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Questioning Anthropocentrism in Christianity: Is the Book of Job in Line with the Principles of Environmental Ethics?

Kwestionowanie antropocentryzmu w chrześcijaństwie. Czy Księga Hioba jest zgodna z zasadami etyki środowiskowej?

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Abstract: In 1967, historian Lynn White argued that religions, particularly Christianity, have significantly contributed to environmental degradation due to their inherently anthropocentric worldview. However, whether Christianity is fundamentally anthropocentric remains a topic of active scholarly debate. The central thesis is that Christianity should be understood as a religious system based on ethical principles that transcend anthropocentrism. Rather than being identified with anthropocentrism, Christianity establishes its ethical norms by understanding the interconnectedness of all living beings on Earth. This interconnectedness is reflected in God's invitation to people and all creation for communion with Him. In this context, the understanding of humanity in Christianity is rooted in the recognition that humans exist in relationship with God, their neighbours, and the wider natural world. This thesis is tested by investigating whether the Old Testament's "Book of Job" advocates anthropocentrism. More specifically, the article analyses how this book aligns with two foundational principles of environmental ethics: the good of being and the concept of inherent worth. The results indicate that the Book of Job largely adheres to the principles of environmental ethics, suggesting that the criticisms typically aimed at anthropocentrism cannot be applied to Christianity. The analysis of The Book of Job affirms that Christianity transcends anthropocentrism by presenting a view of humanity that cannot be understood without considering the relationships established by God between humans, their fellows and all of creation.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, ecotheology, Book of Job, good of being, inherent worth, Christianity and ecology, Bible and ecology, SDG 15: Life on Land, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Streszczenie: W 1967 roku historyk Lynn White wysunął tezę, że religie, a zwłaszcza chrześcijaństwo, w istotny sposób przyczyniły się do degradacji środowiska naturalnego ze względu na swój z natury antropocentryczny światopogląd. Kwestia czy chrześcijaństwo rzeczywiście ma fundamentalnie antropocentryczny charakter, pozostaje jednak przedmiotem intensywnej debaty naukowej. Główna teza niniejszego artykułu zakłada, że chrześcijaństwo należy rozumieć jako system religijny oparty na zasadach etycznych wykraczających poza antropocentryzm. Zamiast utożsamiać się z nim, chrześcijaństwo formułuje swoje normy etyczne poprzez uznanie współzależności wszystkich istot żywych na Ziemi. Współzależność ta znajduje odzwierciedlenie w Bożym zaproszeniu skierowanym do ludzi i całego stworzenia, by pozostawało z Nim w komunii. W tym kontekście chrześcijańska koncepcja człowieka opiera się na przekonaniu, że człowiek istnieje w relacji z Bogiem, bliźnimi oraz – szerzej – z całym światem natury. Teza ta zostaje zweryfikowana poprzez analizę, czy starotestamentowa Księga Hioba opowiada się za antropocentryzmem. Dokładniej mówiąc, artykuł bada, w jaki sposób księga ta wpisuje się w dwa fundamentalne założenia etyki środowiskowej: ideę dobra istnienia oraz koncepcję wartości

wewnętrznej. Wyniki analizy wskazują, że Księga Hioba w dużej mierze pozostaje zgodna z zasadami etyki środowiskowej, co sugeruje, iż typowe zarzuty wobec antropocentryzmu nie mogą być bezpośrednio odnoszone do chrześcijaństwa. Analiza ta potwierdza, że chrześcijaństwo wykracza poza ramy antropocentryzmu, ukazując obraz człowieka, którego nie sposób zrozumieć bez odniesienia do relacji ustanowionych przez Boga między ludźmi, ich bliźnimi i całym stworzeniem.

Słowa kluczowe: antropocentryzm, ekoteologia, Księga Hioba, dobro istnienia, wartość wewnętrzna, chrześcijaństwo i ekologia, Biblia i ekologia, SDG 15: Życie na lądzie, SDG 12: Odpowiedzialna konsumpcja i produkcja

Introduction

Lynn White's 1967 article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" is often cited as a critique of anthropocentrism that religions improved and developed. In the article, White argues that the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly in the Western world, is highly anthropocentric and has contributed to the destruction of nature and its resources (White 1967). This argument has sparked further research into the relationship between religion and environmental conservation, using Christianity as a prime example of anthropocentrism (LeVasseur and Peterson 2017).

In his article, White argues that the belief in progress originated only in the Judeo-Christian tradition and was subsequently transferred to our contemporary culture and way of life. He suggests that Christianity and Judaism "not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploits nature for his proper ends" (White 1967, 1205). Technological progress has opened the possibility for unexpected negative consequences of human actions on nature. White believes that Christianity bears the burden of guilt for such actions and advocates for a fundamental shift in the Christian perspective toward all of creation. He posits that a paradigm shift can be realized by emulating the example established by St. Francis of Assisi, who embodies a model of humility that contrasts starkly with the principles of monarchical authority regarding the relationship with the natural world (White 1967).

Lynn White's critique of religions, particularly Christianity, has garnered substantial attention across disciplines such as philosophy, theology and environmental studies. Since then, a significant body of research has explored the interplay between religious beliefs and environmental concerns, seeking to elucidate the relationship between religion and ecological attitudes. These studies provide critical insights into the validity of White's argument and offer a framework for assessing whether the dynamics he identified have evolved. Depending on their methodological frameworks, they can be broadly categorized into two primary groups.

The first group comprises quantitative and qualitative research to deepen understanding and explore connections between religious beliefs and environmental attitudes. The existing literature does not provide a consensus on the findings. Some studies suggest a negative correlation between Christians who favour a literal interpretation of the Bible and their environmental concerns (Shultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Others suggest that individuals without religious affiliation demonstrate a stronger orientation toward environmental concerns than their religious counterparts (Hand and Crowe 2012, 1-34; Arli, van Esch and Cui 2023). Some studies reveal discrepancies in their findings, suggesting either a positive correlation or a lack of connection altogether. This highlights the complexity of the issue and the need for further research (Hekmatpour 2022; Arbuckle 2015). Additionally, various analyses of scientific literature have explored the relationship between Christianity and environmental attitudes and practices. To test White's

hypothesis, Taylor et al. reviewed more than 700 scientific articles to investigate whether Christians and members of other religions are becoming more environmentally friendly. They concluded that White's thesis is correct (Taylor, van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016). Conversely, Ridgeway concludes that a meta-analysis of 15 studies between 1984 and 2007 does not provide precise results (Ridgeway 2008). Based on the findings from these social studies, it cannot be asserted that, in practice, members of religious communities—particularly Christians—are experiencing a significant shift toward adopting habits, opinions, and behaviours that demonstrate a move away from anthropocentrism.

The second group pertains to theological research, which involves studying theological sources to test the validity of White's hypothesis. Numerous theological investigations were conducted within biblical theology, exegesis, theology of creation, and theological anthropology (Bouma-Prediger and Carson 2023; Northcott and Scott 2014; Eaton 2023). In recent theological literature, there has been a rejection of an exclusively anthropocentric reading of the Bible, with arguments in favour of a theocentric approach to biblical texts. These lead to the conclusion that White's interpretation is incorrect (Bouma-Prediger 1995; Joranson and Butigan 1984; Kinsley 1994; Northcott 2011; Reuther 2012; Bauckham 2002; Harrison 2006; Simkins 2014). Pope Francis, in his encyclical letter "Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home" acknowledges the presence of erroneous interpretations of biblical texts with an anthropocentric focus and distances Christianity from them: "Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures" (Francis 2015, No. 67). By doing so, Pope Francis utilizes the encyclical as a key element of his papal magisterium to highlight these misinterpretations. At the same time, he suggests that the history of Christianity presents a perspective that contrasts significantly with the one depicted in White's article. This legitimizes historical theological research, demonstrating how care for all is central to Christian heritage and an essential aspect of its rich tradition, rather than a marginal or unnecessary element.

The research question follows: Can the Book of Job be interpreted as affirming the principles of environmental ethics (good of being and the inherent worth of non-human creatures), thus challenging the idea that the Christian tradition is inherently anthropocentric? The first section of this paper will provide a theoretical framework that defines the terms "anthropocentrism" and two foundational concepts within environmental ethics: the good of being and inherent worth. We will analyse three themes in the Book of Job: the doctrine of retribution, Yahweh's speeches, and the final section of the book, which depicts the restoration of Job's life. This book uses different names for God, of which God and Yahweh will be used in this article without going into the theological implications of their use. Through this approach, the analysis will determine whether the Book of Job advocates or disregards anthropocentrism. An ecotheological approach focuses on the relationship between God's creation, humanity, and nature. This approach evaluates how well the principles of environmental ethics align with biblical texts such as the Book of Genesis and Psalm 8, among others. However, such a study would far exceed the scope of this journal's article, and therefore, at least for now, such an approach is deferred.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Anthropocentrism

There are many definitions of anthropocentrism. For instance, the Cambridge Dictionary defines anthropocentrism as "a belief in humans and their existence as the most important and central fact in the universe"

(Cambridge Dictionary 2025). Goralnik and Nelson argue that anthropocentrism "literally means human-centred, but in its most relevant philosophical form it is the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value" (Goralnik and Nelson 2012, 155). The definition of anthropocentrism asserts that humans serve as the primary criterion for evaluating relationships with other living beings, which raises the question of whether humans are the only entities endowed with moral status. The fundamental question pertains to the criteria by which the relationship between humans, nature and other living beings is assessed. Within an anthropocentric framework, humanity serves as the primary criterion, establishing all other relational hierarchies and directing value judgments in favour of human interests. Anthropocentrism originates from a human-centred perspective, which inherently challenges the justification of the intrinsic worth of all living beings. Goralnik and Nelson also highlight that, according to this perspective, "all other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans". From this perspective, non-human entities are regarded as significant and valuable primarily because their existence contributes to human welfare.

Interestingly, some interpretations do not see anthropocentrism as inherently harmful. Carmody Grey argues that it should not be automatically considered a dominating attitude toward nature. Instead, it is better understood as a neutral term (Grey 2020, 874). Grey observes that in his encyclical "Laudato Si'" which is dedicated to the care for creation, Pope Francis does not explicitly address anthropocentrism by name. Instead, he consistently refers to anthropocentrism with specific qualifiers such as "distorted," "misguided," "tyrannical," "modern" and "excessive." Humanity's role within the order of creation, particularly regarding other living beings and God, is unique. This uniqueness means we cannot simply classify humanity's role as "anthropocentric."

Such an approach overlooks many theological concepts, which illustrate that humans are intrinsically linked to all creatures, as God created everything. This relationship requires a strong Christian commitment to God, humanity, and all of creation. It is essential to recognize that these theological ideas are rooted in biblical texts and the Christian tradition, especially during the patristic period. Early thinkers emphasized that humanity cannot be fully understood without considering its relationship with nature. This connection underscores the interdependence of all creation and requires an understanding of God who creates and sustains the world. However, not all concepts of existence assume this dependence; some perspectives challenge the idea of transcendence. Nonetheless, this plurality of approaches does not necessarily lead to a different understanding of humanity's place in creation.

This analysis begins with the concept of anthropocentrism, which is considered negative, as introduced by Lynn White in his article. Anthropocentrism positions humanity as the primary standard for valuation, creating hierarchical relationships and guiding value judgments that prioritize human interests above all else. We will use the following definition of anthropocentrism: a concept that originates from a human-centred perspective, which inherently questions the justification of the inherent worth and goodness of all living beings. From this perspective, non-human entities are regarded as significant and valuable primarily because their existence contributes to human welfare.

1.2. Two basic concepts of environmental ethics: the good of being and the inherent worth of being

Several authors have outlined the most important concepts of environmental ethics: the good of being and inherent worth. Paul Taylor, in his 1986 book "Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics" emphasized that those two concepts are essential for an attitude that respects nature (Taylor 2011). In the present analysis, we employ theoretical frameworks derived from environmental ethics, specifically those articulated

by Paul Taylor and Lena Vilkka. We recognize the importance of several key theoretical frameworks in understanding ecological ethics. Notably, Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" emphasizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and the moral obligation humans have toward it (Leopold 1949). Arne Naess's concept of the interconnectedness of all living beings offers a perspective through which the "ecological self" can be fully realized; this idea suggests that individual identity is deeply intertwined with the broader ecological context (Naess 1989).

Furthermore, Val Plumwood's critique of Western philosophical traditions is particularly relevant as it challenges patriarchal mentalities and explores the links between feminist theory and the interconnectedness of all life forms (Plumwood 1993). Similarly, Karen Warren advocates for grounding the interconnectedness of beings within an ethics of care, proposing an alternative approach to ethical analysis (Warren 2000). While various other concepts could enhance a critical examination of these themes, our focus in this discussion will be exclusively on two specific frameworks. This narrow focus aims to provide preliminary insights into how these concepts resonate or conflict with the principles derived from an ecotheological interpretation of the Book of Job. Future research could be valuable in exploring how other concepts align with or conflict with the ecotheological approach to the Book of Job.

The first principle is straightforward when applied to humans. People naturally seek to achieve what is good for them, grow, mature and find happiness. However, when it comes to other living beings, it is less clear how to define their notion of "good" and how to assist them in attaining it. At the heart of this theory of respect for nature is a distinction that enables humans to adopt a life-oriented perspective rather than a human-centred one in environmental ethics. Taylor points out:

> We can now understand how it is possible for a human being to take an animal's standpoint and, without a trace of anthropocentrism, make a factually informed and objective judgment regarding what is desirable or undesirable from that standpoint. This is of considerable importance since, as we shall see later, being willing to take the standpoint of nonhuman living things and to make informed, objective judgments from that standpoint is one of the central elements of the ethics of respect for nature (Taylor 2011, 67).

Taylor's stance critiques the traditional anthropocentric perspective that assesses nonhuman entities from a human-centred standpoint. This critique initiates a discussion about how to interpret and evaluate humans and nonhumans, prompting humans to reconsider their general approach to these assessments.

Lenna Vilkka begins by posing a fundamental question when examining the principle of the good of being: What is good for other living beings, specifically for nature? Each being possesses its unique goodness specific to its life form. According to Vilkka, this understanding of goodness serves as the foundation for the intrinsic value of each being (Vilkka 1997, 24). The concept described aligns with Aldo Leopold's idea of community, as presented in his land ethic framework. Leopold argues that every living organism must be understood within the context of cooperative interactions in a shared ecosystem on a specific piece of land. This perspective highlights the interdependence of all life forms, and the ethical responsibilities humans have towards the environment and its inhabitants. Leopold points out:

> All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps so that there may be a place to compete for). The land ethic simply

> enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land (Leopold 1949, 192).

Leopold argues against anthropocentrism and supports ecocentrism, asserting that humans are part of a larger community that includes other living beings, which they are obliged to respect. This perspective aligns with Taylor's concept of inherent worth. According to Taylor, the concept of inherent worth means that every being has worth, regardless of whether that value is helpful for other beings (intrinsic value) or refers to the good that beings possess, independent of whether humans have, for some reason, attributed value to them (inherent value). The concept of inherent worth establishes other living beings as moral subjects, emphasizing a moral imperative to ensure the well-being of every being.

Villka also argues that inherent worth is inseparably linked to the concept of the good of being, asserting that a being's inherent worth exists independently of any external evaluator who might assign it a specific value.

In conclusion, the concept of the good of being is inherently anti-anthropocentric. It requires individuals to consider other beings from the perspective of what is good for them, taking into account their unique characteristics. The idea of inherent worth posits that all living beings deserve respect and appreciation for their moral value, regardless of any benefit a person may derive from them. Simply by existing, these beings merit respect according to this principle. The following section will examine how these two concepts are addressed in various layers of the Book of Job, particularly in the context of the doctrine of retribution, Yahweh's speeches, and the conclusion of the narrative.

2. The Book of Job and the Concepts of the Good of Being and Inherent Worth of Being

The following two concepts will be used as criteria to explore whether the selected parts of The Book of Job align more closely with the anthropocentric hypothesis or oppose it. When interpreting these passages through the lens of these concepts, we arrive at specific understandings.

The concept of the "good of being" refers to the inherent good that each being strives toward. This striving, instilled by God in every living creature, exists independently of any benefits to humanity. The second concept, the "inherent worth of being," indicates that every living entity possesses intrinsic value simply because God is the creator of all existence. These two concepts will be examined within the context of ecotheological hermeneutics, which considers God's act of creation and His desire for all beings to exist with a purpose. While this approach may involve different theoretical foundations for each concept, such distinctions are legitimate and do not undermine their core essence based on environmental ethics. It is important to note that the author of The Book of Job likely did not have these criteria or the modern understanding of anthropocentrism in mind. Nonetheless, employing this ecotheological perspective can enrich understanding of Christianity's responsibility toward all of creation.

To emphasize the significance of these two concepts as presented in The Book of Job, it is essential to discuss the core idea upon which this book is based: the doctrine of retribution. After examining this concept and its importance for understanding the text, we will explore the extent to which these two concepts are reflected or embraced in Yahweh's speeches and in the epilogue.

2.1. Doctrine of retribution and Job

The doctrine of retribution is a key concept that the Book of Job challenges. This doctrine is essential for understanding the narrative, as it shapes the attitudes and

beliefs of most characters within the book. Clines defines it as "the belief that there is an exact correspondence between one's behaviour and one's destiny" (Clines 1989, xxxix). According to this doctrine, the righteous will be rewarded for good deeds, and the wicked will be punished for their evil deeds. Job questions the doctrine of retribution because he believes that God contradicts this principle. Since he knows he is innocent, the doctrine of retribution is therefore challenged.

However, this doctrine reflects that the moral order in the world for which God is responsible is in crisis. The majority of the characters in the Book of Job adhere to the retributionist belief: Job's friends, his wife, Satan, and even Job himself to some extent, except for God. Job's perspective is unique because he questions this doctrine and perceives that something is wrong. However, it's important to note that all of his speeches and laments are still based on this very doctrine. His interlocutors also refer to the idea that a certain sin in Job's life is why he experiences terrifying events. Although Job's wife only speaks once (Job 2:9), urging him to cease his lamentations, it can be inferred that she, like everyone else, also adheres to this principle.[1] Ultimately, even Satan calculates based on this doctrine, suggesting to God that Job's adherence to His commandments is motivated by personal gain. However, throughout the narrative, God shifts the focus away from reward and punishment and instead emphasizes His creative work, transcending and transforming the traditional doctrine of retribution.

Job is upset not only because of the troubles that befell him, but also because he doubts that the doctrine of retribution is the primary principle governing God's actions. He understands that he must stand up and protest against a particular ideology. Job's first speech (Job 3:1-26) shows the unrest that engulfed him. This restlessness is not the result of the physical troubles that befell him but the result of the decay of the moral order of the whole world. In the first speech, Job is "bitter in spirit" (Job 3:20) and has "no peace nor ease" (Job 3:26). These are the characteristics of a person who is experiencing anxiety and depression. While they may not be enduring significant physical pain or suffering, it is important to note that their psychological distress can coexist with physical pain without being the primary focus.

The main issue with the doctrine of retribution is its excessive focus on human interests; it is overly anthropocentric. It reflects a human-centred perspective where everything revolves around humans: if I follow God's commandments, I will be rewarded; if I do not, I will be punished. In this view, God's role is limited to being the enforcer of moral order, acting as judge and executor of punishment. In this context, all beings and creations are seen as objects of commercial exchange. Animals hold value when they can be classified as objects of exchange. God exists to serve humans, who require a cosmic framework to guide their lives and moral decisions. Job's criticism suggests that God has abandoned the management of the world and does not care about the evil within it: "Yet God does not treat it as a disgrace!" (Job 24:12)

Job struggles to understand God's actions, which no longer appear to follow the straightforward principle of retribution. This difficulty prevents him from fully appreciating the significance and inherent worth of other beings. His attitude towards living beings is, at best, mixed. On one hand, Job acknowledges the suffering of the oppressed poor in chapter 24. He also mentions animals in chapter 12 (Job 12:7-10) without showing any hint of anthropocentrism. On the other hand, in eighth speech in chapter 23, Job only talks about himself and his circumstances: he wants to explain his case to God (Job 23:4), he wants to find him (Job 23:8-9), he points out how he followed God's commandments (Job 23:11-12), and he

1 All biblical quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV 1989).

emphasizes his fear and horror (Job 23:15-17). Also, in chapter 29, he yearns for the days when he felt God's support in all his endeavours. This longing highlights his struggle to adopt a broader view of reality. He reminisces about the respect he received within his community (Job 29:7-8), the good deeds he performed (Job 29:12-15), his prayers for those threatened by evil people (29:17), and the advisory role he played in the community (Job 29:21c-25). In that chapter, he is described as a significant person whom everyone respects. (Pelham 2012, 47) Even God held him in high regard, yet now, for reasons unknown, God is taking incomprehensible steps. So, by all accounts, Job does not adequately recognize, or at least insufficiently recognizes, the good of the other being and their inherent worth at the moment of questioning the doctrine of retribution.

2.2. Yahweh's words and the principles of environmental ethics

Conversely, Yahweh's speeches acknowledge the inherent worth and goodness of other beings, which indirectly critiques anthropocentrism. Schifferdecker highlights the significance of Yahweh's words as "radically nonanthropocentric" (Schifferdecker 2008, 84).

In his address, Yahweh first tries to redirect Job's attention to the mystery and beauty of all creation. By doing so, Yahweh metaphorically pulls Job out of the destructive cycle of self-centeredness that he seems unable to escape. In his speeches, Yahweh mentions various elements of nature such as earth, stars, sea, clouds, snow, and hail. Focusing attention on the beauty of God's creation transforms and clears Job's mind (Brown 2010). There appears to be very little space for humanity in Yahweh's speeches (Schifferdecker 2008). It means that nonhumans have their own good, which God fulfils.

Yahweh emphasizes creatures' significance in His speeches rather than focusing on humanity or Job himself. He does not directly answer Job's questions and chooses to speak from the wilderness—a perspective that Job fails to appreciate. In doing so, Yahweh reestablishes humanity's rightful place in the world: people are merely one of Yahweh's creations. Through this process, God deconstructs Job's worldview by reminding him of his proper position within the broader context of creation (Bauckham 2002; Bauckham 2014).

The Book of Job highlights the significant role of wild animals in the divine order of creation. Job cannot control or utilize these wild animals, yet they possess their purpose and value within God's plan that Job fails to comprehend. Not only do these animals elude Job's understanding, but creatures like Leviathan are portrayed as so formidable that they ridicule human efforts to dominate them. There is an ironic and mocking element in the description of the power of the Leviathan:

> Will you play with it as with a bird or put it on a leash for your young women? Will traders bargain over it? Will they divide it up among the merchants? Can you fill its skin with harpoons or its head with fishing spears? Lay hands on it; think of the battle; you will not do it again! Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed; one is overwhelmed even at the sight of it. (Job 41:5-9)

In contrast, Yahweh presents another perspective during his speeches, placing God and His creation at the centre of the narrative. Dell suggests that anthropocentrism is actively challenged in certain parts of the text. For example, in the following place (Job 12: 7-10):

> But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

In the Book of Job, divine speeches from chapters 38 to 41 reveal the wonders and mysteries of creation while teaching Job to adopt a different perspective. This exploration can be seen as a profound cosmic journey. It begins with the origins of the Earth, highlighting significant features such as the boundaries of the sea in chapter 38. The focus then shifts in chapter 39 to the diverse array of animals, culminating in the introductions of the formidable Leviathan and Behemoth in chapters 40 and 41. This perspective emphasizes the specific role that God intended for humanity. Kathryn Schifferdecker believes that Job is both an observer and a participant:

> It must also be noted that Job, and thereby humanity, is the sole passenger on this grand tour of the cosmos that is the divine speeches. Though human beings are almost non-existent in the divine speeches, they are granted a position of some prominence by virtue of Job's position as the recipient of the vision. Job is called to see the world from God's point of view and to take delight in its beauty just as God does. This position of humanity as both observer and participant is unique in the natural world and implies a certain status. Human beings are not the centre of creation, but they are called to observe and appreciate the beauty of creation in a way akin to the Creator's delight in it (Schifferdecker 2022, 130).

The status of human beings in the biblical narrative is clear at this point. On one hand, this Old Testament text calls for humility and discourages an exclusive status in the order of creation. On the other hand, it highlights that humans are unique beings—*sui generis*—who can participate in God's plan for creation in a specific way. This idea of human participation does not endorse or promote anthropocentrism; in fact, it opposes that mindset. Participating in the divine plan for creation necessitates care for all aspects of creation.

Simkins believes that a theocentric perspective is a fundamental biblical viewpoint:

> The biblical worldview is theocentric. The world belongs not to humans but to God, who created and sustains it. In comparison with God's work in creation, the distinctive status and tasks of humans are insignificant. In a theocentric worldview, humans have more in common with the other living creatures than they have differences. All alike are dependent upon God for creation and subsistence, and all alike are valuable to God as part of his creation (Psalm 24:1–2). The world, inclusive of humans and animals, trees and plants, belongs to God because it is God's creation, and it is in relation to God that each part of creation has it value and worth (Simkins 2014, 411).

In Yahweh's speeches in chapters 38 and 39 of the Book of Job, a list of wild animals – including the lion, raven, mountain goat, deer, wild donkey, wild ox, ostrich, horse, hawk, and eagle – serves a dual purpose: it highlights humanity's inability to comprehend the complexities of the world while simultaneously presenting God's greatness. In contrast to other biblical texts, where wild beasts are mentioned to highlight the dangers they pose to humans, this context emphasizes that humans cannot fully understand the nature and purpose of wildlife. The wild animals referenced in Yahweh's speeches were typically targets for hunting among the Assyrian, Mesopotamian, and Babylonian kings. The biblical writer portrays Yahweh as the sovereign ruler over all creatures, including wild animals, similar to how earthly kings assert dominance over them. Michael Dick asserts that the portrayal of Yahweh's authority over wild animals serves a different purpose than the depiction of a king's dominion over these creatures. (Dick 2006) The text conveys that wild animals exist independently of humans and that "the universe does not receive its intelligibility from a human perspective" (Dick 2006, 266). They do not rely on humans for their meaning; they hold

value and significance in God's plan for salvation. The royal hunt symbolizes the greatness and exaltation of the king, demonstrating his power and skill in controlling even wild beasts. In this context, such hunts serve to elevate the king's status.

In contrast, Yahweh's sovereignty is all-encompassing, characterized by comprehensive governance and authority over all living beings, accompanied by an inherent commitment to their care and well-being. Yahweh's speech appears to guide Job away from his self-focused perspective, which has been deeply affected by his suffering. The goal of the speech is to respond to Job in a completely unexpected manner, reject Job's concerns and redefine the issue of the universe's design.

These speeches underscore that, besides Job's relationship with God, there are other underlying dynamics at play that Job is wholly unaware of. For instance, in Job 38:25-26, Yahweh draws Job's attention to the desert, a realm that has no direct connection to Job's life: "Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; To cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man."

In Yahweh's discourses, the beauty, value and wonder of all creatures and His creative work are emphasized, regardless of how useful or not all creatures may be to humans. These teachings move away from a utilitarian-consumerist and anthropocentric view of creation. Each creature has its own intrinsic value and goodness because God is its creator. Therefore, creatures should not be viewed through the lens of utility, exploitation, or consumption, nor should they be seen through an anthropocentric lens that suggests humans can do anything they wish with creation.

From Yahweh's discourses, it follows that every creature has a specific role and place in God's plan of salvation, which grants them inherent worth and goodness. Consequently, anthropocentrism cannot be a narrative supported by the Book of Job. Instead, God's perspective counters anthropocentrism without rejecting humanity; it invites humans to observe the world with admiration and humility.

In the next chapter, we will analyse how the conclusion of the Book of Job reinforces the specific role that Yahweh intended for humanity. This perspective does not justify anthropocentrism but instead offers an alternative view: one in which God, humanity, and all creation are inseparably connected!

2.3. The conclusion of the Book of Job: the relationship between God, humanity, and all creation.

The main thesis of this article is that Christianity, especially the Book of Job, should be seen as a religious system based on ethical principles that correspond with environmental ethics while critiquing and going beyond anthropocentrism. It asserts that the role and place of humans in Christianity cannot be fully understood without considering their relationship to all of creation. Humans are fundamentally beings of relationships, which include their connections with God, fellow humans, and all of creation.[2]

In this framework, Job's relationship with animals should not be understood as one of tyrannical exploitation, but rather as part of the dynamic relationships that God has established between humans and all of creation. At the beginning of the book, Job is described as a righteous man, emphasizing his relationship with others; as someone who fears God and shuns evil, highlighting his relationship with God; and as a man who owns many sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys, reflecting his relationship with the natural world. All these connections are integral to God's grand creative plan, in which humans play an important but not exclusive role.

2 Cf. LS 66. For insights on how environmental engagement is a fundamental aspect of the identity of believers, refer to (Turza and Jurić 2023).

The connection between all living things is illustrated by Job's wealth, described at the beginning of the book. Namely, animals, children, and household staff contribute to his domestic economy: "There were seven sons and three daughters born to him. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and many servants, so this man was the greatest of all the people of the East." (Job 1:2-3) The different animals each serve specific purposes: sheep provide wool and milk, camels are used for transportation, oxen assist in farming, and she-donkeys are utilized for both milk and transportation. Job's well-being is closely tied to the various animals that are part of his household economy. Conversely, his downfall is illustrated by a series of tragic events in Job 1:13-19: the Sabeans steal his oxen and donkeys, divine fire consumes his sheep, the Chaldeans rob him of his camels, and a desert wind collapses the house where his sons and daughters are gathered, resulting in their deaths. Job's decline begins with the loss of his animals, which signifies the destruction of his relationships. The breakdown of these relationships ultimately leads to his ruin.

The restoration of Job's life goes beyond just his physical healing; it also encompasses the mending of all his relationships. At the end of the Book of Job, God affirms that Job spoke rightly about Him (see Job 42:7) and grants Job twice as many livestock as he had at the beginning. Job has seven sons and three daughters, which is the same as at the beginning of the book. The fact that God does not double the number of Job's children has sparked various academic discussions, leading to different interpretations. Some scholars argue that the author aimed for poetic symmetry rather than a theological message (Doak 2021). Others suggest that the decision regarding Job's children reflects the author's insistence on divine justice, indicating that Job was restored (Martin 2018).

He lived to the age of 140 years. The restoration of Job signifies the restoration of all his relationships. In this context, the doubling of the number of animals that contributed to his household economy symbolizes the interconnectedness between humanity and all of creation. This idea serves as a foundation for Christian anthropology. Therefore, the increase in Job's wealth is not a form of anthropocentrism; instead, it represents an understanding of anthropology that transcends anthropocentrism by promoting the idea that all creation is interconnected within God's plan for salvation. In this plan, all living beings hold their own unique place and role, often in mysterious and unfathomable ways. This role and place align with the two principles of environmental ethics.

The coexistence of Job, his family, his servants and the animals that form an essential part of his household reflects the connection between humanity and the rest of creation. However, Susan Millar argues that Job's increasing wealth and the growing number of animals he relies on for his livelihood contradict the principles of environmental ethics:

> I wonder how Job would feel if, with this fresh perspective, he remembered his dehumanisation. I wonder whether the non-hierarchical animal world would undermine his aspirations to human hierarchy, or whether the creature's freedom would make him rethink his oppression. We do not know. The final epilogue in 42:7–17 gives a mixed picture. I have always been saddened that, after the celebration of animal freedom, we find Job here as lord over 23,000 domesticated beasts (42:12) (Millar 2022, 166).

Millar describes the relationship between Job and animals as one of oppression, expressing sorrow that, after the divine celebration of animal freedom, Job returns to a position of dominance over them. Starting from this interpretation, one might conclude that the Book of Job fundamentally

rejects the principles of environmental ethics. However, if we consider the inseparable connection between all creation—specifically between humans and animals, particularly domestic animals—we can view the relationship between Job and the animals as one of coexistence rather than domination or oppression. This perspective suggests that the Book of Job actually affirms key principles of environmental ethics by recognizing the inherent worth of all beings and the good of being. Moreover, it harmoniously encourages reflection on the interconnectedness of all creation and on the three fundamental relationships (with God, neighbours, and all of the creation) central to every human being.

This interpretive approach aligns with Christian anthropology, which asserts that every living being created by God reflects the Creator and participates in His plan of salvation in its unique way. We can see how specific and significant humanity's role is; in the person of Job, God invites humans to embark on a remarkable journey that expands their understanding of the world and reveals the beauty of His creative work. Of course, that does not mean that humans have the right to behave tyrannically towards all of creation.

Conclusion

Two conclusions can be drawn. The first is that the Book of Job can be interpreted as a critique of anthropocentrism. This criticism aligns with two principles of environmental ethics: the inherent worth of all beings and the good of being. The Book of Job strongly criticizes anthropocentrism and calls for its abandonment, as highlighted by Schifferdecker:

> The divine speeches call humanity to a broad vision of the world, one not centred on human beings but instead cognizant of the vast and varied forms of life outside the human sphere. The divine speeches call human beings to see the cosmos from a God's-eye point of view and to love even that which they cannot control (Schifferdecker 2022, 131).

The second conclusion is that the Book of Job acknowledges humans' specific role in the order of creation. Essentially, the humans that Job represents are called to observe and participate in God's creative work, on the one hand, and on the other to take care of all the creatures. In His speeches, Yahweh directs man's attention to various elements of creation, such as the earth, stars, sea, clouds, dawn, springs, death, snow, hail, lightning, thunder, desert, rain, frost, lions, etc. This process of contemplating God's creative work allows man to engage with creation from a perspective that starkly contrasts anthropocentrism. It is essential to recognize that this interpretation implies the potential for creating a Christian ecological ethic that explicitly acknowledges the two previously mentioned principles of environmental ethics, rather than aiming to establish a whole Christian ecological ethics.

Humanity is perceived as having been entrusted by God with the sacred duty of conserving and managing the Earth. The relational dynamics presented in the Bible position God as the primary subject, while humans are depicted as the ones who are to act upon that responsibility. Recent interpretations of biblical texts uniformly reject interpretations that justify the unrestricted use of natural resources and irresponsible behaviour towards all creation by humans. The verbs "kabash" and "radah" are associated with the royal role that God entrusts to humanity, thereby requiring a ruler who is good, just and merciful, akin to Yahweh himself. (Wenham 1987) In his encyclical Laudato Si', Pope Francis highlights humankind's role concerning creation, emphasizing the importance of caring for creation rather than simply managing and preserving it. The encyclical's subtitle highlights this shift by emphasizing the significance of "care" over "management" or "stewardship". While "management" or "stewardship" suggests a more administrative

approach, "caring" implies nurturing relationships like those within friends and family. Pope Francis has made significant advancements compared to his predecessors in understanding humanity's role in the process of creation. It is not merely about managing a specific institution, like the Garden of Eden, or holding a leadership position in a hierarchy of creatures. Instead, it involves providing care that includes both physical and emotional support for all living beings. In this perspective, humanity's resemblance to God does not threaten other beings; rather, it offers a sense of security akin to that found in a harmonious family. This resemblance underscores humanity's unique role in the order of creation, but it neither diminishes nor enhances the beauty of other creatures. Furthermore, it cannot be understood in isolation from the interconnectedness of all living beings.

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