sustainable practices that promote the flourishing of both humanity and the environment. Since humans share the same life force as the natural world, they can interpret natural phenomena to understand their own lives and moral responsibilities. Historically, Chinese rulers observed signs in nature to assess their alignment with the Mandate of Heaven, a principle linking just governance with cosmic order. This mandate is not discovered externally but discerned through self-cultivation and attentive observation of both one's inner nature and the surrounding world. [15] In this way, Confucian cosmology and ethics offer a holistic vision: that human destiny is revealed through our relationship with the rhythms and signs of the living universe.[16]

Abrahamic Traditions

The concept of inter-creationality within the Abrahamic religions emerges from the fundamental belief that all things in existence find their origin in God. The Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible emphatically affirms that God commanded the universe to come into existence *ex nihilo*. In other words, God *spoke* all of creation into being. The Qur'an frequently presents the natural world as a collection of "*ayat*" (آيات), or signs, meticulously crafted by God, the ultimate Creator (Qur'an 2:164; 6:99; 30:20-

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[14] William Theodore de Bary, Irene Bloom, and Joseph Adler, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 524.

[15] Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46.

[16] Anthony Le Duc, "Becoming Human, Intercultural, and Inter-creational: Movements toward Achieving Ecoflourishing," in *Ecoflourishing and Virtue Christian Perspectives Across the Disciplines,* ed. Steven Bouma-Prediger, Nathan Carson (UK: Routledge, 2024), 179-190.

25). Indeed, a significant portion of the Qur'an's over 6,000 verses delves into various natural phenomena, from the intricate details of plant life and the diversity of animal species (Qur'an 16:10-11; 16:68-69) to the grandeur of mountains, seas, stars, and the sun (Qur'an 13:2-3; 36:38-40). Throughout these verses, God repeatedly calls upon humanity to deeply reflect upon these divine signs embedded within creation (Qur'an 10:5-6; 45:3-5). This invitation to contemplation underscores the understanding that all aspects of creation serve as powerful evidence of God's existence, power, wisdom, and oneness. They firmly establish God as the singular source and sustainer of all that exists.

This theological principle holds immense significance, for it affirms that the universe is not a mere result of chance or happenstance, but rather a purposeful act of divine creation. The notion of creation inherently carries profound implications of meaning, purpose, and order within the universe. According to Pope Francis, the word 'creation' points to "God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance."[17] Rather than something to be studied and controlled, "creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion."[18] Francis asserted that seeing creation as 'nature' may inadvertently reinforce a technocratic paradigm that reduces the natural world to an object of manipulation and control. This perpetuates a dualistic relationship of dominance rather than acknowledging humanity as an integral part of a divinely ordained cosmic system.

The Judeo-Christian tradition gives further support to the notion of inter-creationality by affirming that all of creation is imbued with divinely bestowed intrinsic goodness and value. This was affirmed by various Church Fathers as well as Thomas Aquinas when they reflected on God's myriad creation. Augustine of Hippo declared that all that God created in the universe "both great and small, celestial and terrestrial, spiritual, and corporeal" are good.[19] Inspired by the account of creation in the book of Genesis, Augustine asserted that whether it be a human, an ape, a mountain, a farm, the air, or the heaven with its celestial bodies, each is good accordingly. John Chrysostom shared Augustine's sentiments and argued that since God had already deemed every creature to be good, anyone who harbored a contradictory thought would be committing an "arrogant folly."[20]

Admittedly, among God's creation, not everything is pleasant or beneficial to human life. Indeed, "Among the growth springing up from the earth it was not only plants that are useful but also those that are harmful, and not only trees that bear fruit but also those that bear none; and not only tame animals but also wild and unruly ones."[21] However, the goodness of a creature does not hinge on human evaluation. Thus, any

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[17] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, no. 76.

[18] Francis, *Laudato Si',* no. 76.

[19] Jame Schaeffer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 18.

[20] Schaeffer, *Theological Foundations*, 19.

[21] Schaeffer, 19.

condescending utterance about the creatures which God has created, said Chrysostom, demonstrates disrespect and ingratitude to their Creator. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas, following in the footsteps of the Church Fathers, emphasized that the ultimate source of a creature's goodness is God, who willed its existence. Aquinas taught that each creature possesses its own inherent perfection, instilled by God. Merely by existing and functioning in accordance with its divinely bestowed nature, it demonstrates its intrinsic value. Therefore, criticizing a creature for its inherent nature or way of being amounts to an insult directed at its very Creator.[22]

In this God-centered worldview, the artificial division between humans and nonhuman creation dissolves, replaced by a portrayal of all of God's creation existing in intimate connection with one another, and thus enable the possibility of inter-creationality. This paradigm starts with the understanding that human and nonhuman creation are members of the community of creation. In her book *Ask the Beast*, Elizabeth Johnson asserted that the notion of community of creation is "based on the understanding that humans and other living beings, for all their differences, form one community woven together by the common thread of having been created by God."[23] According to Johnson, this vision of community of creation can be found in the Book of Job of the Hebrew Bible, which considerably challenges human arrogance as well as redefines humanity's place in the universe.

Through God's speech from the whirlwind (Job 38–41), the writer calls attention to the majesty, autonomy, and mystery of creation, reminding the reader that humans are neither at the center nor in control of the created order. Instead, wild animals, cosmic elements, and even mythical beasts exist independently of human purposes.[24] From its beginning to its ultimate purpose, all of creation is rooted in the love and creative power of God. Nothing in the world, whether living beings or cosmic elements, moves and have their being outside the sustaining presence of the Creator. In other words, every form of life, human beings included, is a creature dependent on God.[25] The shared creaturely status forming the vision of a community of creation counters the long-held and destructive notion of human superiority and dominion over nature.[26]

Elizabeth Johnson remarked:

> Widespread in prophets, psalms, and wisdom writings, this paradigm positions humans not above but within the living world which has its own relationship to God accompanied by a divinely-given mandate to thrive. Refashioning the idea of human relation to the natural world along these lines not only provides a context for a non-negotiably responsible retrieval of dominion but also opens the imagination to multiple avenues of reciprocal

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[22] Schaeffer, 19-20.

[23] Elizabeth Johnson, Ask the Beast: Darwin and the God of Love (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 261.

[24] Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 269-273,

[25] Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 267-268.

[26] Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 267.

> interaction between human beings and other species. Broadening the terms of our own identity in light of the reality of others, we end up seeing, thinking, and acting differently.[27]

The notion of community of creation can also be supported by the Qur'an. One of the clearest expressions of this vision appears in the Qur'an in the use of the term *umma*, commonly used to describe a religious community of believers, to refer to nonhuman beings: "There is no creature on earth nor bird that flies with its wings but are *ummam* like you. We have not neglected anything in the Book; then to their Lord they will be gathered" (Qur'an 6:38).

By situating animals and birds as *communities* with their own integrity and divine purpose, the Qur'an draws a parallel between the social structure of humans and nonhuman creatures. Within God's created order, there are communities beyond human communities that exist and are sustained by God. Therefore, all creatures are co-members of a divine ecology grounded in mutual belonging and accountability before God. One can conclude that in the divine ecology, the community of creation is in fact a community of communities.

Virtues Undergirding Inter-Creationality

From the insights provided by the various systems of religious thought in the above section, we can summarize 'inter-creationality' as the concept that stresses the interconnectedness and interdependence of all entities in the cosmos. It recognizes the shared bond among all forms of beings, biotic and abiotic, encompassing humans, animals, plants, other beings, and even inanimate objects. It affirms that non-human creation constitutes an essential aspect of the primary set of relationships of human life. It also underscores the significance of acknowledging the collective aspiration for flourishing. Thus, from the ethical perspective, inter-creationality calls for moral behavior on the part of human beings, fostering solidarity, empathy, compassion, mutuality, and a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the entire creation.

Having established the conceptual framework of inter-creationality, our focus now shifts toward exploring its manifestation through moral virtues that govern the intricate bond within the community of creation. It is important to note that this enumeration does not strive to be comprehensive but rather aims to highlight essential and representative virtues that uphold inter-creationality and facilitate the dynamics inherent in this interrelationship.

Gentleness

As a foundational virtue for inter-creationality, gentleness offers a vital orientation in how humans relate to non-human beings. It is closely connected to the principle of *ahimsā* (nonviolence), which is central to several Indian religious traditions,

[27] Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 267.

particularly Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. While all these traditions uphold *ahimsā*, Jainism is especially notable for its radical and all-encompassing interpretation. In Jain thought, every living being, regardless of size or form, possesses a soul (*jīva*) and some degree of consciousness. This awareness even extends to certain non-living entities believed to contain subtle forms of life. Accordingly, Jains strive to minimize harm in all aspects of life. This commitment is expressed in a strict vegetarian diet and daily mindfulness about the potential harm caused to microscopic organisms in the air, water, and earth. Responsibility for such harm is not dismissed but acknowledged with humility and care.[28]

One of the most striking expressions of *ahimsā* in Jainism is the ascetic practice of voluntary death through fasting (*sallekhanā*). This practice is not seen as suicide but as the ultimate act of detachment and compassion, an intentional, peaceful exit from mundane life that avoids harming any living being. It is reserved for those who have achieved great spiritual maturity and is revered as a path toward liberation (*moksha*), demonstrating the depth of Jain commitment to nonviolence.[29]

In Buddhism, *ahimsā* also holds a central place as the first of the Five Precepts, which explicitly forbids intentional harm to any sentient being. The *Dhammapada* teaches that just as we fear pain and cherish life, so do all beings (Dp. 129–130). Therefore, to cause suffering is morally indefensible. Gentleness, in this context, is cultivated not only in relationships with humans and animals but also in ethical livelihood; Buddhist teachings discourage any occupation that causes harm (AN V.177; Thera. 242–243).

While Buddhist nonviolence focuses on sentient beings, its deeper implications invite a gentler approach to all forms of existence. A person who is truly gentle in spirit would not treat animals with care while casually damaging plants or natural features like trees, rocks, or rivers. Gentleness becomes an attitude that shapes how we interact with the entire community of beings. Thus, gentleness builds upon *ahimsā* and extends it. If *ahimsā* establishes the ethical boundary "do no harm," then gentleness represents the positive expression of that principle. It is not only about refraining from violence but about cultivating tenderness, kindness, patience, and compassionate action. If *ahimsā* is the protective fence, gentleness is the flourishing garden within it. Through kind speech, helpful behavior, and attentive care, gentleness transforms nonviolence from a passive ideal into an active way of being. It is through this virtue that one truly embodies the spirit of inter-creationality, recognizing all beings as worthy of care and building relationships rooted in peace, respect, and mutual flourishing.

In Christianity, as in many Indian religious traditions, gentleness is a highly esteemed virtue. It is listed among the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and is repeatedly emphasized throughout the New Testament. Jesus himself declared, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5), and described his own nature as "gentle and humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29). Far from weakness, gentleness in Christian teaching is a form of tender strength, grounded in humility and

[28] Jeffery D. Long, *Jainism: An Introduction* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 100.
[29] Long, *Jainism*, 110.

compassion. The Apostle Paul encouraged believers to "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Col. 3:12), urging the Christian community to practice gentleness as a defining mark of discipleship. Christian leaders are likewise expected to embody this virtue, especially in their guidance of others (2 Tim. 2:24–25; 3:3). For theologians like Thomas Aquinas, gentleness, often associated with *mansuetudo*, is one of the cardinal moral virtues, while Augustine described it as the "art of self-mastery," a quality often neglected in a world driven by force and domination.

In today's context, marked by environmental degradation and social violence, gentleness remains an essential virtue, not only for human relationships but also for our relationship with creation. A truly gentle person is attentive to the consequences of their actions, seeking to avoid harm not just to people but to all living beings. As Mahatma Gandhi observed, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."[30] Gentleness, in this light, becomes a moral indication of ecological responsibility. Practicing gentleness leads us to live more mindfully and harmoniously within the community of creation. It challenges destructive behaviors such as overconsumption, hunting, and deforestation, which contribute to biodiversity loss and ecological imbalance. Gentleness prompts us to not only 'preserve' forests or 'prevent' species from extinction but to nurture and restore the natural world so that a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between humans and creation can be promoted. In embodying gentleness, we demonstrate our commitment to solidarity with sentient beings by creating conditions that support their flourishing and well-being.

More than a personal virtue, gentleness calls us to a broader ethical responsibility, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all life. As naturalist John Muir eloquently wrote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."[31] Through this lens, gentleness functions not as passive sentiment, but as a transformative force that can be deployed for cultivating peace, practicing empathy, and sustaining the health and harmony of our common home.

Compassion

Another essential virtue that supports the paradigm of inter-creationality is compassion. Rooted in empathy, the ability to recognize, understand, and share the feelings of others, compassion involves both emotional resonance and the desire to alleviate suffering for others. [32] While commonly understood within the human context as kindness toward those who suffer, in the framework of inter-creationality, compassion expands to embrace all beings who share in the fragile, vulnerable condition of existence.

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[30] Peta, "PETA Honors Gandhi's Lifelong Commitment to Animal Liberation," https://www.peta.org/features/gandhi/

[31] John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 166.

[32] Jacinta Jiménez, "Compassion vs. empathy: Understanding the Difference," BetterUp, July 16, 2021, https://www.betterup.com/blog/compassion-vs-empathy#:~:text=Consider%20these-%20definitions%3A,creates%20a%20desire%20to%20help.

In Buddhism, compassion is closely linked to *mettā*, or loving-kindness. Together, they form part of the Four Sublime Abodes, along with sympathetic joy and equanimity. Loving-kindness is the aspiration that all beings be happy, while compassion is the heartfelt desire to alleviate their suffering. These virtues are to be extended universally—to the strong and the weak, the near and the far, the seen and the unseen, without exception or ill will (AN I.183). Even in adversity, individuals are instructed to practice loving-kindness without anger or resentment (MN I.123).

Compassion is not merely a fleeting emotional response; it is a profound spiritual disposition. It arises from deep empathy and expresses itself in the desire to help. The Buddha himself is described as "the one person who arises in the world… out of compassion for the world" (AN I.23), whose mission to spread the *dhamma* was born "simply out of sympathy and compassion for living beings" (AN II.177).

The cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion has transformative potential, not only for personal moral development but also for society and the environment. Both monastics and laypeople are encouraged to nurture these qualities, with the aim of extending their influence beyond the boundaries of family, community, or species.[33] As Nyanaponika Thera wrote, in a world burdened by suffering and self-centeredness, "it is compassion that removes the heavy bar, opens the door to freedom, makes the narrow heart as wide as the world. Compassion takes away from the heart the inert weight, the paralyzing heaviness; it gives wings to those who cling to the lowlands of self."[34]

Applied ecologically, the implications of compassion are profound. To embody compassion within an inter-creational framework is to approach all forms of life, and the ecosystems that support them, with care and concern. Selective compassion is not enough; a truly compassionate person extends their care to all sentient beings and to the non-sentient environment that sustains life. This integrated practice of compassion reflects a high ethical commitment to the flourishing of the whole community of creation.[35]

In Confucianism, the virtue closest to compassion is *ren* (仁), often translated as benevolence, humanity, or kindness. *Ren* is the core of Confucian ethics, emphasizing empathy, respect, and moral responsibility toward others. According to Mencius, one of Confucius's key successors, people are born with innate 'sprouts' of virtue, one of which is compassion. Like a seed that needs sunlight, water, and soil, compassion must be nurtured through a thorough education, example, and diligent practice. In this view, cultivating *ren* leads to a harmonious society grounded in respect, dignity, and social responsibility.

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[33] Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtues Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 120.

[34] Nyanaponika Thera, "The Four Sublime States: Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity," *Access to Insight*, 1994, https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html.

[35] Simon P. James, "Against Holism: Rethinking Buddhist Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Values* 16, no. 4 (2007): 457.

While traditional Confucianism focuses primarily on human relationships,[36] later thinkers extended this moral concern to the non-human world. Mencius wrote that the virtuous person "is benevolent toward people" and "feels love for all things."[37] Wang Yangming (1472–1529) deepened this view by asserting the unity of humans and the cosmos. He argued that the benevolent heart connects with all beings, and that true morality arises from the ability to empathize with the suffering of people, animals, and even the destruction of plants and objects. In this expanded framework, harming the environment is not only impractical but morally wrong, and care for the natural world becomes a virtuous expression of human flourishing. This holistic Confucian worldview affirms that "all people are siblings, and all things are companions." Moral awareness, therefore, includes responsibility toward the broader community of beings. It encourages a relational understanding of humanity's place within nature and promotes an ethic of ecological care rooted in compassion and solidarity.[38]

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer whose thought was greatly influenced by Buddhism, remarked, "Compassion for animals is intimately associated with goodness of character, and it may be confidently asserted that he who is cruel to animals cannot be a good man."[39] The ethical outlook of religious traditions demonstrate that they can enable human awareness of the moral responsibility that human beings must have toward non-human creation. By extending our kindness and compassion to the environment, we can foster sustainable practices and protect the natural world from senseless harm.

At the heart of this discussion lies a profound awareness of suffering, our own and that of others. Compassion arises when this awareness is transformed into solidarity, rooted not in pity or condescension but in ethical responsibility and shared vulnerability. As religious traditions show, exhibiting these virtues toward nature reflects a form of spiritual humanism, one in which our hearts remain open and responsive to the experiences of all beings. Of course, intellectual awareness of suffering alone does not ensure ethical action. For some, suffering leads to bitterness or emotional withdrawal. Solidarity, then, is not automatic; it must be cultivated. Through spiritual discipline and moral reflection, we nurture the inner capacity to act with goodwill and empathy. The more we train ourselves in compassion and express it through concrete, outward actions, the more we strengthen our relationship of solidarity with all members of the community of creation.

Moderation and Contentment

Moderation and contentment are also essential virtues that buttress inter-creationality. They serve as the antidote for many social and environmental ills being experienced today. They oppose negative tendencies such as greed, excessiveness, and

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[36] Xinzhong Yao, "An Eco-Ethical Interpretation of Confucian Tianren Heyi," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 9 (2014): 579.

[37] Quoted in Yao, "An Eco-Ethical Interpretation of Confucian Tianren Heyi," 576.

[38] Yao, "An Eco-Ethical Interpretation of Confucian Tianren Heyi," 581.

[39] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1903).

selfishness which are detrimental to personal spiritual progress as well as social and ecological flourishing. Thai scholar monk Prayudh Payutto remarked, "At the very heart of Buddhism is the wisdom of moderation."[40] The Pali term for moderation, *mattāññutā*, combines *mattā* (measure) and *ñ̃ñutā* (knowledge). According to Payutto, a person who practices moderation knows the right measure in consumption, speech, work, rest, and recreation. Their actions are guided not by personal gratification but by wisdom with the aim for balance and genuine benefit.[41] Moderation is said to be deeply rooted in the Buddha's life. Despite living a life surrounded by luxury and shielded from suffering, upon encountering illness, aging, and death, he renounced his privileged life in search of meaning. Initially embracing extreme asceticism, he later recognized its futility and discovered the Middle Way, a path between indulgence and self-denial that led to enlightenment and *nibbāna*.

As an antidote to greed, a major obstacle to liberation, moderation is frequently emphasized in Buddhist scriptures. The *Dhammapada*, for instance, advises avoiding harmful speech and behavior, being moderate in diet, and focusing on higher states of mind (Dp. 185). The *Aggañña Sutta* illustrates the consequences of excess. In this mythic account, luminous beings degenerate into coarse, embodied humans after greedily consuming a sweet earthly substance. Their radiance fades, and moral and environmental decline ensues, linking lack of moderation to both personal and ecological degradation (DN 27). While Buddhism does not demand poverty, it does warn against material attachment. The Buddha taught that true happiness lies not in sense pleasures but in simplicity guided by wisdom and virtue. Thus, monastics are to possess only essentials, a robe, a bowl, daily food, shelter, and medicine (MN I.10), while avoiding luxuries like gold, silver, and ornate items.[42]

Moderation is closely connected with contentment, a virtue that the *Dhammapada* describes as representing the highest wealth (DP 204) and that "leads to great goods" (AN VIII.22). The Buddha frequently encouraged his monastic followers to cultivate satisfaction with the basic necessities of life and to refrain from developing attachment to material possessions. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, he stated that contentment fosters wholesome qualities and reduces unwholesome ones (AN I.29). He praised monks who were content with whatever robes, food, or shelter they received. Such monks did not obsess over possessions, saw their limitations, and used them mindfully without arrogance or judgment toward others (AN VIII.21). It must be stressed that Buddhism does not idealize poverty or condemn wealth. In fact, extreme poverty can hinder spiritual practice,[43] as a Vietnamese proverb claims: "You need food to uphold the faith." While basic needs must be met, a life obsessed with material

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[40] Prayudh Payutto, *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Marketplace*, http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~sprapant/Buddhism/buddhist_econ.html#Wealth%20and%20Spiritual%20Development.

[41] Prayudh Payutto, *A Constitution for Living: Buddhist Principles for a Fruitful and Harmonious Life* (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1998), 15.

[42] Cf. Barend Jan Terwiel, *Monks and Magic: Revisiting a Classic Study of Religious Ceremonies in Thailand*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012); Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism*, 128.

[43] David Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston: Wisdom, 2003), 74.

gain is discouraged. As the Buddha warned, wealth can lead to intoxication, negligence, and greed (SN III.6). This mirrors Jesus' teaching: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34).

Contentment stands in opposition to *tanhā* (craving), the relentless desire for personal gratification, often at the expense of others and the environment.[44] Christmas Humphreys described craving as the force that isolates individuals, causing suffering through selfishness and separation. Craving leads to dissatisfaction because fulfillment is sought in impermanent things.[45] The Stoic Seneca echoed this idea when he observed that people were not poor for having little, but for wanting more. Buddhism teaches that true peace comes from ending craving and cultivating contentment.[46] Thus, contentment is a quality that leads to a vision of truth that truly satisfies.[47] In the face of greed which seeks satisfaction but never finds it, the real antidote is contentment and moderation.

Like the Buddha, Jesus also emphasized the values of moderation and contentment in everyday life. In his teachings, Jesus warned against accumulating earthly treasures, which are vulnerable to decay and theft, and instead urged his followers to seek lasting spiritual treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19–21). Similarly, Luke 12:15 cautions against greed, reminding us that true fulfillment cannot be found in material possessions. These teachings encourage the pursuit of inner peace and discourage the endless seeking of wealth. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus expanded on this theme as he urged his followers to place their trust in God's providence for life's basic needs. He warned that excessive worry about food, drink, and clothing undermines spiritual well-being. Instead, what is more important is the sincere search for God's kingdom and righteousness with confidence that in doing so, one's essential needs would be met.

This message of moderation and contentment is echoed in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Addressing early Christian communities, Paul told his listeners that true gain comes from a combination of godliness and contentment. He urged believers to be satisfied with what they have and to recognize the fleeting nature of material possessions (1 Tim. 6:6–8). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul attributed his strength to his relationship with Christ while expressing his own sense of contentment in all circumstances (Phil. 4:11–13).Together, these biblical teachings encourage trust in God's providence rather than dependence on material wealth. The Catholic Church continues this message in its social teachings, which often critique consumerism and call all people, both believers and those of goodwill, to foster a culture of moderation. This

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[44] G. P. Malalasekera, "The Status of the Individual in Theravāda Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 14, no. 2 (1964): 152.

[45] Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (Harmondsworth, England: Pelican Books, 1951), 91.

[46] Prayudh Payutto, *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Marketplace*, http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~sprapant/Buddhism/buddhist_econ.html#Wealth%20and%20Spiritual%20Development.

[47] Sangharakshita (trans.), *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*, (UK: Windhorse Publications, 2000), online version.

involves shifting focus away from material excess and toward spiritual growth.[48] Lasting contentment is not found in acquiring every color of a new shirt, another pair of shoes, an additional car, or a second home for vacation. It lies in the awareness that, through a deep relationship with Christ, we already have what we truly need.

Islamic teachings place considerable emphasis on the principles of moderation and contentment as essential components of a virtuous life. The concept of moderation, known in Arabic as *wasatiyya*, is a recurring theme in both the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'an instructs believers to pursue a path marked by balance and fairness, exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad's own life. For instance, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:143) highlights the importance of fostering a just and moderate community, modeling the Prophet's example. Moreover, the Qur'an warns against indulgence and extremism. Surah Al-A'raf (7:31) cautions against excesses in wordly matters with the advice for believers to enjoy the provisions granted by God. Moderation is further reinforced in the Hadith, where the Prophet consistently advocated for a life of balance. He is reported to have said that "the best actions are those done in moderation," which points to the importance of temperance in both worship and daily conduct.

Alongside moderation, contentment (*qanāʿa*) is a deeply valued quality in Islam. The Qur'an repeatedly calls on believers to place less importance on worldly possessings while cultivating gratitude and satisfaction with what they have. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:152) encourages a continuous remembrance of God and the expression of thankfulness for divine blessings. Gratitude, in this context, serves as the foundation of contentment and helps individuals recognize sufficiency in their current circumstances. Islamic perspectives on contentment go beyond material satisfaction, encompassing a spiritual tranquility that stems from trusting in God's will. Surah Al-Hadid (57:23) reminds believers that those who accept both fortune and hardship as part of God's decree will ultimately be rewarded. Thus, both moderation and contentment are seen not merely as ethical ideals, but as spiritual disciplines that align one's life with divine guidance.

The virtues of moderation and contentment, taught by various religious traditions, are undeniably crucial in fostering balance within the community of creation. By curbing unnecessary loss of life and alleviating the strain on natural goods, these virtues contribute significantly to ecological well-being. Setting limits on our lifestyles and prioritizing genuine needs over wants can reduce the impact of consumerism and commodity production on natural resources. As scholar of Buddhism Donald Swearer noted, "One chooses less so that all may flourish more."[49]

In addition to alleviating the strain on natural goods, embracing moderation and contentment carries a profound significance in our lives by instilling a deep appreciation for the things we already possess. In a world that ceaselessly promotes the allure of upgrading to the latest technologies and trends, it becomes all too easy to overlook the value in what we already have. It is no coincidence that in the Psalms of the Hebrew

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[48] Ryszard F. Sadowski, "The Role of Catholicism in Shaping a Culture of Sustainable Consumption," *Religions* 12 (2021): 598.

[49] Donald Swearer, "Buddhist Virtue, Voluntary Poverty, and Extensive Benevolence," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 26, no 1 (1998): 93.

Bible, gratitude is so often highlighted as an essential attitude toward God's blessings. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians are extolled to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thes. 5:18).

In Islam, gratitude (*shukr*) is considered a fundamental part of Islamic spirituality. Muslims are encouraged to express gratitude daily to God for God's blessings, and to show appreciation to others who have helped them. The Qur'an teaches that those who are grateful to God will receive even more blessings, while those who are ungrateful will face divine punishment. Confucius also took gratitude as a central tenet of his teachings, making it one of the aspects that undergird the practice of filial piety, which calls on individuals to show reverence and respect to their ancestors, parents, and elders. In the deeply Confucian influenced Vietnamese culture, a proverb reminds people when they eat fruits not to forget those who have planted the tree. Another proverb admonishes one to remember the source when taking a sip of water. Religious teachings often remind us that true happiness lies not in material wealth but in simplicity, gratitude, and spiritual growth. Genuine well-being comes from inner peace rather than constant accumulation. This mindset not only benefits individuals but also supports ecological flourishing. Studies show that gratitude fosters pro-environmental attitudes while encouraging responsibility for future generations and stronger support for climate action and sustainable practices.[50] Gratitude towards other members within the community of creation leads to greater respect and care for creation. This disposition motivates concrete actions like reducing waste, conserving energy, and using natural goods responsibly. As the Buddha wisely taught, one should not harm the tree under whose shade one rests, for doing so would betray a friend and act unjustly (Pv. 9:3–5).

Reciprocity and Mutuality

At the heart of the paradigm of inter-creationality is the principle of reciprocity, a common ethical norm across world religions popularly referred to as the Golden Rule. While often associated with interpersonal relationships, reciprocity can also extend to human interactions with non-human creation. In Confucianism, reciprocity is expressed in both negative and positive forms. The familiar negative version, "Do not impose on others what you do not desire" (Analects 12.2, 15.24), guides respectful conduct. However, texts like the *Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean* present reciprocity positively, especially in governance and moral cultivation. Rooted in *ren* (humaneness), reciprocity emerges from innate compassion, expanded through moral development. Neo-Confucianists, influenced by Buddhism, later elevated the Golden Rule as a central ethical ideal, applying it beyond family to society at large.[51]

In Christianity, the Golden Rule is found in Jesus' declaration in the Gospel of Matthew 7:12: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,

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[50] Stylianos Syropoulos, Hanne M. Watkins, Azim F. Shariff, Sara D. Hodges, and Ezra M. Markowitz, "The Role of Gratitude in Motivating Intergenerational Environmental Stewardship," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 72 (2020): 101517.

[51] Mark A. Csikszentmihalyi, "The Golden Rule in Confucianism," in *The Golden Rule the Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (London: Continuum, 2008), 165-168.

for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This rule represents a rearticulation of the injunction to love God and love neighbor stated in the Torah of the Hebrew bible. While these principles were already in the Jewish scriptures, Jesus' contribution was to make these two actions inextricable. One cannot be fulfilled without the other. Jesus' ethic of love is rooted in recognizing the transformative power of God's love which calls us to see every person in the context of God's presence, irrespective of their social, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. He exhorted his listeners to perceive others as reflections of God's presence, not as threats or mere allies. Thus, the act of loving one's neighbor, who embodies divine presence, is inseparable from loving God. It is a moral responsibility as well as an expression of faith.[52]

Other traditions, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Greco-Roman thought, and more, also affirm reciprocity in various ways. As Marcus G. Singer observed, the Golden Rule's presence across traditions supports its status as a universal ethical principle. It promotes empathy, compassion, and fairness: treating others as one wishes to be treated.[53] Integral to reciprocity lies the ability to understand the perspective of others. This understanding curbs judgment based on preconceived notions and unrealistic expectations by encouraging us to put ourselves in another's place. Such empathetic awareness guides appropriate action. Reciprocity, therefore, is not about rigidly applying rules, but about discerning the right response by considering others' feelings within specific contexts. This process of understanding requires imagination, an essential tool in truly stepping into another's shoes.

Reciprocity nurtures mutuality, a dynamic relationship where both parties share common interests, values, and benefits. Beyond material exchanges, mutuality fosters trust, emotional support, and cooperation. It rejects a simplistic and transactional tit-for-tat model of engagement and embraces generosity of spirit. For example, when volunteering for a charity, one offers not just time but also expertise, receiving in return a sense of fulfillment, even personal and spiritual transformation. Mutuality thus strengthens interpersonal bonds characterized by a shared sense of purpose and harmony. A relationship grounded in reciprocity and mutuality lays the foundation for healthy, meaningful connections and contributes to a more harmonious world.

Traditionally, reciprocity has been understood within the context of human relationships. Some may argue that extending it to non-human creation is a conceptual leap. Yet, this essay's exploration of religious worldviews suggests otherwise. Embracing inter-creational reciprocity calls for broadening the I-Thou relationship to include the natural world. When reciprocity begins with a desire to eliminate mutual suffering, it naturally extends beyond humanity. As the Buddha taught, "All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of others, one should not kill nor cause another to kill." This teaching affirms that empathy and reciprocity are not limited to human interactions but are foundational to all life-affirming relationships.[54]

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[52] Bruce Chilton, "Jesus, the Golden Rule, and Its Application," in *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (London: Continuum, 2008), 79.

[53] Marcus G. Singer, "Golden Rule," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (NY: Macmillan, 1967), 365–67.

[54] Acharya Buddharakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), sec. 130.

Envisioning Traditional Wisdom within a New Paradigm

Understanding and applying religious traditions to contemporary issues is challenging, especially given their diverse and historically situated teachings. While religions have always addressed real-life concerns, today's global environmental crisis presents an unprecedented challenge. Therefore, applying traditional teachings to this new context is not always straightforward. To navigate this, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim proposed a three-part methodological approach: retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction. Retrieval involves exploring scriptural texts and commentaries to uncover insights on human–earth relationships. Reevaluation assesses the relevance of these teachings in today's context, identifying how they might address ecological concerns. Reconstruction seeks to adapt or reinterpret these traditions to respond meaningfully to current environmental challenges, often leading to new expressions of faith and ethics. This process requires sensitivity to differing interpretations and careful representation of traditions. Scholars and practitioners can work together through creative dialogue to carry out this interpretive journey.[55]

Applying this method to the principles of ethical living as discussed in this essay allows these values to extend beyond human relationships and into the relationship between humans and the rest of the community of creation. The virtues of reciprocity, mutuality, gentleness, compassion, etc. involve not just avoiding harm, but actively working for one another's well-being. For example, humans can act responsibly by using natural resources with restraint and care. This includes reducing energy use, conserving water, managing waste, and promoting renewable resources. As beings with intellect and moral agency, humans can also design social and economic systems that prioritize long-term sustainability and well-being, for both human and non-human creation. This involves evaluating the ecological impact of our choices, adopting sustainable technologies, and building economies grounded in justice and equity. In the digital age, digital sustainability is also crucial. This means using technology responsibly to reduce its environmental footprint—through energy efficiency, sustainable production, reducing e-waste, and raising awareness. By optimizing how we produce and use digital tools, we support a healthier planet.

While non-human creation cannot reciprocate in the same ways humans do, it contributes to our well-being in its own essential ways. Physically, creation provides us with air, water, food, and medicine. Everything we consume, whether plant- or animal-based, originates from the natural world. For centuries, humans have relied on nature's pharmacy—plants and herbs with healing properties, to treat illness and support health. The non-human world also supports our emotional and mental health. Time in natural settings reduces stress, enhances mood, boosts focus, and fosters creativity. It offers a space for reflection, mindfulness, and mental restoration. These psychological benefits are increasingly supported by research and affirm the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with the environment.

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[55] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "The Movement of Religion and Ecology: Emerging Field and a Dynamic Force," in *Routledge Handbook in Religion and Ecology*, ed. Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim (New York: Routledge, 2017), 7-8.

On a spiritual level, creation nurtures our inner lives. Natural environments inspire awe, reverence, and humility, drawing us into deeper contemplation and connection with something greater than ourselves. Many religious traditions, such as Buddhism, view the non-human world as a significant teacher. Observing the processes within creation helps us confront the illusion of a permanent self and the futility of clinging to wealth, power, or material status.

When viewed through the lens of inter-creationality, the relationship between humans and non-human creation becomes one of mutual self-offering. Each part of creation possesses both *intrinsic value* (inherent worth) and *instrumental value* (usefulness to others). Environmental ethics often warn against reducing nature to mere utility, but true ecological responsibility lies not in choosing one type of value over the other. Rather, it involves recognizing that both intrinsic and instrumental values coexist—in humans and in all members of the community of creation.

By affirming the inherent goodness and mutual benefit of all creation, we cultivate a relationship grounded in reciprocity and mutual care. This perspective invites both human and non-human members of the community of creation to engage in mutual service, each giving according to their nature, each benefiting the other. In this perspective, intrinsic and instrumental goods are not opposing binaries but complementary aspects of a relationship where mutual service naturally arises from the affirmation of mutual goodness.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the paradigm of inter-creationality embodies a transformative vision that seeks to overcome egocentric, ethnocentric, and anthropocentric orientations within the human community, calling instead for an expanded ethical consciousness that embraces all members of the community of creation. The religious traditions explored in this essay provide rich spiritual and philosophical resources that support this paradigm, both in its foundational cosmological insights and its ethical applications. Religious transformation, grounded in these traditions, fosters the cultivation of moral virtues essential for initiating and sustaining inter-creationality, thereby nurturing a robust ecological ethos.

This essay has highlighted key virtues, such as gentleness, compassion, moderation, contentment, gratitude, and reciprocity, that serve as pillars for inter-creational relationships. Yet, this list is by no means exhaustive; virtues such as humility, prudence, responsibility, and respect also play a crucial role in shaping an ethical orientation attuned to the flourishing of the whole. While the term 'inter-creationality' may resonate more readily within Abrahamic theological frameworks, the underlying relational dynamics it describes—of mutual dependence, intrinsic value, and moral responsibility—are present across diverse religious traditions.

The central insight underscored here is that human beings are not external to, but integral members of, the broader community of creation. Accordingly, virtues traditionally applied within human society must now be extended beyond intra-human

relationships to encompass the entirety of creation. Only through this expansive moral imagination can inter-creationality serve as a viable and compelling paradigm for ecological harmony and mutual flourishing in a wounded world.

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