

The Beneficence of God with Respect to Environmental Ethics: Tillich's Divine-Human Creativity Theory as Solution to Climate Crisis

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Abstract

The world today is in an environmental crisis due to human destructiveness and aggressive behaviour. Health problems in terms of bad medicine are rampant. This is so because human hearts are bent away from the Beneficent God because of sin. Monopoly, greed, and glutton describe the dangerous situation of the world today. Wealth, money and power are automatically reasons for inequality. World economics are destructive and exploitative. Human beings destroy others, destroy themselves; they kill others and kill themselves (suicide). Human beings destroy their environment. Gender inequality is one example of human destructiveness where women are senselessly ostracized, downtrodden and relegated. Because environment is defined in this study as the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival, climate change is the defining crisis of our time and it is happening even more quickly than we feared. No person in the world is immune from the devastating consequences of the global climate change. Rising temperatures are fueling environmental degradation, natural disasters, whether extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruptions especially due to COVID-19, conflict, and terrorism. Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning. As the infinite cost of climate change reaches irreversible highs, now is the time for bold multidisciplinary action. The objectives of this study are three-fold: i) to address climate crisis calls through an interdisciplinary approach, as a religious contribution is needed as part of panacea. ii) to use theological correlation methods to contribute to the understanding of our world and the existential questions - spirituality asks existential questions, religiosity is the inter-subjective way of elaborating answers to questions about existential meaning, on beliefs in God, the divine, sacred, or Transcendent; religion is the system that offers answers. iii) to examine how the world needs to behave ethically. Environmental philosophy is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship between human beings and nature, as well as the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents. This qualitative study uses Tillich's theological correlation method, and Tillich's divine human creativity theory in addressing the challenge of environment and climate crisis. 'The Christ' is the one who brings the new reality, Jesus (Christology) strikes the necessary balance. "Christ is the end of existence lived in estrangement, conflicts and self-destruction, existential distortion, the ambiguities of life and human's historical predicament".

Key words: Atonement, Christ, ethics, human destructiveness, redemption, sin

1.0 Introducing the problem

Human beings are created with a vacuum, an empty box which is only filled by God the Creator. According to God's FIAT, human beings are - *Homo Adorans*. Human beings are rational, spiritual, and worshipping; created to worship and adore God. This sets them apart from other animals and other creatures. The capacity of our relationship with God is what gives us our focus and fulfilment. The dogmatic or analytical explanation of the problem(s) of this study is that, through original sin, humankind became *privatus boni* (deprived of good) and *vulneratus in naturalibus* (wounded in their natural physical existence, marred in their relationships) and, therefore, in need of redemption. Sin, or the deprivation of original holiness and justice, necessitates the utilization of the doctrine of God as a basis for ethics in order to resolve problems at the historical and socio-political levels.

The world is in environmental crisis due to mankind's selfishness, destructiveness and aggressive behaviour (Freud, 1905, 1910, 1911, 1920, 1923, and 1927 Fromm, 1992; Miles-Novelo, 2022). We witness countless examples of inhuman action against humanity, abuse, nepotism, senseless conflicts (personal, interpersonal, and intra-personal), conscious and unconscious violence. The just war theory is no longer working (Mattox, 2006). We are in a global disrupted childhood obviously because human hearts are bent away from God because of sin. Humans destroy others and themselves, they kill others and kill themselves (suicide, and death: personal, interpersonal, and intra-personal). Humans destroy their environment. Gender inequality is another example of mankind's destructiveness; women are senselessly ostracized and relegated. Environment is defined in this study as the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival; climate change is the defining crisis of our time and it is happening even more quickly than we feared. No nation is immune from the devastating consequences of climate crisis. Rising temperatures are fuelling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruptions especially due to COVID-19, conflict, and terrorism. Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, the oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning. As the infinite cost of climate crisis reaches irreversible highs, now is the time for bold collective action.

Two important points have to be made clear: i) the three basic pairs of environmental principles are: justice and sustainability; sufficiency and compassion; solidarity and

participation (Minteer, 2011); ii) all the principles of ethics in medicine namely: *primum non nocere* or non-maleficence (first to do no harm), confidentiality, competence, beneficence, charity, altruism, risk/benefit analysis, proportion, equality, autonomy, distributive justice, etc (Beauchamp, *et al*, 1979, 1989, 1994 and Frame, 1988), emanate from the doctrine of God. This study demonstrates how environmental concerns challenge us to extend these principles to include the well-being of the natural world and our human duties to it.

Tillich insists that morality is essentially religious and that theological ethics must be seen as present in each part of systematic theology. In this respect, Tillich's moral vision is as challenging and timely as it was when first written. Too often Christian ethicists and moral philosophers ignore the demands of theological reflection; contemporary theologians are given to moral exhortation in place of careful ethical reflection. Yet the question of relation between morality and religion continues to fuel public debate, especially in increasingly an interdependent world of diverse and competing moral, cultural, and religious outlooks (Tillich, 1963b:1).

The word doctor, commonly associated with health refers to doctrine, implying that it pertains to health education as well. A continuum of Health Education and Health Promotion in the context of personal health and hygiene is essential to the prevention and treatment of human diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, TB, COVID-19, and or Ebola. The goals of medicine and the relationship between theology, environment and medicine also need to be reemphasized. The study begins with a literature review reviewing academic, educational and professional writings demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the academic literature on theology, environment and health. The literature review is followed by the research methodology, discussion; a conclusion and references.

2.0 Literature review

This section examines the data and findings of other authors relative to a specified research question or questions. It is just one research methodology that is employed to address theology, environment and health. The central focus of this literature review is the threat to our environment. Human existence finds itself in danger of self-harm, self-extinction, and self-annihilation. Theology and the environment are related, as they all deal with human existence. Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the problem of human existence and centres on the subjective experience of thinking, feeling, and acting (Macquarrie, 1972:14-15). Existentialist thinkers frequently explore issues related to the

meaning, purpose, and value of human existence (Mills, 2022:57; Steele, 2021:1). The hypothesis of this study is that, according to John Macquarrie and Paul Tillich, ‘the world around us matters’ (Mueller, 1984:21); and that it deserves to be treated with authentic care. Authentic care is only made possible by spirituality, religiosity and religion. “The way to an ecological theology of nature” (Moltmann, 1993:33) is interconnected with the ecological crisis (Moltmann, 1993:20), and the crisis of [world] dominance (Moltmann, 1993:23).

Fusis, Phusis or Physis --- φύσις is a Greek philosophical, theological, and scientific term, usually translated into English—according to its Latin translation ‘natura’ -as ‘nature’. Ancient Greek attitudes towards the environment were largely religious rather than scientific. For example, Plato considered nature to be planned or designed by a higher power and his Socratic dialogue *The Republic* (375 B.C.) considered planetary rotation as an instructional image for the human soul. There is a serious relationship between Socrates the father of philosophy and Kierkegaard the father of Christian existentialism especially on central life questions (Kreeft, 2014:138). Greek natural science was based on the principle that the world was saturated with mind. Greek thinkers regarded the presence of mind in nature as the source of that regularity or orderliness in the physical world whose presence made a science of nature possible.

Zimmerman (2004) divides environmental philosophy into three categories: anthropocentric reformism, environmental ethics, and radical ecology. Freud, even before explicitly defining aggression as one of the components of the instinct of self-preservation or Ego instincts (Freud, 1910, 1915a), described the instinct of cruelty as intimately connected with the instinct of appropriation.

The greatest threat to our environment is not nuclear or fluorine testing, the burning of tropical forests in the Amazon River region or toxic waste. The greatest threat to our environment has been and is sin! So . . . help to clean up the environment by repenting of your sin! The existence of aggression can be explained by psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud founded psychoanalysis, the most well-known form of psychodynamics. According to his theory, human aggression is an instinctive drive, one that springs from the person rather than the situation, and is therefore an unavoidable part of human life (Glassman, 2004).

Foltz (2013) offers contemplative or “noetic” knowledge which can be seen as the highest mode of understanding, a view that persists both in many non-Western cultures and in Eastern

Christianity, where *theoria physike*, or the illumined understanding of creation that follows the purification of the heart, is seen to provide deeper insights into nature than the discursive rationality modernity has used to dominate and conquer. Working from texts in Eastern Orthodox philosophy and theology not widely known in the West, as well as a variety of sources including mystics such as the Sufi Ibn 'Arabi, poets such as Basho, Traherne, Blake, Hölderlin, and Hopkins, and nature writers such as Muir, Thoreau, and Dillard, Foltz challenges both the primacy of the natural sciences in environmental thought and the conventional view, first advanced by Lynn White, Jr., that Christian theology is somehow responsible for the environmental crisis. Instead, Foltz concludes that the ancient Christian view of creation as iconic—its “holy beauty” manifesting the divine energies and constituting a primal mode of divine revelation—offers the best prospect for the radical reversal that is needed in our relation to the natural environment.

Bauman (2014) argues that the Christian doctrine of *Creatio Ex Nihilo* (creation out of nothing) sets up a support system for a ‘logic of dominance’ toward human and earth others. Conceptually inspired by the work of theologian Catherine Keller and feminist philosopher of the environment Val Plumwood, it follows a genealogical method in examining how the concept of creation out of nothing materializes in the world throughout different periods in the history of the Christian West.

O’Neill *et al.* (2021) convincingly write, in a suffering world reeling from global pandemics and health disparities, it is high time to think theologically about the devastating experience of disease, and to address our God-inspired responsibility to understand its origins and engage in its management. In a fragmented world, we need a unifying and integrated perspective on people in communities embedded in a fractured ecology. In an academic world blind to the spiritual world and imbalanced toward technical solutions, the global church must articulate a contemporary metanarrative that is moral, practical, and deeply transformational.

The only solution is to fear God (Steele, 2021:36). According to existentialism, existence precedes essence. In this statement we are taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which, from Plato’s time forward, enables *existentia*. Sartre reversed this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. It keeps us with metaphysics, oblivious to the truth of Being (Heidegger, 1978:208).

Uzawa rightly thinks that global warming is a corporate game (Uzawa, 2008:193). According to the greenhouse theory of climate change, the climate system will be restored to equilibrium by a warming of the surface-troposphere system and a cooling of the stratosphere. The predicted changes, during the next few decades, could far exceed natural climate variations in historical times. All the theories of climate change are still far away from bringing the solution. These range from anthropogenic global warming (AGW), bio-thermostat, cloud formation and human forcing besides greenhouse gases, ocean currents, planetary motion, and solar variability (Bast, 2010).

3.0 Methodology

The climate crisis calls for the heart of the Existential Method by Paul Tillich and John Macquarrie (Mueller, 1984:21-34). Faith-oriented moral reasoning mode resolves climate crisis. Qualitative research design is employed; Library and Archival research are the premises on which theological correlation methodology this study balances. God's being is the source of environmental ethics, ethics in medicine and health ethics, the goal of ethics is God's glory, Love for God, Creation nature of environment, Neighbor, and Self is the motive of ethics.

Ontological analysis and ethical application are keys to problem-solving (Tillich, 1954). Below are illustrations of the philosophical impact of Tillich's theoretical correlation of research methods via epistemology, research approach, research strategy, and data collection/analysis methods.

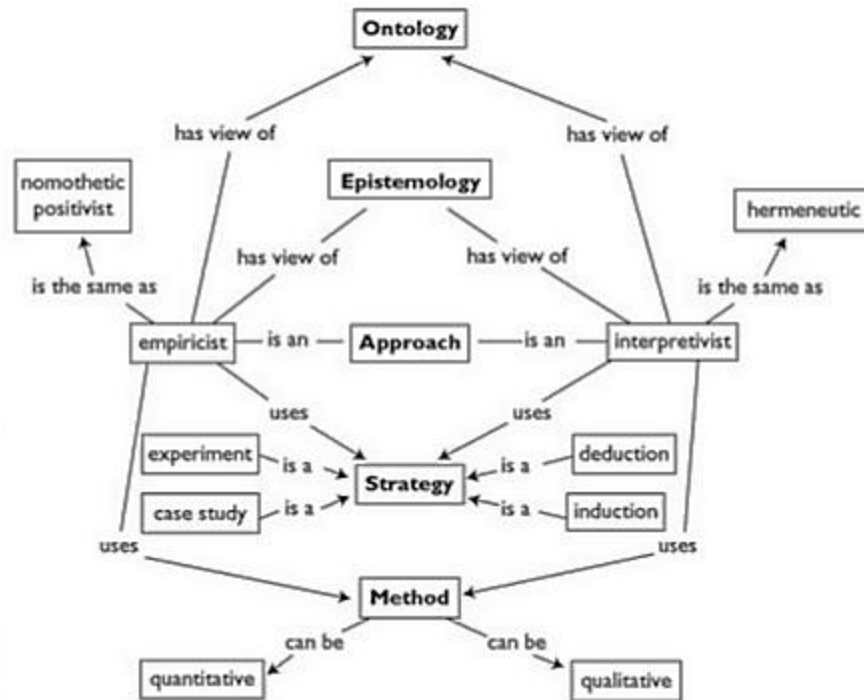


Figure 1: Impact of research philosophy on the choice of research method

Climate crisis is existential, and is summarized as brokenness best solved by the doctrine of God. We have used inductive reasoning in our observations to derive at a general principle. We used theological hermeneutics and in views of epistemology and ontology. Figure No. 2 below elaborates the relationships between spirituality, religiosity, religion and nature as follows:



Figure 2: Theological correlation method of Paul Tillich: Divine-Human Creativity Ethic.

By using the correlation theory, one can examine spirituality, religiosity, and religion in relation to the problem(s). Tillich’s theology as well as his theological method is correlative, which means theological method and theological content are mutually determinative. His is a

theology of correlation, where ‘correlation’ means that one starts with the ‘incompleteness’, the ‘brokenness’, and the ‘despair’ of man in the existentialist sense. In contrast, one ends with ‘completeness’, the wholeness, and the unity of God. It is this God who changes and transforms lives through Jesus Christ.

This study argues that, it is the Ground of Being encountering emptiness, brokenness, and anxiety that solves the human problem(s). “We could not think about Being without a double negation. Being must be thought of as a negation of the negation of being” (Tillich *et al.*, 2020:179). Having the courage to be comes before a divine encounter (Tillich *et al.*, 2020:160), and we must confess that we are sinful, and guilty, and then we must accept God’s acceptance (Tillich *et al.*, 2020:163-71).

4.0 Results and discussion

We assert that human activity has pushed the earth into the sixth mass extinction event (Kolbert, 2014; Ripple *et al.*, 2019:1026-8). The loss of biodiversity has been attributed in particular to human overpopulation, continued global population growth, and overconsumption of natural resources by the world’s wealthy (Pimm *et al.*, 2014; Ceballos *et al.*, 2017). The *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, published by UN IPBES in 2019, posits that roughly one million species of plants and animals face extinction from anthropogenic causes, such as expanding anthropogenic land use for industrial agriculture and livestock rearing, along with overfishing. Human actions threaten more species with global extinction now than ever before, the report concludes, estimating that around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken (Plumer, 2019, see also Vidal, 2019). A 2020 report by the WWF found that, human activity – specifically overconsumption, population growth, and intensive farming has destroyed 68% of vertebrate wildlife since 1970 (Greenfield, 2020).

Tillich rightly insists that “morality is essentially religious and that theological ethics must be seen as present in each part of systematic theology” (Tillich, 1963:1). Theology is a science like any other sciences, and because medicine, like theology, is also a science, it is in the true sense commendable for every physician for health education and promotion; to understand the goals of medicine and the relationships of theology and medicine. In addition to enriching the higher life of the community, this understanding also fosters its ethical culture and growth. When the physician becomes increasingly aware of these, they will be able to strike a balance

in their medical practice. Scientists and their reputation should not be reasons for physicians to ignore all Church influences, and assume skepticism and doubt, mocking all Church programs and teachings. We argue that *preaching, teaching and medicine* are functions of the Holy Trinity, anyone evading from this clearly exhibits their narrow judgment and scientific incompetency. The new being which is transformed by Jesus Christ is capable of authentic care (Tillich, 1955).

Three points must be made clear: i) Humanity is the Image and Likeness of God --- *Imago Dei* in terms of their innate capacity to be creative and orderly. The *Imago Dei* theory proposes rooting the dynamics of humanity's creativity in the *Imago Dei*, as humanity is the Image and Likeness of a creative God. The Divine-Human Creativity ethic is divided into three major parts.

i) Recognize the creativity of God by considering the manner with which He created and He creates the universe.

ii) *Imago Dei* elucidate the context of the research: humanity is the Image and Likeness of God. We want to treat the subject by examining the evolution of the concept throughout the history of the Church. In the context of such a historical treatment of the concept, we offer an analysis that draws insights from a variety of theologians over the centuries. These include Paul Tillich, Jürgen Moltmann and others.

iii) It is important to consider the concept of creativity using the concepts proposed by theological aesthetics and our personal experiences as artists, ethicists and theologians. Specifically, we consider how art, ethics, and theology relate and serve each other in the service of revelation. We describe the stages of the creative process by using the parallelism of art, ethics, theology, and revelation. In our last part, we discuss creativity in light of *Imago Dei's* being an image of God.

Humans are the following six levels of their existence: i) *Homo Adorans*, rational, spiritual, and worshipping; created to worship and adore God. This perhaps distinguishes them from other animals and other creatures. They have their focus and fulfillment in this capacity of the relationship with God, with a vacuum, or an empty box in their being which is only filled by God. ii) Humans are *Homo Sapiens*, most abundant and widespread species of primate, characterized by bipedalism. An animal or machine that usually moves in a bipedal manner is

known as a biped, meaning ‘two feet’, (from Latin *bis* ‘double’ and *pes* ‘foot’) or two legged. They are thinking animals by virtue of their creation and constitution, their large and complex brains enables the development of advanced tools, culture, and language. They are highly social and tend live in complex social structures composed by many cooperating and competing groups, from families, and kinship networks, to political states. iii) Humans are *Homo Politicus*, political, civil, of the state, and relating to civil polity. It is the behaviour of people in a political setting. They need political ethics, and any sound ethics according to this study comes from the doctrine of God. iv) Humans are *Homo Economicus*. The term *Homo Economicus*, or economic man, is the portrayal of humans as agents who are consistently rational and narrowly self-interested, who pursue their subjectively defined ends optimally. It is a word play on *Homo sapiens*, used in some economic theories and in pedagogy. v) Humans are *Homo Faber* --- this means the concept of work or hard working in the world. Protestant ethic (Albrow, 1990; McKinnon, 2010:108-26), in sociological theory, the value attached to hard work, thrift, and efficiency in one’s worldly calling, which, especially in the Calvinist view, were deemed signs of an individual’s election, or eternal salvation. vi) by nature humans are ideally ethical --- *Homo Ethicus*. Ethics is a species-specific variable: All human beings are ethical; only humans are ethical; and to the extent that human beings are ethical, they are fully human beings. They are not just a bundle of perceptions, thoughts, or judgments but is an individual actively and critically engaging in varying relations with God, community, and the world. These relations have a constitutive ethical dimension personally and socially. Humans do not just seek pleasure; they seek meaning and purpose for life. As humans we possess a reflective awareness of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust, etc. humans may disagree on what is good and what is bad in different situations, but agree on the first principle of ethics that good is to be done and evil is to be avoided. And finally; vii) Humans are *Homo Aestheticus* --- all human societies throughout history have given a special place to the arts, poetry, drama, fiction and nonfiction. Even nomadic peoples who own scarcely any material possessions embellish what they do own, decorate their bodies, and celebrate special occasions with music, song, and dance. It is via the arts the authentic care messaging for our environmental can be channeled. Thiers is the beautification and not the destruction of nature. God wants to create a being analogous to the Himself, to whom the Creator speaks, and who will listen and speak to God. This remains true despite differences; humans are a *Creatio Imago Dei*. Humans are given a special task. Humans bear a responsibility; and human dignity and responsibility are inseparable. *Imago Dei* is a special and unique creation with a high destiny. To designate an activity, is a ‘creative process’ and it

is for-good to legitimize it, not just describe it. Creativity is a phenomenon whereby something new and valuable is formed (Tillich, 1951:252-3).

5.0 Conclusion

Tillich's famous method of theological correlation implies that the theological answers are connected with the philosophically-existentialist questions humans ask. In using the method of correlation, systematic theology addresses the brokenness of human existence, the negative, the absurdity, the helplessness. St. Augustine long before Tillich, said: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee" (Augustine, *et al.*, 1961). Starting with brokenness, systematic theology advances as follows: it analyzes the human situation that gives rise to existential questions, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message answer these questions. It is important to protect the environment for humans because it is essential for their health. For example, humans need clean air and clean water to stay healthy. Polluted air or water could lead to people getting sick and dying. The three pairs of principles in environmental ethics are: i) justice and sustainability; ii) sufficiency and compassion; and iii) solidarity and participation. It is God the Creator who is the engine of ethics and not the human-centered (anthropocentrism) and not the nature-centered (biocentrism). The Divine-Human-Creativity Ethic strikes the balance environmental crisis and health. God must take a centre stage in our environment. Our conscious return to God will save the world.

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