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INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

Volume 1 / 2022

**PEACE WITH NATURE,  
PEACE IN THE CREATION!  
AN ETHICALLY  
AND AESTHETICALLY DURABLE  
NATURE RELATIONSHIP**

**Yrjö Sepänmaa**

Professor Emeritus, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

# PEACE WITH NATURE, PEACE IN THE CREATION! AN ETHICALLY AND AESTHETICALLY DURABLE NATURE RELATIONSHIP

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## **Abstract**

I will examine two concepts, *the Creation* and *Peace with Nature*. What is the *Creation* like and what does it mean to conclude a peace treaty, *Peace with Nature*, with it? These questions have become timely in Finland in two projects. The first was a camp-based environmental education project "*The Creation – Joy from Nature and Animals: Environmental Education for Children and Young People*" (2018–2020), aimed at 8–12 year-old girls. The second is the ceremonial Midsummer event "*PAX NATURA – a Proclamation of Peace with Nature*" (2017–).<sup>1</sup>

## **Keywords**

Bildung, Ecosystem Services, Environmental Wisdom, Pax Natura, Total Work of Art, Well-being.

## **The Creation Project**

*The Creation Project* is of the type *philosophy for children*, leading to thinking about ways of life and taking responsibility for the environment and providing conceptual means for this. It rests particularly on humanistic environmental research. It combines experiential and intellectual environmental observation. It then proceeds to practicing environmental skills. The *Creation* is personified as a partner, with whom we act in mutual understanding and respect, in a civilized manner, and with good behaviour.

The Project produces material for the development of value consciousness and attitude education. Difficult questions are not avoided. The approach is positive, believing in life, eagerly searching for solutions. The animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms – like our own group, humanity and its members – are seen in close-up, in nature camping and hiking, experientially, while developing emotional links. The philosophical questions are formed suitably for the age group. The results support children's and young peoples' mental growth and initiative, without distinction.

## **Creation in a state of nature**

Creation gives rise to creations, i. e. that which is created, and systems of them, the *Creation*. *Luomus* (*Creation, or Creature*) is the new name of the Finnish *Central Museum of Natural History* in Helsinki. "*Luomus on luonnon muisti*" (*Creation is nature's memory*), says the museum's motto; the English equivalent being "*Library of life*".

The Creation is the same as the World, the Universe. Do we think of the Creation as being purposefully created by someone or something, or as having developed spontaneously and as still developing? We are faced by an interpretation and choice based on our view of the world and of life. The initiator and controller is seen either as a personal author, the Creator, or then as self-controlling nature, according to evolution theory.

A personal Creator or self-sufficient Nature? The need to choose is elegantly avoided by the American pioneer of environmental journalism Philip Shabecoff (1934–), who states to his interviewer:

I am profoundly humbled by the beauty and wonder of the natural world. Whoever or whatever created it, nature is an aesthetic masterpiece of endless variety.

He ends:

To me, a life without nature's beauty is unthinkable.

To me, too, I should add.

The Creation is perceived as a total work or a total work of art comprising pieces of nature. Its beauty too is in layers: from its parts to their combinations, up to the Universe. The state of equilibrium is dynamic, and movements from one state to another take place through instability, disturbances, ruptures, and catastrophes.

Discretely avoiding the original dispute permits a more essential activity aimed at the same goal by those who think differently. It is good to see the big picture, the forest and not the trees. "Feel and see from on high", is how someone arriving at my summer holiday municipality is guided by a roadside billboard. "—nature is beautiful seen from above --", writes the Dane Martin Glaz Serup in his prose poem *The Field* (2010). Withdrawal from San Marco's in Venice to the sky and space – a literal final ascent – ends Paolo Sorrentino's television series *The Young Pope* (2016), the final picture showing the entire Earth from space.

### **Humanity and human creation: culture**

Alongside or instead of Nature's creation is human creation: culture. It has a different time scale compared to geological nature. The results of human work are temporary, ephemeral and momentary compared to the geological and cosmic dimension, but of vital importance to a person and humanity despite their absolute modesty or nullity.

Culture is a system that has arisen under our control and is built on our actions. The author has care and responsibility for choices and results. The preservation of natural values and cultural heritage and caring for them is a duty written into the Finnish constitution:

Responsibility for nature and its diversity, for the environment and cultural heritage belongs to everyone. Government must strive to ensure that everyone has the right to a healthy environment and the possibility to influence decision-making relating to their living environment.

The position of humanity, at least in the Christian creation, is to be the latest and greatest, but at the same time to be set as a trusted servant, farmer, and guardian of all. In that they are a creator, a continuer and developer of the work. Nature in a state of nature and human creation interlock, mix, and form layers. The mental, immaterial world with its principles and ideas, sciences and arts is also involved.

The positive side of human work is enrichment of the environment, the negative is intentional or unintentional destruction and overlaying. Construction means unavoidably the destruction of the previous, be it valuable or not. It must be calculated whether change is worthwhile; positive and negative environmental effects must be weighed up. The technology philosopher Frederick Ferré stated the tragedy of this building-by-destroying as follows:

The meaning of life is to be both a maker of beauty and a destroyer of beauty in order to make more beauty. That really is the rhythm of the universe.

Natural and human nature meet. Culture is humanity's hand-, foot- and fingerprint, the result of creative force and frenzy. The environment is our self-portrait, exactly like the painting that changes according to its model's actions in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The German equivalent, *Bildung*, to the term *Civilization (Civility)*, refers to both a picture and to building.

Recent discussions have been largely a projection of threats and images of destruction and influencing through fear. Human work, however, has an important positive, constructive role. It produces that which nature alone cannot and thus increases the diversity of the environment, even if on the other hand it reduces it.

“Technology is our next nature”, proclaims the Dutch *Next Nature Network*. “*Forward, not back to nature*”, the group demands in its published manifesto *Next Nature Book: Nature Changes along with Us* (2012, 2015). Those with a longer vision have already seen farther than human nature, to a state of post-humanism and the post-Anthropocene. A second or next nature – varied or made by humanity – is not one, but a series, a continuum.

Human actions undoubtedly produce tension and contradictions between different types of value. Rural and urban landscapes – around which are industrial areas and traffic arteries – are those environments the preservation and continuation of which demand people, for good or evil. Wind turbines are an obvious visual detriment, however at the same time promising an ecological and economical way to produce energy. Noise walls and berms hide the view from the road while protecting roadside residents from traffic noise. Compacting the urban structure reduces the need to move but closes long views and eats green areas.

Detriment and offence are lesser evils than spoliation and pollution – the difference being only one of degree. Irritated nature's reactions are unpredictable – climate change being one of them. Nature is our *Doppelgänger*: humanity encounters Nature eye-to-eye, face-to-face, and finds themselves in it. Cultural nature is an extension to Nature's creative work, humanity's self-portrait. Here is a task for an active, future-facing aesthetic: not only to predict what is coming, but to take a stand and influence trends.

## Encounter

We, the humanity, are part of our environment, internal. At the same time, however, as observers we keep our distance and measure our relations to other species, landscapes, the Earth, and Space. We try to create a set of ethical norms for common life. I refer to three kinds of encounter: species, landscape, and the world.

*Foreign species:* The problem with inter-species encountering is how to discuss, when nature speaks with many voices and languages. An interpreter and a translation are needed. The difficulty of making contact is illustrated in the science-fiction film *Arrival* (2016), in which enormous egg-shaped spacecrafts land on Earth. No-one knows with what purpose the strangers have come, and whether they are friendly or hostile. The beings send ink-jet clouds of different shapes and colours. The first idea of a linguist who is called to help is to see a language in the spraying; then an attempt can be made to decide its grammar and vocabulary. The researcher succeeds, contact is made, the threat ends.

*Landscape:* The landscape is encountered eye-to-eye: we see the landscape – the landscape sees us. Interaction arises between us. We observe the landscape's expressions and gestures, we interpret them. The landscape speaks to us; it addresses us. The landscape touches us; it can be touched. It affects our feelings. The landscape becomes a person; it becomes a partner, a friend.

*The Earth:* Seen from Space, the Earth is a blue-green ball, a total work, a kind of total work of art. Its beauty is admired by astronauts. Shakespeare's Hamlet holds a skull in his hand, speaks to it and dwells on the nature of human life. I pick up a same-sized globe, and my thoughts go to it and the situation of the creatures living on it. It has been said that seeing the Earth from space illustrated our mutual dependence and created a great feeling of togetherness. This became a concrete duty of care. The globe's message is that of photographs of Earth taken from Space: look after me!

## Peace with Nature

Peace with nature is an expression of our will, a treaty guiding our acts and actions. It was made official and ceremonial in a proclamation of peace with nature, "*PAX NATURA*", given on top of Koli Mountain in Finland since 2017 on Midsummer Day (near the Summer solstice, 21<sup>st</sup> June). The idea was developed, backed and implemented by two small associations, *Ukko-Kolin Ystävät* (*Friends of Ukko-Koli*) and *Kalevalaisen Kulttuurin Liitto* (*Kalevala Cultural Association*). The model for the proclamation text and its manner of presentation was taken from the traditional *Joulurauhan julistus* (*Christmas Peace Declaration*) in the City of Turku, Finland.

Thus, on Koli, referring to the Finnish national epic, *The Kalevala*:

In the light of the Midnight Sun of Midsummer, all those living and moving in Nature are urged to treat the Earth's nature as well as human nature with respect and sympathy according to a Kalevala-like nature relationship.

And thus for 700 years in Turku on Christmas Eve (24<sup>th</sup> December), based on the *Bible*:

a general Christmas Peace is hereby proclaimed urging all to celebrate this festival with appropriate devoutness and otherwise to behave quietly and peacefully.

In the old days, breach of the Christmas Peace was followed by more severe punishment than usual. The proclamation quickly moves to remind those in breach of the peace of the punishments awaiting them. The text of the proclamation of Peace with Nature is a more succinct appeal, without reference to sanctions.

Peace with nature means a balanced, conciliatory relationship between people and all kinds of nature. Whether its roots are in the *Kalevala* or in something else is then secondary. The question is of a lifestyle and attitude, which can be seen as ethical-aesthetic. This proclamation, like the Christmas Peace, is a common statement of will. It commits to a respectful environmental relationship and good behaviour. It is more than following conventional manners. It is a question of environment-friendly ways of life, of a respectful attitude to Creation – of environmental civilization or civility. It is matter of following an etiquette of good manners, of encountering the other in a spirit of friendship.

The mythical ideal state is a paradise of eternal peace, Eden, lost for breaking a prohibition. Green peace is a peace movement, which seeks a solution to the conflicts of humanity and nature in reconciliation. The general name has become the name of a central nature protection movement: *Greenpeace*.

A peace proclamation obliges, no matter whether the question is of nature peace or the similar Christmas peace – or of school, home, or social peace. Life together is based on interaction, for which there are rules of the game and sanctions for not following them. For example, a law on environmental crime is undoubtedly needed, but before resorting to laws and sentencing it is sensible to use softer means, such as education and enlightenment.

Personification means thinking of nature and its parts as being like a person. As such nature is seen as a negotiating partner. If Creation is seen as a legal person, it becomes a contracting party, which needs a voice. The voice is given by a guardian and defence counsel, a spokesman. Humanity must take a place and role as a nature ombudsman. In promoting nature's interests, humanity promotes its own interests, even when it seems to act against them.

A demand for activities to be ecological has become apparent in recent years. This is a question of the structure appearing in ecosystems and ecosystem services, i.e. the resources nature offers us. Nature serves people, people serve nature. The environment is seen as our understanding partner, someone we can talk to, to whom we are united by feelings and a physical dependency. Arnold Berleant depicts such a participation and solidarity, stating (2013):

Humans and environment need to be understood as interdependent constituents of a complex whole that has identifiable contributing factors but not separate parts.

[ ... ]

As experienced, environment does not stand apart but is always related to humans, to the human world of interest, activity, and use. This is the human meaning of ecology.

In Finland, it has been wished to emphasize the symbiotic relationship between people and their environment by naming a special *Finnish Nature Day*, which is celebrated at the end of August. When the project was initiated in 2013 it was stated that:

An attempt will be made to wake people up to the importance of services produced by our nature, as we cannot live without clean water, food, and air.

War and conflict situations between states are sought to be resolved by peace negotiations. If they succeed, they end in a ceasefire and then a peace treaty. The war against nature is an unproclaimed war. Battle is an image used in nature literature too. Land is conquered for agriculture, heroic fights are waged against predators and natural forces, even if no longer with the former feelings of the joy of victory.

The paradox of peace with the Creation and Nature is that nature too is sometimes aggressive and destructive. Not only are there animals hunting each other for food and plants fighting for space to grow, but also there are meteorites striking the Earth, volcanic eruptions, mud slides, and floods – to say nothing of the massive environmental destruction caused by humanity.

Threats create environmental anxiety and paralysis. Fears are real, but they should not become dominant. Positivity is a resource. It is wise to wish the best for nature. The *Creation Project* too arranged information and experiences for children and young people with the motto “*Joy from nature and animals*” – joy above all, even though...

Life is a work that changes and conforms, renews, withers, and dies. Ecosystems are characterized by the mutual dependence of their members. Human life built, designed, and created as a totality is like a natural system. Both have surface and deep levels. The beauty of the surface is wide and horizontal, that of the deep level is narrow, concentrated, and vertical.

### **Environmental civilization (civility) and wisdom**

Civilization (civility) refers to the level of development of the individual and society. It is not a state of being but an aspiration, which is based on a belief in people's abilities. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes form a totality. The task of research is to determine the association between these three and the means by which civilization (civility) can be supported.

Environmental civilization is a question of taking care of the relationship between humanity and the environment. Civilization obliges people to develop knowledge and skills, but also to examine attitudes, in a wide sense morality and manners.

Good manners mean understanding others, taking account and respecting them. Here beauty has an ethical-aesthetic character. Such environmental civility is more than knowledge – it is also civilization of the heart. It includes tact. It is walking alongside. Tact means discretion, empathy.

Etiquette is understood as regulating our mutual interaction, but it can – and should – be extended to be a guideline of good behaviour between humanity and the rest of creation.

Peace with nature means adapting one's lifestyle to nature; peace with nature is also peace with ourselves. Peace with nature is a means and goal for achieving a balanced relationship. This is sought by the moderation movement, which promotes a responsible, ecologically durable lifestyle. An equal relationship requires familiarity with and listening to each other. A basis for this is created by an interest in nature and nature research. Knowledge applies equally to the culture environment and to virtual worlds.

Familiarity leads to esteem. It is wished to protect one held in esteem, in loyalty to one's friend. Finland's first nature protection supervisor Reino Kalliola (1909–1982) said that as a school-boy his aim was to become a friend of nature. A love of nature, an attachment to nature, and a feeling for nature characterized his whole career and life.

The external observer grows into an active internal participant. Observation becomes doing and doing also includes aesthetic pleasure and a feeling of well-being. The scale of doing extends from the everyday living environment to manifestos and visions outlining major goals and environmental programmes in the manner of art programmes.

Literature and the other arts provide models for the observation of, and pleasure in the environment, but they also inspire actions. The well-known American nature writer Aldo Leopold saw unity, complexity, and intensity in nature. The exact same properties were crystallized fifteen years later in the characteristics of a good work of art by Monroe C. Beardsley in his philosophy of criticism. Environmental utopias present desirable states, dystopias threat images. The point of departure is equally optimism and anxiety. Fritz Lang's classic film *Metropolis* (1927) ends with a lesson on the emotional delicacy and empathy needed between thought and action. Head, heart, and hands – i.e. intelligence, empathy, and acts – form a trinity.

Environmental wisdom is a synthesis of 7 e-values: aesthetic, ethical, emotional, ecological, epistemic, economic and emphatic. This is the highest level of aesthetic environmental civility and civilization. The Earth sets the limits to our activities, but also the preconditions and possibilities. Humility and daring are needed simultaneously.

The starry sky is on the one hand a mythological firmament of named constellations, on the other scientifically an enormous depth, in which one can see the light of the cosmic past of different times. The heavens of imagination and science fit in the same sight.

A mystical, deep lack of knowing – perplexity and a sublime feeling of the distances of space, in front of light years – can also be aesthetically captivating. In his Christmas essays for radio, the Finnish Nobel-prize winning writer F.E. Sillanpää built a link and emotional relationship with nature. “*A Dream of Christmas*” (1928) ends with imagining a wistfully peaceful death: “*An infinitely small warm spot is only extinguished in the middle of an infinitely large and cold space.*”

## Finally

Between the Creation and Peace with Nature there is a bond, the binder is humanity – absent from the original Creation, then barely a survivor, now ever stronger and more dominant. At some stage once again in the future, humanity is absent and the world in a state of new creation, *The New Wild* (a phrase used as the title of his exhibition by the Finnish landscape painter Petri Ala-Maunus). The world after us and our traces – *hours, years, aeons* – was envisioned by a pair of Finnish artists IC-98 (Patrik Söderlund and Visa Suonpää) in an installation and exhibition *Omnia mutantur*, i. e. everything changes (2015).

Humanity, and only humanity, sees and considers its place and relation to its life surroundings; it does not just live high life. According to Socratic wisdom the good life is a considered life, responsible, conscious, and serious. We are part of the Creation's system and also the creators of the cultural levels in it – an observer, experiencer, and seer relating critically to our plans and acts. Humanism emphasizes optimistically humanity's abilities and responsibility. Ideological humanism and the humanities meet.

The *Creation Project* and *Peace with Nature Declaration* may be understood as seeds and shoots, as premonitions in the language of folk belief, or as weak signals in modern terms. They give a name and a face to actions and movements that have a possibility to grow enormously. Perhaps in coming years, Peace with Nature, *PAX NATURA Declaration*, will be proclaimed as visibly as the traditional Christmas Peace. The *Creation* will expand from its religious colouring to become a neutral term for our world of mutual dependence. The word has a solemn, but at the same time a soft fairy-tale like tone.

A synthesis? A suitable emblem for Peace with Nature and Peace in the Creation would be the artist Anna Estarriola's multimedia installation, a spatial work *The System* (2017), in which people, animals, objects, and unidentifiable lumps sit harmoniously in a common future panel, attempting to understand each other. The question is: “*What's next?*”

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<sup>1</sup> Luomakunta-hanke – Iloa luonnosta ja eläimistä. Ympäristösvivystystä lapsille ja nuorille. 2018–2020. Helsingin NNKY. Projektin johtaja: ympäristöfilosofian dosentti Leena Vilkka. (Creation Project: Joy from Nature and Animals. Environmental Education for Children and Young People. Organized by the Young Women's Christian Association in Helsinki. The leader of the project Docent (title of) in environmental philosophy Leena Vilkka.) PAX NATURA – Luontorauhan julistus. Koli, Lieksa, Finland. 2017 - , vuosittain juhannuspäivänä. Ukko-Kolin Ystävät ry ja Kalevalaisen Kulttuurin Liitto ry. (PAX NATURA – Declaration of the Peace with Nature. Koli, Lieksa, Finland, 2017, yearly on Midsummer Day. Organized by Ukko-Kolin Ystävät (Friends of Ukko-Koli) and Kalevalaisen Kulttuurin Liitto (Kalevala Cultural Association).

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