

From Antagonism to Peace with Nature: Paradigm Shifts in the Human–Nature Relationship

Od antagonizmu do pokoju z naturą: zmiany paradymatów w relacji człowiek–natura

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Abstract

This article explores both historical and contemporary understandings of the human–nature relationship, tracing the evolution of paradigms from perceptions of nature as an adversary, through its instrumental treatment as a resource, to contemporary efforts aimed at establishing a partnership model. It examines key turning points in this evolution, including the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, the ecological awakening of the twentieth century, and the emergence of new philosophical currents such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, posthumanism, sustainable development, and environmental justice. Particular attention is given to Michael Meyer-Abich's concept of *peace with nature*, which proposes an ethical and political framework for coexistence between humanity and the natural world as the foundation of a new civilization. The article argues that only a transformation in how we conceptualize the environment – one that incorporates philosophical, religious, educational, institutional, and social dimensions – can offer an adequate response to the global environmental crisis. Peace with nature emerges here not merely as an ethical choice, but as a fundamental condition for the survival of humankind.

Key words: environmental philosophy, practical philosophy of nature, anthropocentrism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, transhumanism, Michael Meyer-Abich, sustainable development, human–nature relationship, ecological justice, peace with nature, education for sustainable development, SDG 4 quality education

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje zarówno historyczne, jak i współczesne rozumienie relacji człowiek–natura, śledząc ewolucję paradymatów od postrzegania natury jako przeciwnika, poprzez instrumentalne traktowanie jej jako zasobu, aż po współczesne wysiłki zmierzające do ustanowienia modelu partnerstwa. Analizuje kluczowe punkty zwrotne w tej ewolucji, w tym rewolucję naukową i przemysłową, ekologiczne przebudzenie XX wieku oraz pojawienie się nowych nurtów filozoficznych, takich jak głęboka ekologia, ekofeminizm, posthumanizm, zrównoważony rozwój i sprawiedliwość ekologiczna. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono koncepcji pokoju z naturą Michaela Meyera-Abicha, która proponuje etyczne i polityczne ramy współistnienia ludzkości ze światem przyrody jako fundament nowej cywilizacji. Artykuł dowodzi, że jedynie transformacja sposobu, w jaki pojmujemy środowisko – obejmująca wymiar filozoficzny, religijny, edukacyjny, instytucjonalny i społeczny – może stanowić adekwatną odpowiedź na globalny kryzys ekologiczny. Pokój z naturą jawi się tutaj nie tylko jako wybór etyczny, ale jako podstawowy warunek przetrwania rodzaju ludzkiego.

Slowa kluczowe: filozofia środowiska, praktyczna filozofia natury, antropocentrzyzm, głęboka ekologia, ekofeminizm, transhumanizm, Michael Meyer-Abich, zrównoważony rozwój, relacja człowiek–natura, sprawiedliwość ekologiczna, pokój z naturą, edukacja na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju, SDG 4 – jakość edukacji

Introduction: Humanity and Nature – An enduring relationship

The relationship between humans and nature has long been a subject of inquiry for philosophers, ethicists, natural scientists, and social scientists. Since the dawn of human civilisation, this relationship has evolved within a dynamic framework shaped by humanity's biological needs, cultural interpretations of the world, technological transformations, and metaphysical conceptions of humanity's place in the universe. Throughout many historical periods, the belief in the primacy of humans over the natural world has prevailed, giving rise to paradigms of domination, control, and environmental exploitation.

Anthropocentrism, according to which man, as an exceptional being, is authorised by the Creator to have dominion over other creatures, and even must shape and utilise nature for his purposes, already appears in religious traditions (especially in the Abrahamic ones) and mythologies of many cultures. Support for the anthropocentric understanding of the human-nature relationship can be seen in Western thought. Elements of an anthropocentric approach to nature are present already in ancient Greek thought (Glacken 1967, 18–33; Hughes 2001, 48–86) and Roman thought (Hughes 2001, 87–146). A similar understanding of this relationship is also visible both in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in the Muslim tradition (Sadowski and Ayvaz 2023).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the question of the role of religion in causing the environmental crisis became the subject of a lively debate, initiated by the publication of Lynn White Jr.'s article *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* (1967). Setting aside the controversial theses proposed by White, it is nevertheless impossible to overlook his contribution to broadening the understanding of the environmental crisis by incorporating a religious perspective. However, many publications have too hastily blamed anthropocentric religious views for the environmental crisis. These works point to the ambivalent influence of monotheistic religious thought on the relationship between humans and nature. According to religious anthropocentric conceptions, on the one hand, humans are indeed authorised to rule over nature and utilise it for their own needs; on the other hand, they are obliged to care for nature within the framework of duties that the Creator imposes on humans in this regard. It is a gross oversimplification to reduce the various versions of anthropocentric conceptions of the human–nature relationship to a single one characterised by irresponsible exploitation of natural resources or even a hostile attitude toward nature.

It is worth noting, however, that not all cultures developed anthropocentric models. The cosmologies of Indigenous peoples of North America, Australian Aboriginals, and many African and Asian communities were based on a non-anthropocentric approach—that is, the recognition that humans are part of a larger whole, a web of life in which no being holds a privileged status (Edor et al. 2025; Bisong 2024; Besong 2025). Interpretations of these traditions reveal that nature was treated with respect, and transgressions against it were associated with moral or ritual sanctions (Descola 2013, pp. 89–91; Sutton and Anderson 2004, pp. 155–157). However, research shows that a non-anthropocentric approach to nature did not shield those regions of the world in which it was dominant. On the contrary, no significant differences are observed in the condition of the natural environment based on whether anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric views of nature prevail (Ponting 2007; Tuan 1971, p. 216; Tuan 1974, pp. 104–110; Chew 2007, pp. 22–23).

This study shows that patterns of attitudes toward nature grow out of adopted paradigms: from antagonism and exploitation toward relationality and *peace with nature*. The paradigm shift indicated here reveals that language, values, and institutions are derivative of prior ontological and axiological assumptions. Hence, building a sustainable world is not merely a matter of technology or policy, but also a task for education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). Advancing this goal, in turn, supports the realization of the remaining SDGs. Education for sustainable development – drawing on environmental philosophy and the philosophy of sustainable development – translates the paradigm into critical competences, ecological virtues, and institutional practices. The approach proposed here weaves together religious-cultural, ethical, and political strands – from the diagnosis of crisis to a model of coexistence – showing that changes in attitudes follow from paradigm shifts.

Meanwhile, the development of Western civilization – particularly since the modern era – has led to an increasing alienation of humans from the natural environment (Jonas 1984). Processes of urbanisation, rationalisation, mechanisation, and the ideology of progress have contributed to the consolidation of the belief that nature is a passive backdrop to human activity, a resource to be exploited rather than a co-participant in life. As a result, the relationship with nature has become one-sided: humans ceased to perceive themselves as part of the biosphere and began to act apart from it, as its masters and overseers (Merchant 1980).

The contemporary experience of the ecological crisis marks a turning point in the understanding of the human–nature relationship. Climate catastrophes, environmental pollution, desertification, deforestation, species extinction, and the degradation of soil and water are not merely technical or biological problems, but profoundly philosophical and existential ones. These phenomena reveal the inadequacy of existing paradigms of the human relationship with nature and its instrumentalisation. They also imply the question of whether it is possible to develop a new, pro-ecological paradigm. Can humanity redefine its place in nature—not as its unlimited ruler and proprietor, but as a participant in the community of life, who draws on its resources with prudence and responsibility, and who cares for its well-being?

In recent decades, environmental philosophy has been actively seeking answers to this question. Several schools of thought have emerged, including the land ethic (Leopold 1949), deep ecology (Naess 1973), ecofeminism (Warren and Erkal 1997; Öztürk 2020), posthumanism (Phillips 2015; Oppermann 2016), and environmental justice (Sarokin and Schulkin 1994; Petrikin 1995). What unites these approaches is a critique of anthropocentrism and an attempt to redefine the human–nature relationship in a spirit of reciprocity, respect, and shared responsibility. However, some perspectives seek to build a new model of the human–nature relationship based on anthropocentrism, arguing that humanity's exceptional status need not entail irresponsible destruction of nature. These concepts emphasise the duties of care for the natural world – duties that, apart from humans, no other beings possess (Łepko 2017; Bołoz 2020; Smolková 2021; Plašienková and Smolková 2024).

A particularly compelling and promising approach is the philosophy of *peace with nature* developed by the German thinker Michael Meyer-Abich (1990). He advocates for a departure from the paradigm of struggle against nature in favour of recognising its subjectivity and the necessity of harmonious coexistence. According to Meyer-Abich, the relationship with nature should be grounded in the principle of peaceful cohabitation, analogous to the relations between individuals in a civil society. Although Meyer-Abich does not define himself as an anthropocentrist, his concept appears to align closely with such a perspective.

The aim of this article is therefore to present the evolution of paradigms in the human–nature relationship. Beginning with the perception of nature as an adversary, through its conceptualisation as a resource, and culminating in its treatment as a partner, the article also outlines a proposal for a new approach based on the philosophy of peaceful coexistence between humankind and the natural world. This analysis will enable a better understanding of the historical, cultural, philosophical, and ethical premises that have led to the current crisis, as well as the potential inherent in alternative models of coexistence with nature.

Understanding the relationship between humans and nature is today not only a task for philosophy but also a key to the survival of civilisation. If humanity does not redefine its place in the world and develop a pro-ecological paradigm for its relationship with nature, it may not survive the consequences of its own expansion. This article is an attempt at a philosophical response to this challenge.

1. The origins of the Human–Nature relationship: Nature as an adversary

In the earliest epochs of human history, the relationship between humans and nature was primarily centred on survival. Nature was perceived as a mysterious, powerful, and threatening realm of human existence. For early humans, nature was above all a danger – an untamed, formidable force on which their life and death depended. The natural environment provided not only food and materials for shelter but also constantly exposed humans to the dangers posed by wild animals, unpredictable weather, famine, disease, and natural disasters. In this context, nature appeared as an adversary against which vigilance was required, as well as defence or, whenever possible, mastery through tools and technology (Ponting 2007, 19–23; Diamond 1997).

During the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods, the human attitude towards nature was characterised by a duality: on the one hand, humans drew from nature everything necessary for life, while on the other, they were engaged in a constant struggle against it. It was during this era that the awareness of nature as a foreign, separate, and often hostile force to humans began to take shape. This fundamental opposition between *culture* and *nature* became one of the most enduring cultural dualisms, continuing to influence the way we perceive the world to this day (Ponting 2007; Keeley 1996, 67–69).

Symbolic representations of this relationship are found in the mythologies and religions of ancient cultures. In Mesopotamian and Greek myths, nature often appears as powerful deities – storms, seas, forests – that had to be appeased, tamed, or overcome. Frequently, the elements were portrayed as wild forces of chaos, opposed by the order imposed by humans or a divine demiurge. In agricultural societies, by contrast, natural cycles were objects of ritual veneration. Agrarian calendars, solstice festivals, and offerings to the gods of harvest all reflected an attempt to control the unpredictability of nature through magic, religion, and ritual (Glacken 1967, 3–18, 39–42). Religious beliefs and convictions have influenced the shaping of the human relationship with nature. According to Eliade, reverence for nature in primal religions often stemmed from the experience of the sacred as something awe-inspiring and overwhelming, vastly exceeding human capacity to comprehend (Eliade 1959, 117–120). Many scholars support the thesis that the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) portray nature as an adversary. A classic publication presenting this position is Lynn White Jr.'s article (1967). However, the majority of scholars do not claim that nature is an enemy of humanity within these religions; rather, they argue that humans have a need, or even a duty, to master and tame nature. It is held that such an attitude towards nature is a consequence of the faith adopted. A frequently cited example in this context is the biblical passage from the Book of Genesis: *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth* (Gen. 1:28, NRSV).

Such an attitude also had its consequences in the Christian tradition. Saint Augustine maintained that the sin of the first parents disrupted the original harmony of creation. After the Fall, the bodily realm became a site of spiritual struggle for the human being. For this reason, Augustine's approach to corporeality is marked by caution and, at

times, even suspicion, as the body may become a source of disordered desires (Augustine 2003, chapter 21; Glacken 1967, pp. 151–154). However, this does not mean that nature as such was considered evil or devoid of value – Augustine did not deny its intrinsic worth and dignity as the work of God.

A similar attitude towards nature can be observed in Islam. The Qur'an describes the human being as a steward (khalifah) of nature (Qur'an 2:29; 7:56; 45:13). However, numerous passages emphasise the obligation to care for the natural world. Thus, the portrayal of religion as a source of hostility towards nature appears to be poorly justified.

It is the author's view that the Abrahamic religions are not inherently anti-nature and do not portray nature as an enemy. Rather, it is the interpretations of these traditions – particularly during the period of dynamic expansion of Western civilization – that contributed to legitimising the paradigm of human domination over nature and viewing it as impure, wild, and dangerous (Nasr 1976; Sadowski and Ayvaz 2023). In religious thought, nature was often seen as a source of spiritual danger, particularly through its association with bodily desires. Modern interpretations broadened this view, treating nature as a general threat to human well-being. This shift helped to legitimise the unrestricted exploitation of nature and justified its exclusion from the sphere of ethical concern.

In classical philosophy, nature was likewise often regarded as *matter* that could be freely shaped by humans according to their intentions. In Aristotle's hierarchy of beings, man occupied the highest position, while plants and animals existed solely for his sake (Aristotle 1941, Book I, Chapter 5, 1256b15–22). Such a view did not encourage the development of the idea of the ontological equality of living beings, nor the recognition of nature as a relational subject. Instead, it reinforced the image of nature as a backdrop, a prop, or at best, a means to the fulfilment of human ends (Hughes 2001).

On a practical level, this adversarial stance towards nature manifested itself in the development of tools, weapons, agricultural techniques, and settlement structures. Every human action – from clearing forests to constructing fortified towns – took on either a defensive or offensive character in relation to the natural world. It was a relationship marked by conflict, governed above all by the logic of survival. Even in communities that venerated the forces of nature, such reverence was often born out of fear and the desire to placate external powers, such as deities or spirits representing natural forces, rather than from any recognition of nature's beauty, equal status, or intrinsic value (Merchant, 1980, pp. 2–3).

This initial paradigm – nature as a hostile force – became deeply embedded in our collective imagination, leaving a lasting imprint on culture, religion, and politics. The treatment of the environment as something external, potentially dangerous, and in need of control formed the basis of many civilisational institutions. Presenting nature as a threat to humanity implied the necessity of actions aimed at protecting human beings (Milton 2007, Book IX, 1.; Hobbes 1998, Part I, Chapter 13). It also inspired efforts to understand the laws governing the natural world. Such knowledge enabled humans to gain mastery over nature and to develop means of protection against its hazards. This, in turn, laid the foundations for technological advancement, through which nature came to be regarded not so much as an adversary, but as a resource essential to the rapidly expanding Western civilisation.

2. The Scientific and Industrial Revolutions – Nature as a resource

A turning point in the human relationship with nature came with the Scientific and subsequently the Industrial Revolution. These two processes, unfolding successively from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, fundamentally transformed the way people perceived the natural world. Above all, nature ceased to be viewed as a mysterious and incomprehensible force; instead, it began to be understood as a mechanism – a system of elements that could be studied, analysed, predicted, and, most importantly, exploited for human purposes.

The Scientific Revolution gave rise to modern science based on observation, experimentation, and mathematics. It was driven by the conviction that science should have practical applications and serve the purpose of human domination over nature: *nature must be put on the rack and tortured for her secrets* (Bacon 1620, p. 43). In the modern era, nature came to be conceived as a soulless machine – something that could be understood and transformed by the power of human reason (Descartes 1637, pp. 34–35). The distinction introduced by Descartes between extended substance and thinking substance (*res extensa* and *res cogitans*) separated the human being (as a thinking substance) from the rest of the physical world (as extended substance). This, in turn, legitimised the unrestrained exploitation of nature, which was regarded entirely as *res extensa*.

This philosophical transformation in the perception of the world laid the foundations of modern thought, which, in turn, inspired the Industrial Revolution. It was during this period that humans came to be seen as *masters of nature*, capable—through scientific knowledge and technological tools – of controlling the environment and reshaping it to suit their needs. The world became a '*regnum hominis*', *the empire of man over things*, as Bacon put it (*Novum Organum*, 1620, Book I, Aphorism 81). The Industrial Revolution, which began in late eighteenth-century England, was a logical consequence of this paradigm shift and marked the moment when the exploitation of nature reached an unprecedented scale.

With the advent of new technologies, there was a dramatic increase in the use of natural resources. Nature ceased to be viewed as an autonomous reality and came instead to be regarded as a reservoir of resources to be quantified,

exploited, and economically utilised. The rapid expansion of cities, the growing demand for raw materials and labour led to profound environmental transformations: air and river pollution, soil degradation, deforestation, and changes to the landscape. The scale of these developments was unparalleled (Worster 1994, pp. 287–291).

Paradoxically, for a long time the negative consequences of this process were either ignored or regarded as an acceptable price for progress. A positivist optimism prevailed, according to which technological advancement equated to human advancement. This implied that nature was to be *mastered* and *civilized*. Nineteenth-century Western thought was also marked by a belief in the unlimited power of science, which resulted in a lack of reflection on the limits of development and the resilience of the Earth's ecosystems.

Criticism of this model emerged only in the twentieth century, when it became apparent that the exploitation of the natural environment leads to its irreversible degradation. Economists such as Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and ecologists like Barry Commoner highlighted that the economy is not a separate system but part of the ecosystem and subject to its limitations (Commoner 1971, 17–21; Georgescu-Roegen 1971, 15). At the same time, the concept of *external costs* of industrial development began to be recognised. These included pollution, disease, and loss of biodiversity – factors that had previously been omitted from economic calculations.

From the perspective of the mid-2020s, it is clear that the scientific and industrial revolutions marked the beginning of the subordination of the biosphere to human interests, a process exceptional in its scale. Currently, human activity impacts the entire planet and extends beyond it. Although scientific achievements and technological advances have contributed to immense civilisational progress, they have also created a system that depletes the planet's resources faster than they can be replenished (Steffen et al. 2007, 614–621).

For this reason, there is growing discourse around the need for a new revolution – this time ethical and systemic – that would enable a departure from the paradigm of exploitation towards a relationship based on respect, moderation, and coexistence (Łepko 2022; *Ecological Paradigm Shift* 2025).

3. The Ecological Awakening – A source of change in the perception of Nature

The second half of the twentieth century marks a pivotal turning point in humanity's relationship with nature. Overexploitation of the environment resulted in increasingly evident signs of an environmental crisis, impacting entire societies. Global warming, smog, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, and ozone depletion came to be recognized as consequences of the dominant model of socio-economic development. The response to these threats was the so-called ecological awakening, a process of profound change in the perception of nature and humanity's place in the world (McNeill 2000).

A symbolic milestone of this shift was the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. The book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 by Rachel Carson, catalyzed the so-called ecological awakening. Carson detailed how the widespread use of pesticides, particularly DDT, led to the death of birds and disruption of ecosystems (Carson 1962). Her narrative, in addition to presenting scientific data, also appealed to ethical considerations and emotions, resonating with a broad public audience. In this way, a global public consciousness began to awaken on a large scale regarding the devastation of nature and its consequences.

In the subsequent decades, key institutions, international conventions, and grassroots social movements dedicated to nature conservation emerged. Concurrently, new philosophical and ethical approaches developed, often adopting a non-anthropocentric perspective in seeking solutions to escalating environmental problems. Arne Naess formulated the concept of *deep ecology*, advocating a departure from the instrumental treatment of the environment and the recognition of the intrinsic value of all forms of life (Naess 1973, 97–99). Within this framework, humans are no longer the centre of the universe but rather one link among many in the ecosystem's network of interconnections. Following this, other currents arose, such as ecofeminism (Plumwood 1993), environmental ethics, and ecological theology, which sought variously to reformulate the human-nature relationship, encourage societies towards environmental activism, and raise ecological awareness (Sadowski 2025).

This process also extended to popular culture. Literature, film, education, and the media increasingly engaged with environmental themes. Social campaigns, educational programmes, and civic movements promoting recycling, sustainable development, and responsible consumption emerged. There was a growing reflection on lifestyles, particularly in the countries of the Global North, and their impact on the state of the biosphere.

The ecological awakening also brought about a language change. Instead of speaking of *endless progress* and *dominion over nature*, terms such as *environmental responsibility*, *environmental justice*, *ecological awareness*, *sustainable development*, and *ecological footprint* began to be used. Slowly but steadily, the place once occupied by modern optimism and recklessness in exploiting nature was taken by an awareness of natural processes and reflection on the environmental costs of civilizational development (Abram 2017).

Although much remains to be done, the turn of the 1960s and 1970s can be regarded as a moment when nature ceased to be widely perceived as an inexhaustible resource and began to be understood as a fragile and limited system whose sustainability also depends on human actions. It was during this period that a paradigm shift began – that is, a move away from humanity's unlimited dominion over nature and its exploitation towards a responsibility for the environment in which humans and all living beings coexist.

4. Contemporary models of the Human–Nature relationship

In the face of escalating ecological problems and global environmental threats in the 20th and 21st centuries, the need to redefine the human–nature relationship has become the subject of intense philosophical, scientific, and societal debate. Today, numerous competing approaches exist that interpret this relationship – from conservative and pragmatic perspectives to those that are radically critical of humanity’s historical treatment of nature. Each of these models is grounded in its own ontological, ethical, and political assumptions, which shape the way the natural environment is perceived, as well as the role attributed to humans within the ecosystem.

One of the most widely accepted approaches to the human–nature relationship is the concept of sustainable development, as defined in the so-called *Brundtland Report* of 1987, produced by UN agencies. Sustainable development assumes that economic growth can be reconciled with environmental protection, and is based on the principle of three interdependent pillars: economic, social, and environmental (WCED 1987). Although this model has been broadly endorsed at the international level and incorporated into the legal systems of many countries, it is often criticised for being overly general and insufficiently effective in addressing real ecological challenges (Redclift 2005; Jackson 2009).

At the same time, more radical approaches emerged, such as *deep ecology*, initiated by Arne Naess. This perspective holds that all forms of life possess equal intrinsic value, regardless of their usefulness to humans. As such, it is characterised by what Naess called biospheric egalitarianism (Naess 1973, 96). Deep ecology calls for a profound transformation of consciousness – specifically, the abandonment of anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism or ecocentrism, in which humans are not dominant over nature but are equal participants within it. In practical terms, this translates into advocacy for population reduction, simple living, and locally based models of production. A perspective closely related to deep ecology is ecofeminism. According to this approach, the roots of violence against nature and against women are deeply interconnected. Carolyn Merchant and Val Plumwood argue that patriarchal social structures, reinforced by deeply rooted Western cultural dualisms – such as culture versus nature, male versus female, reason versus emotion – legitimise the domination of both nature and women (Merchant 1980, 123–163; Plumwood 1993, 20, 41–44). As an antidote to this domination, ecofeminism advocates abandoning the prevailing dualistic thinking in favour of relationships grounded in interdependence, empathy, and care – values traditionally associated with the feminine sphere but devalued in a male-dominated world.

Another contemporary approach that has been gradually gaining prominence is ecological posthumanism. This perspective challenges the traditional boundaries between humans and the rest of the biosphere. Proponents of this view – such as Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, and Rosi Braidotti – argue that the category of *the human* is a cultural construct that has shaped a hierarchical understanding of nature, privileging the human species. They advocate for a shift in our conceptual framework – from thinking in terms of separation and human exceptionalism to thinking in terms of hybridity, relationality, and co-agency, where the human is merely one actor among many in a web of interconnected entities, including other humans, animals, technologies, and ecosystems (Haraway 2016, 1–8; Latour 2004, 53–57; Braidotti 2013, 60–61).

An important approach is the theory of environmental justice, which links environmental issues with broader social and political concerns (Schlosberg 2007, 3–9; Latour 2004, 53–57). Scholars such as David Schlosberg and Rob Nixon emphasise that environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poorest communities, Indigenous peoples, and countries of the Global South (Schlosberg 2007, 79–81; Latour 2004; Nixon 2011; Sadowski 2016, 151–155). From this perspective, environmental protection becomes a struggle for equality, human rights, and environmental democracy. It entails the promotion of concepts such as environmental citizenship and the need for systemic transformation of economic and political institutions.

On a practical level, increasing attention is now being paid to local and Indigenous models, such as *Buen Vivir* (*good living*) in South America, which is inspired by the cosmologies of the Quechua and Aymara peoples. *Buen Vivir* rejects economic growth as an end in itself and promotes living in harmony with Pachamama – Mother Earth – as a fundamental dimension of well-being (Gudynas 2011). Similar ideas can be found in African traditions of *being together*, interconnectedness, and the centrality of community – commonly referred to as Ubuntu philosophy – as well as in the Dreamtime tradition of Australian Aboriginal peoples. According to this worldview, there is no clear boundary between humans and nature, as everything shares a common origin and spiritual identity (Kyei-Nuamah and Peng 2024; Rose 1996).

Despite their differences, all of these approaches share the conviction that the prevailing anthropocentric paradigm is inadequate in the face of contemporary challenges. They propose not only alternative ways of perceiving the world, but also concrete strategies for action – ranging from the transformation of education systems and legal frameworks to the redefinition of social values. Their growing significance suggests that the future of the human–nature relationship will depend on society’s willingness to transcend modernist limitations and embrace a new way of thinking about nature and the place of humans within it. At the core of all these perspectives lies the imperative to recognise and affirm the deep interconnections between humans and the natural world.

5. Nature as a partner in building peace between humans and the Natural World

Among contemporary concepts seeking to overcome the dominant paradigm of instrumental treatment of nature, a special place is occupied by the ideas of German naturalist and philosopher Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich. In his book *Frieden mit der Natur* (Peace with Nature), he proposes moving away from the model of human-nature rivalry towards a relationship based on reciprocity, partnership, and coexistence (Meyer-Abich 1990, 18–19). Although grounded in the Western European tradition, his approach radically challenges the nature-culture dualism and formulates a new ethical and political foundation for future relations with the biosphere.

The fundamental premise of his philosophy is the assertion that humans are not beings external to nature, but rather an integral part of it. This means that human actions cannot be perceived as external to ecosystems but are an immanent element within them. Meyer-Abich advocates for a necessary shift in human self-understanding – from seeing oneself as master and owner of nature to recognizing oneself as a responsible participant in the community of life. Consequently, he argues that nature is not a resource to be exploited, but a community of life to which humans belong (Meyer-Abich 1979).

Meyer-Abich advocates a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric to a physiocentric perspective, in which nature is no longer merely the object of regulation but an equal moral subject in ethical relations. In his view, the philosophy of nature must not be confined solely to describing the world; it must also indicate ways of acting responsibly within it. Moreover, he emphasises the necessity of restoring the category of *practical reason* in our interactions with nature – interactions founded upon restraint, moderation, and dialogue with the environment (Meyer-Abich 1979).

In his conception, Meyer-Abich draws inspiration from German philosophy of nature, particularly the thought of German Romanticism, and especially from Schelling, Goethe, and Humboldt. However, he does not advocate a return to *wild nature*; rather, he envisions the development of an ethos of living in harmony with the natural order – one that does not presuppose the dominance of a single species over others (Görg 2003). The ideal, therefore, is not a return to the state of nature, but the creation of a new model of civilisation that rejects conflict with nature in favour of the peaceful coexistence of the human being within the natural world (Meyer-Abich 1993).

Meyer-Abich refers to the symbolism of plants as sensors of ecological imbalance. In this way, he demonstrates not only environmental degradation but also the dehumanisation of modern man, who has severed his ties with nature. He argues that the ecological crisis is, in essence, an anthropological one, stemming from a fundamental misunderstanding of the human being. Contemporary human beings, he claims, are alienated from nature and perceive themselves as beings *external* to the biosphere (Meyer-Abich 1986).

Peace with nature is also an idea that calls for developing, by analogy with social relations among humans – which are regulated by law, ethics, and institutions – similar principles in relation to nature. Just as relations between individuals in a democratic society are based on respect for rights, equality, and compromise, so too should human relations with nature be founded on the principle of ecological peace. This entails recognising not only the value of nature but also its dignity as a co-participant in collective life (Meyer-Abich 1990; 1993).

It should be noted that Meyer-Abich does not confine himself to abstract philosophical reflections. He identifies concrete areas of action, including reforming ecological education, moving away from the ideology of growth, transforming urban planning and transportation policies, developing environmental democracy, and enacting legislation that recognizes the rights of nature – for example, constitutional guarantees for climate protection. Consequently, institutional and structural transformation is necessary, including changes in law, education, economic organisation, and culture (Hartmann 2005). This concept thus assumes that ecological change cannot be limited to individual *pro-environmental* legal acts but must become the foundation of a new social order.

An important aspect of this conception is its critique of the traditional understanding of ecological responsibility. Meyer-Abich emphasises that individual responsibility for the environment, while necessary, is insufficient in the face of the contemporary scale of global challenges. His proposal is closely aligned with Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility, as articulated in the principle: *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life* (Jonas 1984, 11). Both thinkers share the conviction that technology and knowledge grant humans immense power, but simultaneously impose upon them a new dimension of moral responsibility. The object of this responsibility is no longer limited to people living today but also includes future generations, as well as the non-human natural world.

In an era when climate disaster and species extinction cease to be mere future scenarios and instead become present realities, the call for *peace with nature* gains particular urgency. Unlike technocratic visions of world repair through *green innovations*, Meyer-Abich advocates for a genuine transformation encompassing worldview, values, daily attitudes, and even lifestyle. This entails not only a change in the human–nature relationship but also, and perhaps above all, a transformation of humanity itself.

Conclusion: Towards a Philosophy of Survival

The contemporary world stands on the brink of a radical civilisational shift. The prevailing paradigm of the human–nature relationship – based on domination, control, and exploitation – has not only lost its relevance, but more importantly, has revealed its self-destructive consequences. The climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, soil desertification, ocean acidification, and the transgression of planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009) are clear warnings that the continued persistence of this model threatens to disrupt the balance of life on Earth irreversibly. In this context, peace with nature is no longer merely an aesthetic or spiritual notion; it becomes an existential imperative – a condition for the survival of civilisation.

The previously discussed concepts indicate that subtle modifications to the prevailing paradigm of the human–nature relationship are insufficient. Merely patching the weak points of this paradigm or implementing technical innovations alone will not yield the desired results. What is needed is a fundamental shift in thinking – that is, a transformation of mentality involving the rejection of egoism, complacency, short-sightedness, and irresponsibility in favour of cultivating a mindset of moderation, responsibility, foresight, and willingness to make sacrifices. Increasingly, calls are being made for a radical rethinking of our worldview and of the place and role of the human being within it. Such change must be multidimensional, encompassing language, values, law, institutions, and human ways of life.

The peace referred to here is not a utopian state of perfect equilibrium, but a dynamic process of negotiating coexistence. It requires empathy, awareness of the consequences of ecological processes, a willingness to cooperate, and a renunciation of excessive consumption. It must also be grounded in environmental justice – that is, global solidarity with the most vulnerable communities, as well as the recognition of the rights of nature as both a legal and ethical subject (Latour 2017; Schlossberg 2007, 131–133; Latour 2004).

Significantly, the proposed changes do not focus on altering individual behaviour, but rather on the systemic transformation of economic, political, and educational models, along with the cultivation of an ecological way of life grounded in a culture of moderation. The philosophy of survival in the twenty-first century requires a reconfiguration of the paradigms that have thus far shaped our relationship with the world: economic growth, competition, efficiency, resource exploitation, and environmental degradation. In their place, a new ethos must emerge – one based on responsibility, interspecies solidarity, intergenerational justice, and the recognition of the community of life.

The author maintains that building a sustainable world requires the alignment of three frameworks: the human–nature relational paradigm, appropriate education for sustainable development, and the legal-institutional order. The *peace with nature* perspective organizes this nexus: it shifts the emphasis from domination to interdependence, from utilitarianism to intergenerational and interspecies responsibility, and from *ad hoc* technical fixes to a cultural transformation of habits and virtues. In practical terms, this entails incorporating environmental philosophy and the philosophy of sustainable development into the core of education. The results of philosophical inquiry should be reflected in learning objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation criteria, and institutional policies. Only then can the transition advocated here – from antagonism to coexistence with nature – become a genuine vector of change. Quality education (SDG 4), therefore, does not end the argument but completes it: it is the mechanism by which a paradigm is translated into attitudes and collective practices.

While philosophical reflection on the relationship between humanity and nature may indicate directions and offer interpretative tools, real change requires the engagement of a broad spectrum of social actors: public institutions, social movements, science, education, culture, and citizens. Each of these spheres has a vital role to play, and failure to act in this regard will reduce the likelihood of ensuring the well-being of future generations. In shaping the future, humanity must learn from the mistakes of the past and undertake bold transformations in the manner of its presence on Earth. For if humanity does not learn to live in harmony with nature, its future will be gravely endangered.

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