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Rubicon Crossings: Working at the Margins of Ecotheology and Ecophenomenology

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Abstract: Trying to answer the challenges proposed by the *Laudato si'* encyclical letter and its proposed "integral ecology," this essay deals with the possible interactions between ecotheology, ecophenomenology, and cultural anthropology, outlining an interdisciplinary approach to Incarnation. In the first part, the core ideas of the aforementioned encyclical are discussed. In the second part, ecotheology is discussed as an answer to the critiques that see in Christianism a hindrance against a deeper ecological thought. The third part discusses ecophenomenology, while proposing to integrate within the debate some new theoretical proposals. The fourth part discusses how to "cross the Rubicon" between ecotheology and ecophenomenology, while also describing both limits and opportunities for such crossings. In the conclusions, some ideas for further research are proposed, in the sense of a layered theory of Incarnation.

Keywords: ecotheology; ecophenomenology; French phenomenology; ecology; cultural anthropology

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1. Introduction: Estuaries

What I will propose in this essay is structurally and methodically an experiment in Rubicon-crossing[1]—a metaphor entailing immersion but also transfiguration. As Hans Blumenberg (2012) remarked, in any metaphor using the river since Heraclitus' fragments, both shores remain fixed, connected by the riverbed; what changes is the flux within it. The Rubicon-crossing adjoints a metaphorical dimension of challenge, perhaps even a betrayal. But the site of the crossing and re-crossing is also that of immersion of the subject, transformed by the stream—an apt metaphor, as the embodied dimension is at the centre of our endeavour here, namely to outline a possible dialogue between disciplines, adopting the body as the centrepiece of an ecological paradigm[2]. This does not mean to simply combine three different approaches eclectically, but rather outlining not only the possible interconnections but also the reciprocal limits. Perhaps we could stretch the metaphor by saying that we are working at the estuaries, at the confluence of three different rivers.

Starting as a meditation on the Papal encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015), this essay works at the conjunction of ecotheology, ecophenomenology, and some phenomenology-influenced cultural anthropology, aiming at outlining a theoretical framework capable of dealing with the complexities of the human–world relationship: while attention to the ecological dimension was present in previous encyclicals, the *Laudato si'* was the first to propose a form of integral ecological thought, but this ethical call has (also) to be answered in theoretical terms, which is what I am setting to do here. As we shall discuss, this encyclical urges anthropological and philosophical questions concerning the specific position (in the sense of the German *Sonderstellung*, Hartung 2008; Fischer 2022) of human beings within the world: the ecological question partakes of a broader cosmological question, doubling it with an axiological dimension. The question concerning ecology has become, at the same time, an *apocalyptical* question: this is especially tricky because the concept of apocalypse has been transformed—through Modernity—and what we conceive as "apocalyptic" today is, in

fact, almost a parody (in the technical and non-derogatory sense) of what it was supposed to mean. The first part of the essay deals directly with the encyclical, while the following parts develop first the ecotheological, then the ecophenomenological side of the discussion. Subsequently, I shall try to discuss their possible junction and the limits they pose. The concluding remarks try to show the direction for further research and discussion[3].

2. Ecology and the *Laudato si'*

In 2015, Pope Francis published the *Laudato si'* encyclical letter (Francesco 2015). At its core is the call for an "ecological conversion," which has to bring forth a new understanding of the interrelatedness of beings within an "integral ecology". One of the most important suggestions of the encyclical is to take inspiration from local knowledge and cultures[4] in the strife toward a rediscovery of Earth as a "common home". This conversion is ethical, both in its connection with morals and in its being a call to act. As Cristina Traina (2020) remarked, "Francis' moral vision produces moral criteria of human and environmental justice rather than clear moral rules for accomplishing them", offering "devotional readings that motivate the reader by painting an inspiring picture of God, humanity, and the world or a troubling picture of sin's harm to God's creatures and creation". This is also achieved through the use of "collegial rather than hierarchical" rhetoric throughout the encyclical, whereas similar documents, for example, the *Evangelium Vitae* by Pope John Paul II[5], were much more affirmative of a specific theological view. According to Francis, reading *Genesis* 1–3, "human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour, and with the earth itself" (66). This entails an anthropological vision, which is also an ethical one: as Celia Deane-Drummond (2020) remarked, the traditional Catholic focus on human dignity, in its relation to the interconnectedness envisioned by the encyclical, «requires a significant paradigm shift in what dignity signifies,» becoming a challenge to human exceptionalism. Yet, Francis' ecumenical view is not entirely clear, nor without problems. As Deane-Drummond (2022) writes in a subsequent essay, «finding a direct link between specific mandates or rules in the Bible and specific environmental actions is unlikely to be successful for a contemporary environmental ethic. The impact of the biblical text is therefore indirect.» We can say that, theologically speaking, we have two possible intertwined strategies, one direct and the other indirect. The direct strategy is the most problematic one: it means interpreting the Scriptures in the desired "ecological sense". The problem is that this usually means forcibly seeing the desired sense where the text is either neutral or more ambiguous. An example is *Laudato si'* 68 referencing *Exodus* 23, 12: the animals have the right to rest and yet in general seem subordinated to human activities and interests—at least after the Fall[6] and the Flood that has instituted a new relationship between humans and their surrounding world. The same book, as the subsequent *Leviticus,* just to name the most obvious cases, contains countless lengthy instructions on the proper way to sacrifice animals on different occasions; they are simply bracketed out in the spiritual reading[7]. There is possibly more hope in the indirect approach, as this means translating the Christian ethos in a way that is compatible with ecological interests. The problem is that Christian ethics *is* grounded on the Scriptures, and especially near the end of the New Testament (letters of Paul and John, Apocalypse), the idea of a world that is going to end soon is a major obstacle to ecological action: if the world is ending, this could mean a complete disregard for it, as was, for example, the case with Gnosticism[8]. From a theological perspective, which includes the double temporal dimension of the *Heilsgeschehen* and the *Weltgeschichte*[9], the ecological dimension has become acute in the lapse of time between the predication of Jesus Christ and the always-forthcoming apocalypse. If how Mankind deals with the world has become a problem, this happened because there is still a world to be found, subsistent within the apocalyptic delay. Considering that, in Christian thought, life has a central meaning, and climate change and ecological devastation are indeed a danger to the possibility of life itself, this means that the ecological problem becomes a challenge for the living community, the *Ecclesia*, which is asked to rethink its task in relation to an extended otherness that includes the world as a whole.

Typically, this topic developed within the perspective of the "stewardship" of Mankind towards the world. As Descartes in his *Discours*, which is one of the founding texts of modernity, expressed the idea to become "*comme maitres et possesseurs de la nature*," he was, in fact, paraphrasing the "mandate" in *Gn* 1:26–28[10]:

> 26 God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground'.
>
> 27 God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.
>
> 28 God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth'.

As many theologians have remarked (e.g., Liederbach 2022, whom we are following here), "subdue" and "be masters" translate, respectively, *kavash* and *radhah*, two verbs that imply both some sort of violence and a legitimate mastery. This is a somewhat standard interpretation, paradoxically used as an instrument for both ecotheological critique (cf. Habel and Trudinger 2008) and for anti-environmental purposes, but it can, in fact, be challenged. Frances Flannery (2021) shows, for example, how both *kavash* and *radah*, while occurring in military contexts, refer to «bringing a land under control to rule it», which can be more adequately understood (also following the narrative in the subsequent *Gen* 1:29–30) as the obligation to maintain the world as a peaceful domain. The Flood (*Gen* 6:5 onwards) becomes, in this perspective, the result of humans failing at their task.[11] An older essay by Jakob Wöhrle (2009), with a wealth of quotes from the use of these two verbs throughout the Ancient Testament, can confirm this: the point is not so much to subdue but rather to accept the authority entailed in the task. In this more "peaceful" perspective, humans have to gain their position not *over* but rather *within* this common space for life (*Lebensraum*)[12]. Moreover, as Jean-Pierre Sonnet (2009) discusses, the difference between the earlier Eastern theomachies (that both Flannery and Wöhrle discuss) and the *Genesis* is the idea that God is *not* entirely absorbed in this power: the act of resting on the seventh day means that an exercise of restraint of power. True omnipotence also means the possibility *not* to do[13].

Following the text, the second tale of Creation of Man, we read that God «shaped man from the soil of the ground and blew the breath of life into his nostrils, and man became a living being» and «took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it» (*Gen* 2:7, 15). Here, it is of interest that *Adam* comes from *adhamah*, the dust and the soil, implying a deep connection of man to its earthly dimension:

> The Hebrew words that are translated into English as "cultivate" and "keep" in most English translations are *'avadh* and *shamar*. The word translated into "cultivate" (*'avadh*) can be rendered (depending on context) as "cultivate", "work", "serve", or "worship". The word translated into "keep" (*shamar*) can be rendered (again depending on context) as "keep", "watch", "preserve", "care for", or "obey". (Liederbach 2022, p. 317)

We can go a step further in our interpretation: man oversees the world, but he has to keep it and make it flourish. The concept of stewardship is at the core of the mandate. As the man himself has come from dust, the flourishing and mastery over the Garden (and then, after the Fall, of the world) is also a way to make himself flourish through self-mastery, taking care of the soil from which he came. As we shall discuss further, this ethical imperative implies a form of intertwinement between humans as lived bodies and the world they act and move upon: the kind of intertwinement that, since, at the very least, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, has become a core topic of both ecophenomenology and some metaphysically (and theologically) orientated branches of French phenomenology we shall be dealing with here.

The problem, according to the Pope, is that man has misunderstood his role and has considered himself superior to the rest of Creation. Modernity has broken the connection of man with its surrounding world, and a new "integral ecology" is a dramatic call to action to try to reestablish this contact and transform it into a praxis. The risk is creating a "secularised" Apocalypse. The fact that we take the Apocalypse as terrifying derives from the immanentisation of eschatology caused by the delay of the Second Coming. As modernity, according to Blumenberg (1983), has gained its hold through the "second overcoming of Gnosticism," the end of the world seems to have lost its *redemptive* value[14]. Interestingly, Blumenberg is refusing altogether the diffused narrative of modernity as a form of promethean Gnosticism, which has been developed notably by Eric Voegelin (1997), followed by Hans Urs von Balthasar's throughout the *Theodramatik* series (cf. Long 2022) and, lately, by Bruno Latour (2017), who tried to develop a "political theology of Gaia" to contrast the ecological crisis, taking directly inspiration from Voegelin[15] (cf. Scott 2021). There is a problem with rhetorical superimposition: the "ecological apocalypse" ends up as the diabolical parody of the true and original one. We use the term "parody" not to discredit the importance of avoiding ecological collapse, whose problem is exactly being apparently more imminent than the promised one: the "diabolical" means that instead of *redeeming* the world, we are at risk of *destroying* it, cloaking the original meaning of ἀποκάλυψις as Revelation of the future transformation[16] of the world with a general sense of destruction, which does not bring to the cosmological revolution that the original entails. The διάβολος is what splits the two halves of a symbol: the ecological apocalypse is disconnecting the true meaning of the Revelation, favouring its simpler, catastrophic meaning. In short, the ecological apocalypse is a catastrophe for the Apocalypse as Revelation: a form of mere destruction without any further meaning, as the ecological (but also the always lurking atomic) apocalypse does not reveal anything except itself—and the responsibility man has towards it. A sense of urgency and lack of time is typical of the apocalyptical rhetoric (cf. *Rev* 12:12), and yet, on theological terms, it is only if we avoid the imminent ecological apocalypse that we can rediscover the wait for the true Apocalypse. Conversely, this would open a new space for hope—a hope that is endangered by the current events. Thus, avoiding the ecological apocalypse can bring a desirable outcome, repristinating hope in the future. The problem lies in the fact that the possibility of Apocalypse as a redemptive moment has, itself, partly justified the disinvestment in the world. This has been exacerbated by the delay of the Second Coming, which, as Saint Paul (and even canonical epistles, especially those by Judas and John) show, was taken to be proximate. While modernity has overcome Gnostic anticosmicism, a residue of negativity was left within the concept of the end of the world in its transformation from something to expect to a menace to an Earth where humans started feeling at home in.

3. Ecotheology

In 1967, Lynn White accused Judaeo-Christian thought to be responsible for the ecological crisis (White 1967; cf. Hamlin 2018). With the important exception of Saint Francis of Assisi, most of Christian theology was, according to White, favourable to mastery over nature. This has sparked a debate known as Ecotheology: many theologians have tried to develop a new Christian ecological ethics to counter White's narrative. There are, in this respect, two main strategies: the first is to develop a reading of the Scriptures capable of justifying a new relationship with the world, and the second is to work from within the main topics of Christian praxis. Protestant theology, through its distinctive approach to the Bible, has usually worked in the first sense, while as we have discussed, the Pope is working more in the second. The Orthodox tradition, which historically leans on the more irenic view of the Oriental fathers[17], has developed a deeper idea of Nature as Beauty and as symptom (or symbol) of Godly presence. While this was already a topic in Basileus the Great, the first of the Cappadocians, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, it was taken up by theologians such as Vladimir Solovyov (2009) and Sergei Bulgakov (1993) and further developed in Pavel Florensky (2004), usually from the perspective of sophianism[18],

highlighting the dimension of Wisdom inherent to the Divine. This more optimistic vision, which shows some resonances of Schelling's thought, was also connected to a deep interest in science as a means to discover the inner workings of Creation, as was put into practice by Florensky himself[19]. Whereas Orthodox views have been somewhat left at the margins of the debate on ecotheology, the question concerning ecology was developed in various branches of theology. Interestingly, this meant hybridising theology with other critical approaches, such as feminism or even (recently) queer theory.

Amongst the most important theologians who worked in this direction, Sally McFague's *The Body of God* (1993) occupies a prominent position: her works on metaphors and models in theology were aimed towards a conception of the human as "feeling at home on the Earth" while responsible for its well-being as a part of the Body of God. This implies an anti-anthropocentric view, but this decentration as "God's darling" means a recentring as God's partners (McFague 2008, pp. 58–59; Dean 2020). This radical rootedness of humans in the world as the Body of God implies a critique of the semantics of power and dominion, which is instead rethought in the sense of a relation of interdependence. Going a bit further than McFague, we can add, through Blumenberg's *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* and his later theory of *Unbegrifflichkeit*[20], that metaphors can orient discourses: if we conceive of metaphors not only as semi-finished concepts, and we instead consider them as something that helps reconstruct the "original sense-connections" of the lifeworld, we can go so far as to say that the metaphor of the world as the Body of God can disclose a new region of meaning for incarnated beings in a participatory fashion with God, as a deeply rooted *lebensweltlich* understanding[21]. This way of dealing with metaphors implies an intentional operative potential that is intertwined with their theoretical relevance. At the same time, as McFague stresses, the incarnated God is also an endangered God[22], opening a new ethic towards its manifestation as the world: ecological damage becomes a new form of crucifixion. As in a recent retrospective, Montanari (2023) has stressed, this discloses a double sacramentalism:

> On the one hand, the idea is that all phenomena of creation have the potentiality to reflect divinity; creation—as body of God—is indeed a sign of His constant presence. On the other hand, human beings, and specifically those open to God, are themselves His signs. (Montanari 2023, p. 464)

This means, as Montanari proceeds, that in McFague's ecotheology, «salvation is not something that happens to us, but rather something implying an active participation as creatures inserted in the complex interrelation that is the body of God,» and (through another metaphor, a medical one) salvation becomes the reestablishment of an adequate equilibrium of the parts[23].

Another important theologian who dealt extensively with the topic was Sigurd Bergmann. In a retrospective on the developments of ecotheology (Bergmann 2006), he focusses on the importance of the spatial dimension, both as "created space" in a theological perspective and as the reciprocal interaction of "worlds" and "words" in the perspective of an "all-embracing space," whose aesthetic dimension constitutes the basis for an "ecotheological aest/ethics of space". A central notion becomes in this reconstruction the idea of atmosphere: while Bergmann discusses the evolution of this concept in Gernot Böhme's (1995, cf. 2019) works, we can go a step further: it is noteworthy for our discussion that this topic was first developed in the *neue Phänomenologie* developed by Hermann Schmitz (2017, 2019). Schmitz' perspective, followed by Böhme, considers *Leib* in a holistic sense, situated (*befinden*) and permeated by "situations" and dynamics of communication; emotions are, in this view, not within the *Leib* itself but rather within the atmospheres in which it is immerged. These are what Schmitz calls *binnendiffuse Bedeutsamkeiten*, "inner-diffused meanings," interacting with the *Leib* through a vital impulse (*vitaler Antrieb*)[24]. In the theological declination proposed by Bergmann, the work of the Holy Spirit is life-giving, and atmosphere-creating is taken as the point of departure for the "ecotheological aest/ethics" envisioned. This should bring forth a "new study of religion, nature, and culture," entailing a redefinition of the concept of nature, which can also signify the attention to the local religious practices as normative ways to deal with the surrounding world, in a "trialec-

tic method" that relates spatiality, historicity, and sociality, in the sense of a "contextual theology" (Bergmann 2020).

Another blossoming perspective on the interrelation of God, humans, and the world is the "deep incarnation" formulated originally by Niels Henrik Gregersen as a counterpart to Arne Naess' (2005) "deep ecology":

> Deep incarnation is one way of articulating that the person of Jesus and what he revealed about the human condition can't be historicised into being just a bygone member of the human race. In a similar way, no individual can be historicised to be just an individual taking care of him- or herself. Being human means experiencing the deep sociality of human existence. A person becomes a person through other persons. The point of Christology is that by conjoining this material world, the Father's eternal Word or Wisdom entered into the matrix of material existence as well as into the social field of human communities.

Or, in the words of Mathew Eaton, another exponent of this trend:

> Deep incarnational theology exalts the human as alone capable of revealing and representing a deity whose infinity ought to transcend ontic restrictions and reductionist epistemologies grounded in human horizons of understanding, while simultaneously opening forms beyond the human for possible sites of incarnate presence. (Eaton 2016)

Ecology is implied in this perspective, and, in Gregersen's words, the *anthropogenic* dimension is not meant to automatically signify an *anthropocentrism*. This also means, according to Gregersen's (2016) approach, a closer interdisciplinary dialogue with sciences and notably with biology—considering, for example, how the body in which Jesus incarnated was obtained in the process of evolution. As Robinson and Wotochek (2021) remarked, Gregersen's position, along with a similar one expressed by David Clough (2018) implies the "radical inclusivity of Christ's election," and the Christological identification is "communicated" to all creation through the eucharistic process. A similar position was proposed by Diane-Drummond, according to whom the ontological aspects of Logos-Christology are not held apart from an ethical orientation within the world, in the perspective of an Incarnation for the entire Cosmos, which is also reminiscent of some sophianistic elements taken from Bulgakov, as this view of Incarnation is centred around the figure of Sophia (Robinson and Wotochek 2021; Deane-Drummond 2009).

A recent and somewhat provocative essay by Margrethe Kamille Birkler (2023) has radicalised the view of ecotheology as a political praxis. While this is not exactly the old idea of an *ecclesia militans*, she proposes a reading of Marcella Althaus-Reid's (2001) "indecent theology" as a practice of finding epistemological resources outside of academia and institutional power, usually meaning at the margins of society. Together with McFague's idea of a "kenotic life," in the sense of a self-imposed restraint to let others flourish, and the notion of "dark hope" by O'Neil Van Horn (2019) as an attitude of "always making trouble" within the status quo, the idea is to bridge ecotheology from a theoretical to a political perspective.

A bridge to the following paragraphs is offered by Deane-Drummond herself and Dorothy Dean. In Dean's reading of McFague's theology, she shows that this perspective can be further understood if it is conjoined with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of embodiment. I would argue that while Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1964, 1968) perspective is, in fact, one of the most popular and well-developed on the corporeal dimension, Michel Henry's competing model brings forth a conception of Incarnation as grounded in the immanence of Life that is arguably more radical than Merleau-Ponty regarding the metaphysics of belongness—which, in Merleau-Ponty's case, was developed in his unfinished work and in the later lectures (2003, 2010). As Henry writes in the last page of his book on Incarnation:

> Our flesh bears the principle of its manifestation within it, and this manifestation is not the world's appearing. In its pathos-filled auto-impressionality, in its very flesh, given to itself in the arch-passibility of absolute Life, it reveals this, which

> reveals to itself, and in its pathos, Life's arch-revelation, the Parousia of the absolute. In the depths of its Night, our flesh is God. (Henry 2015, p. 262)

Henry's perspective is explicitly grounded in his reading of Irenaeus of Lyon's view of embodiment and in a distinctly theological perspective. The main difference is that Henry conceives of his phenomenological work as a theory concerning the radical immanence of what underlies the process of manifestation—thus, a *deeper* dimension than that offered by Merleau-Ponty's work. Notwithstanding Henry's ferocious (and often unjust) critiques of his fellow French phenomenologist, what is of interest is that Merleau-Ponty has gained interest within the field of ecotheology as a dialogue partner. This was also confirmed in Deane-Drummond's and Bergmann's work, which often quotes from anthropologist Tim Ingold.

4. Intermezzo: Tim Ingold

Tim Ingold is a sort of crossroads author, quoted by both ecotheologians and ecophenomenologists. An anthropologist who tried "to escape ethnography into philosophy," Ingold has absorbed both the focus on embodiment typical of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's idea of humans that are able to build their world because first they inhabit it[25]. Ingold's reading is able to turn theoretical philosophy into a toolbox for anthropology, and his early collection of essays *Perception of the Environment* (Ingold 2021) has been, since its original publication in 2000, a classic of the field. The Ingold view has been recently updated (through some Deleuzian hints) in the sense of a "lineology," capable of describing the intertwinements of humans, animals, cultures, and practices, considered as becomings and not as beings. Ingold's "dwelling perspective" is explicitly built on Heidegger's seminal essay *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* (Heidegger 1971, pp. 145–61). While Ingold's is undoubtably simplifying Heidegger's complex net of linguistic spirals and analogies, what is interesting is his own development of the idea of a prominence of dwelling over building. At the same time, humans build their surrounding world, but this perspective is not mono-directional: the perception of the environment entails a double arrow of constitution. What Ingold tries to think is the in-betweenness:

> We really need a new word, something like "anthropo-ontogenetic", to describe how form, rather than being applied to the material, is emergent within the field of human relation. [. . .] anthropogenesis is neither making nor growing, but a kind of making-in-growing". (Ingold 2015, p. 122)

While Ingold's approach is both theoretical and anthropological—and he himself has stated that he is trying to "escape ethnography through philosophy" (Ingold 2014; Descola and Ingold 2014), his view is always rooted in direct contact with other cultures—he himself has written many notable works in the circumpolar area. It is Ingold's merit to have translated into a practice-oriented perspective Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's thought, yet what we shall try proposing in what follows is a sort of theoretical stepping back towards a more "theoretical" perspective. This does not mean dismissing anthropology, which is instead here proposed as a fundamental partner in an ecological theory, but it is intended as a radicalisation of what tends to be taken as a general background that needs to be kept open and relatively underdeveloped to permit practice.

5. Ecophenomenology

While ecotheology has searched within the theological tradition for the instruments to think of forms of political action, phenomenology and phenomenologically inspired anthropology have developed both the (lay) theoretical perspective of how to think about the intertwinement of humans and their surrounding environments and used this as guidelines for empirical research. Contrary to Michael Schnegg (2023), I try avoiding the idea of a "phenomenological anthropology," as Husserl himself was overtly critical[26] of any kind of anthropologisation of phenomenology (Husserl 1989; cf. Duranti 2018), although in his later writings, as for example Blumenberg remarked, he had to search for forms of compromise with the anthropological world, such as the idea of *Lebenswelt*[27].

Parallel, and apparently never really in contact with ecotheology, ecophenomenology-nomenology was developed as another form of ecological discourse, trying to ground philosophically human beings to their belongingness to the world. While some work in this sense has been done since the '80s, the first collective volume on the topic is the important volume collecting various contributions, published in 2003 by Toadvine and Brown (Brown and Toadvine 2003). From their perspective, ecophenomenology should also tackle the metaphysical and axiological dimensions of human–world interrelatedness. In Toadvine (2009), this also entails a form of non-exceptionalism of human beings, as—building on Merleau-Ponty—reflection is not a capacity of the human being, but it is a "coming-to-self of Being". As Dean (2020) further developed in an ecotheological sense, Creation itself is reflective, and humans share this capacity. This idea was taken up by many, and even geographers such as Augustin Berque (2016) or David Seamon (2018) and anthropologists such as Tim Ingold (and his followers) have worked in this sense. Recent developments, such as the Covid crisis, have sparked new interest in this branch of phenomenology in recent years (Verducci and Kūle 2022).

Bence Peter Marosan (2013), in a systematic review of the available literature, proposed, as the task of ecophenomenology, an analysis of the «strained relationship between the industrially and technologically determined human existence and nature,» which becomes an axiological study of the man–nature relationship, which is achieved in a practice-oriented ethical investigation about how the human being should relate to the world. While early work was done in this sense by Hans Jonas (2001), the most employed authors to think about ecology phenomenologically are Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, stressing in the interpretation either the corporeal dimension of human beings or the constitution of a practical world in which humans dwell. Jonas proposed an ontology and metaphysics of life that countered Heidegger's primacy of death, and his last major work, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* (Jonas 1984), tried developing (although from a self-conscious "old-style" perspective) an approach that countered the risks of technological advancement. The stark critique of technology was famously Heidegger's somewhat catastrophic perspective[28]: scholars such as Michael Zimmerman (1993, 2001) and Frank Schalow (2000) discussed at length how Heidegger's thoughts on technology could (or could not) be integrated into a "deep ecology," usually considering how Heidegger's own idea of a strong difference between animals and humans, expressed for example in the *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (Heidegger 1995), could be a severe hindrance for this kind of integration. While Schalow maintained that humans have to take care of both more vulnerable entities and Being itself, entailing a deeper ethical commitment because of human differences, it is exactly the point where Zimmermann saw an irreducible element between Heidegger and deep ecology. Building instead from Merleau-Ponty, David Abram (1988) was keener to find ways of bridging the man–animal difference—which is also a desideratum of ecotheological critiques of human exceptionalism.

Ecophenomenology is a form of retranslation of the ecological terms into cosmological ones. While the term "cosmology" originally meant a discourse on the becoming to be thought in non-contradictory terms (Vanni Rovighi 2022), modern (and usually phenomenological) cosmologies have, at least since Max Scheler (2018), tried to think of humans in terms of their *Sonderstellung*, their specific and different position within Nature at large. From this point of view, Scheler's thought, which is grounded in a deeper metaphysics of reciprocal manifestation and in a phenomenological perspective rooted in the body[29] while maintaining ontological distinctions between humans, plants, and animals, proposed a *Stufenfolge*, a proceeding of degrees of complexity that is achieved by humans' possibility of ascetism, of being able to refuse the strict constraints of impulses—and Heidegger himself was fairly indebted to Scheler, especially in his reading of von Uexküll, cf. (Heidegger 1995; Rasini 2023). Scheler's and Husserl's pupil Helmut Plessner (2019) was the one to further develop this idea in the sense of an excentric positionality of human beings, but his thought, while it has been given more attention in recent times, has not yet been fully integrated within this canon. Plessner stresses the dimension of positionality as *Begrenzung* of the

organisms, dealing massively with the biological literature available at the time (1928), employing phenomenology as a non-exclusive method, and refusing the metaphysics through which Scheler's similar position was achieved.

In a more recent essay, Alessandra Scotti (2023) proposed, building from Merleau-Ponty, the idea of "making Earth" (*fare-Terra*) to describe the instituting dynamics towards a transcendental geology. While Husserl's influence on Merleau-Ponty is explicit, the French phenomenologist is largely credited with "reincarnating" the Husserlian Ego within a theory stressing the concept of flesh[30], which becomes what Barbaras dubbed an "ontological testimony" (cf. Barbaras 2019, 2024) of a further developed ontology of intertwinement between humans and their surrounding world. The Earth becomes in Merleau-Ponty both a *Boden* and a *Spielraum*, manifesting a dialectic between passivity and activity, implying an indirect ontology (cf. De Fazio 2021; Amoroso 2023) that should have been further developed in *Le visible et l'invisible*: in his late courses (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 2010), nature is considered as what is not-instituted by humans, but what is a continuous institution *par son agencement interne.* While not directly discussing ecophenomenological literature, a recent theoretical outline offered by Manlio Iofrida (2019) proposed to return to Merleau-Ponty as a philosophy of embodied beings as opposed to the linguistic turn. Interestingly, while ecophenomenology is intertwined with political problems—something that has also been developed by the so-called critical phenomenology (Magrì and McQueen 2022)—Iofrida is one of the few to actually deal with Merleau-Ponty's political writings. According to the ecological paradigm of the body proposed by Iofrida, who also develops his ideas through Ingold and Berque, nature has a residual dimension that cannot be reduced to human activity: humans detach themselves from the natural background, and this is also entailed in the functioning of the *Stiftung*. The *Stiftung* as an institution (Lisciani-Petrini 2019) implies a creative gesture that always refers to a background of non-constituted passivity from which it taps. The cultural world itself is elevated upon a natural world that is never entirely culturalised (i.e., reducible to language), and nature becomes the inherent soil of a chiasmatic relationship with the human body.

David Seamon's micro-cases are another way of dealing with phenomenology from an ecological perspective. His work is cantered on the idea of being situated, and he has developed this embedded situatedness along with other authors such as Jeff Malpas or Edward S. Casey[31]. Seamon's work shows how to actively use phenomenology in everyday life; whereas his approach is largely pragmatical, employing phenomenological structures as guidelines for his reflections on even the smallest daily fragments, Augustin Berque's view is philosophically more complex: a human being is defined by its *il y a* within a specific territory, and this means a "geographicity," which is declined in the sense of a *mesologie*, a *logos* of interconnectedness grounded in the possibility of movement, the *mouvence.* In Berque's perspective, this is described as an "ecumenical relation," which is at the same time active and passive. In a word, "the human milieux are a relationship, not an object" (Berque 2016; Iofrida 2019; Giarolo 2022).

Berque's work is also mentioned in some of the recent developments of French phenomenology that can help us in this direction. Renaud Barbaras (2019, 2024; Riquier and Bobant 2022) has done, in this sense, some interesting and important work. While he is not yet an author of the "ecophenomenological" canon—and the complete absence of the cultural dimension in his theory centred around life is, indeed, problematic—his theory presupposes a radical intertwinement between humans (and any other being in general) and a deeper dynamic process of manifestation. Barbaras' theory builds upon the a-subjective phenomenology by Jan Patočka while at the same time transforming in a dynamic sense the theory of manifestation—whose crowning moment is a theory of incarnation within the living body of God—by Michel Henry, while reading in a critical fashion Merleau-Ponty's later writings[32]. One of the points of interest in Barbaras is that he proposes a tripartite theory that can be resumed in the following schema:

Question où?	Inhérent à	Modalité radicale	Sens	Fond cosmologique
Site	Identité	Être dans le monde (*corps*)	Topologique	Sédimentation
Sol	Être	Être du Monde (*chair*)	Etantité	Source
Lieu	Existence	Être au Monde (*sujet*)	Phénoménologique	Mouvement

Barbaras frames his theory as a "phenomenological cosmology". While his scope is strictly theoretical, it can be useful to join this perspective to the classical referencing of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger[33] within the field of ecophenomenology. From an ecological perspective, what is interesting in Barbaras' approach is that we are faced with a multi-layered vision of belonging. As was already the case with Henry, Barbaras' theory is developed from the perspective of Life's manifestation rather than from the subjective perspective, entailing a full-fledged metaphysics[34].

6. At the Estuaries

In the first part of this essay, we have discussed some ecological topics prominent in the *Laudato si'* encyclical letter. We have then connected it to the field of ecotheology and have seen how the parallel developments of phenomenology have discussed similar topics from a lay perspective. In the fashion of some recent proposals in French phenomenology, we can then try proposing the outline of a phenomenological perspective that entails both the immanent side of the lived body as phenomenological *Leib* and the dimension of transcendence disclosed by the acceptance and theoretical development of the theological discourse. This means that this is the outline of a theory of Incarnation, which is doubled by a theory of belonging. At the same time, this is both an exercise of what Falque dubbed the "crossing of the Rubicon" between phenomenology and theology, while at the same time, the perspective is not that proposed by Jean-Luc Marion (2024) of a fundamental phenomenological concept as that of donation that is employed to reconstruct a whole Trinitarian theory, but rather it is more similar to a metaxology. If, as Gabellieri (2019) said, metaxology has to become "the science of connections"[35], this becomes both an ecological and an echo-logical enterprise, working at the interrelations of multiple disciplines in a comprehensive framework, grounded upon this correlation itself. At the same time, this is not to be understood as a form of pantheism but rather as the question concerning the forms of pan-entheism that are usually discussed in ecotheology (Kerber 2023). Yet, this also has a political value, if we think of the machine at the beginning of Walter Benjamin's (1990) *Thesen über den Begriff der Geschichte*, where theology is presented as a hunchback moving the chess pieces of politics, hidden within "The Turkish" machine. What has changed is that the role of theology in ecology can both be more explicit (the hunchback opening the machine) but also at the very core of its workings, as the process of Incarnation in a theologised sense is radically intertwined with this political perspective[36]. This means the decision to integrate theology within a political discourse—a decision that is, at the same time, theoretical. Operating on this double register—phenomenological (and anthropological) and theological means, in this perspective, to give a greater legitimation and a call to action that phenomenology, by itself, is incapable of[37], while giving ecotheology a stabler theoretical (and lay) foundation through phenomenology: this double register is precisely metaxological. Reprising the river metaphor, it is not *necessary* to cross the river, but when this crossing is accepted, a reciprocal transformation can be achieved. The problem becomes to achieve a *cum-fusio* and not confusion.

As should have already become evident, the bodily dimension of human beings (and beyond) is the centrepiece of both ecotheology and ecophenomenology. In the first case, the body reflects, as the *imago Dei*, theological preoccupations, which entail the Incarnation of God himself in the world. Ecophenomenology remains, instead, on the layer

of immanent nature through which the body is constituted, and that is also by this same body constituted. Crossing the Rubicon between these two different approaches to ecology is thus, in the most general sense, considering the body both as a phenomenological entity, or even the most central phenomenological dimension, and in its creatural dimension, at the intersection of finitude and transcendence. We have to also add a further specification: a coherent phenomenological ecotheology must conceive of God not in a pantheistic but rather in a pan-enteistic sense: God, if it has to be Absolute, cannot be reduced to the world. Thus, conceiving of the world as the Body of God does not mean confining Him to this dimension—in a somewhat dualistic split that reflects the theological difference between soul and body. Avoiding reducing God to his vulnerability as an endangered life of the world means saving His transcendence and His infinity, and keeping open this dimension of transcendence implies, contrary to the immanence of pantheism from Bruno to Spinoza, an absolute ethical demand. At the same time, the perspective of a phenomenological ecotheology can also be learnt from the theological developments of phenomenology itself to conceive the relationship between God and his Creatures. An integral ecology, as that requested by the Pope, would become, in this perspective, an ethos of respect through the embodied perspective, thus, in the first place, an ethos of life.

The problem remains here regarding the subsequent dimension of acceptance (or refusal) of the theological legitimation. The risk for this perspective is to end up legitimising only certain practices while, at best, recognising the theoretical *legality* of others. The encyclical that has sparked our series of reflections shows this kind of problem when it calls to local knowledge as practical forms and paradigms of actions while not mentioning the intertwinement between such local knowledge and religions, which are not compatible with Christianism—and, thus, to ecotheology. The problem becomes, then, the ecumenical dialogue between Christianism and what has been dubbed "sacred ecology," the field of cultural anthropology dealing with the interrelations between religions and practices. As Fikret Berkes puts it, "The remaining pockets of traditional systems probably cannot escape history, but they can transform themselves into diverse and creative hybrid systems that build on traditional ways of knowing" while "suggesting new approaches to environmental stewardship" (Berkes 2017, p. 276). This also entails the embodied dimension: Italian anthropologist Francesco Remotti (2013) has dubbed "anthropo-poiesis," the set of dynamics that, in each culture, define the being-human through practices and in relationship with differing ontologies. From Remotti's perspective, Christian practices can be defined anthropologically as one of the sets of anthropo-poietical dynamics. In a phenomenological sense, Drew Leder (1990)[38] has proposed a phenomenology of the different "somatic modes of attention" (as Csordas 2002 calls them) which are culturally informed ways to give attention to the body, in a play of the various different habitus that bring forth embodied perception. Further "phenomenologising" Remotti's work, we can say that he reconfirms the body and the embodied dimension as central for thinking about the relation between humans and their world yet, as was already the problem with the hybrid dimension of the *Lebenswelt* as both transcendental horizon and sedimented-historical soil (*Boden*), as was already defined by some of Husserl's pupils (Husserl 2008; Landgrebe 1981), this entails the problem of having a historically informed transcendental and incarnated structure.

Ethnographical work can help us gain a more complex understanding of the process of Incarnation, reporting configurations and situations that are possibilities of the body that would otherwise go unnoticed. What influences these possibilities is what, in phenomenological terms, constitutes the lifeworld: in Alfred Schütz's (Schütz and Luckmann 2017; Berger and Luckmann 1966) understanding, the lifeworld constitutes a stock of knowledge that influences what is relevant to solving common problems in typical ways and, at the same time, is a repository of taken for granted conceptions concerning the place of man in Nature. Culture is, in itself, a form of institution (*Stiftung*) that imposes upon a nature which, in the sense of *Être brut* or "savage being," remains as a partial non-reducible rest. Marc Richir (2000, 2003) called it an "architectural register," implying, after Merleau-Ponty, that culture is one realisation of finite human facticity.

The risk is, thus, double: ecotheological preoccupations, while able to give a greater legitimation to ecophenomenology, are at risk of disqualifying practices that, in a strictly phenomenological and anthropological perspective, can simply be analysed. Yet, without recurring to a form of theology, these are instead at risk of limiting their potential to a finite vision of human beings, which are somewhat detached from the call from a higher order of Being[39]. We can say that the crossing point of ecotheology and ecophenomenology is a multi-layered theory of Incarnation that I shall outline as a theoretical opening for further developments. Incarnation, as I am outlining it here, is itself a triadic relationship, centred around the body as both what belongs to the world whose manifestation transverses it and what through which the process of Communion is possible. The body is a finitude that is embedded within a world and through which the world itself is manifested. This entails both the *Ein-Leibung* and the taking position of the subject within a lived body through the practical dimension, which can be studied by the dwelling perspective, as the "anthropo-poiesis". Additionally, as one of the foremost phenomenologically inspired anthropologists said, "human consciousness is seldom stable" (Jackson 2013): as existential anthropologist Ernesto De Martino (2023) said, building from the *Daseinsanalytik* by Ludwig Binswanger (2012), humans can experience "crisis of presence" that are also culturally embedded. This also entails a further cosmological problem: a phenomenological theory—if it wants to be *phenomenological*—has to disclose the deeper layers of meaning of cosmology, but even the semiotics of what is considered human, animal, or plant—and what their limits are—are variables whose significance has been usually underplayed since Scheler and Plessner, whose theories are built upon ideas taken from their contemporary biology, and are entirely absent in the recent perspective offered by Barbaras.

At the same time, on the practical dimension, as was stressed by a recent essay by K. Meyer (2024), ecophenomenology has usually been lacking on the side of its normative implications. If phenomenology is a descriptive discipline, it is not entirely clear how to bring forth prescriptive elements towards ethics that should be capable of going beyond the task of "functionaries of humanity" (Husserl 1970) assigned to philosophers by Husserl and become something more in the sense of activists. Historically, this was the task of (usually left-winged) existential developments of phenomenology: first of all, Sartre's (2018) approach, or even Patočka's ethos of self-destitution (Patočka 1998) or Enzo Paci's (1974) idea that the economic dimension in the Marxist sense should be studied within the phenomenological perspective of the *Lebenswelt*. Ecotheology, tracing back to Christianism, can help in this sense; yet, what it entails is a form of decision, of *Entscheidung* much in the sense of Heidegger or even Carl Schmitt (2005). If ecophenomenology or ecotheology want to instigate political action, they must recognise that this has its source in a previous decision towards a transcendence embedded in the immanence of the world that cannot be entirely reduced to it. This can be further framed in either a democratic theory, as in the case of Latour's political theology of Gaia, or in a more authoritarian discourse, but still, it needs to become an available position that is neither self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*) nor human, nor a merely descriptive task—both of which are always at risk of becoming relativistic positions. This grounding also implies a form of responsibility towards not only the other, as he is entailed in the same body of God, but also an ethic towards God himself, breaching finitude towards transcendence through action.

We have discussed how the *Laudato si'* exposed multiple problems of the relationship between humans and their world. We have then linked these preoccupations to the field of ecotheology, which we have then seen side by side with ecophenomenology and with similar approaches in anthropology. As a conclusion, I would argue that tackling ecology points at a complex theory of Incarnation: we use this term to signify *both* a process of *Ein-Leibung* in which we can trace the symbol of divinity in humans. Humans dwell in the world through the process of Incarnation[40]. We use the term to signify both a process and an ontological situation: as a process of *Ein-Leibung* means belonging to a process of manifestation (Henry, Barbaras) and, at the same time, *embodying*. Embodiment happens in a world influenced by others, within a culture, and takes shape accordingly (in the

sense of Remotti's "Anthropo-poiesis"). As Incarnation happens within a cosmology (in the sense of a discourse concerning man's relation with the order of Being and of beings), the perception of the difference between man and animals, or even man and plants, is diversified, depending on where the discontinuities are set (Descola 2014[41]). Nor is Incarnation a stable process: people living in cultures where the natural world is still inhabited by spirits can experience a crisis of presence through possession or trancelike states. A complete theory of Incarnation in both a theological and a phenomenological sense has to keep track of these shifting grounds at its core and to search for wades between the polysemic significance of Incarnation. But this requires, in a somewhat traditional fashion, both a phenomenological and a metaphysical protocol capable of maintaining transcendence as both the dimension of trans-passibility and trans-possibility in human beings, as Jean Greisch (2021) and Barbaras develop from the hints by Henry Maldiney (1991) and rejoining inner (world in Merleau-Ponty's sense, Incarnation in Henry's sense) and upwards (theological) transcendences in the metaxological perspective.

7. Conclusions and Openings

Let us complete the circle. Starting with the Papal encyclical *Laudato si'*, we have discussed how ecotheology and ecophenomenology can answer the call to think of an "integral ecology". The centrepiece of this conception, which also stands at the crossroads of phenomenology, anthropology, and theology, is Incarnation as a theory of the body embedded in a world that it contributes to constitute and as the bearer of the process of Communion. A further dialogue between these three disciplines, while respecting their differences, can bring forth new suggestions for a complex ecological theory. While phenomenology can give hints to better understand the process of embodiment, and anthropology shows how these are concretely enacted in different cultural landscapes, theology can help overcome the finite perspective towards an ethos of transcendence. Ecology is always a political question, and while other perspectives can be developed on this topic[42], it is possibly only by keeping together these three perspectives in a systematic crossing of the Rubicon that it is possible to have a complete theory, which also maintains a non-relativistic call to action while, at the same time, taking into consideration cultural diversities. At the same time, what I have outlined in this essay should be further developed, also in the sense of a critique of the problematic knots between its three constituent disciplines, which would require further work on their metaxology. What I have outlined is, after all, the hope for a much more complex and interdisciplinary dialogue where each of the three disciplines can help ascertain the blind spots of the others. And in this hope of further dialogue, it is reflected something of the hope that is at the core of the universalistic Christian message.

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Notes

1 The expression was notably employed by Emmanuel Falque (2016) to describe his own approach to the hybridisation of philosophy and theology.

2 As I will also mention later, I am here developing the perspective outlined by Manlio Iofrida (2019): his invitation to rethink ecology—developed largely if not completely independently from ecophenomenology—is the starting point of this essay—he too started his reflection with a reading of the *Laudato si'* in a phenomenological sense, while keeping a theory of embodiment at the core of his theoretical proposal.

[3] For the nature of this outline, I had to select amongst the many materials those that could best fit the theoretical project I am pursuing here. The reader can refer to the bibliography I am mentioning for further historical or bibliographical reconstructions.

[4] Notice that he doesn't call them "religions". Interestingly, since, at the very least, the discovery of America, "local cultures"—as opposed to the various forms of universalistic claims from Occidental philosophers and thinkers—have been linked to a deeper connection with nature. What shifted was the meaning of this connection, oscillating from being "less than human" to an envy of a lost age. A thorough and erudite reconstruction of the meeting of "philosophers and savages" is offered by Sergio Landucci (2014).

[5] Who was also much more familiar with philosophy, and especially phenomenology. He was famously a friend of Anna-Maria Tyminiecka.

[6] It is interesting that the sacrifice done by Abel and Cain does not have a previous justification (*Gn* 4:3).

[7] Another possible example: it is said in *Rev* 20, 1 that the Ocean will be dried out, and the most logical conclusion is that no sea creature will survive the Apocalypse; even if we read this passage in a most analogical fashion, it will remain problematic. Watson (2022) is somewhat too optimistic in this sense. It can be counterargued, regarding the Old Testament, that the new Law brought by Jesus doesn't require sacrifices anymore, so that only the "positive" aspects of these books can be conserved. Still, the relationship between Old and New Testament has countless intricacies. I wanted to point out the problem, but I cannot discuss an eventual solution here.

[8] While knowledge of Gnosticism was traditionally built on heresiologists (Simonetti 1993; Jonas 1997), the discovery and editing of the Nag Hammadi scriptures has deepened our understanding of what Gnostic texts were. The reference edition is M. Meyer (2009). The political implications of a gnostic-like reading of Saint Paul have been notably developed by Jacob Taubes (2004) and further by Giorgio Agamben (2005). The term is used not in a philological sense (Gnosticism is a *tendency* also present, for example, in Yezidism or in the Sufi Islamic tradition) but echoes here the admittedly oversimplified vision diffused throughout the XX century following Jonas and Voegelin, up to von Balthasar. It was traditionally considered a way of both emancipation from law through a deeper and non-mediated connection to Godhood, which could also lead to hedonistic practices downplaying the role of institutions, which meant an empowering of humans.

[9] From Löwith's (1949) title in the German translation of the seminal *Meaning in History*, but we are dealing with considerations that go in the opposite sense.

[10] Biblical quotes are taken from the New Jerusalem Bible of Catholic orientation.

[11] I must thank the anonymous reviewer who made me think about this part more thoroughly.

[12] Commenting on the same passage, Sonnet (2009) speaks in terms of *maitrise douce.* He also discusses how the *Genesis* can also be read as a "gnoseological" work through the use of distinctions that help making the world intelligible. What is implied is that knowledge of this domain is also helpful for its governance.

[13] Which evidently becomes also the topic of the real strength in weakness, as in Saint Paul (*2Cr* 12:10).

[14] As Odo Marquard (1984) described it, modernity is the positivisation of the world through the negativisation of God's alienation from the world. Yet, at the same time, the need for an anthropodicy (Blumenberg 1983, p. 142) is the key to accessing the actual idea of stewardship. While the ecological crisis is, in itself, a product of late modernity, without modernity, we could not have disclosed the full *theological* potential of stewardship. The point is not finding forms of anti-modernism; it is rather trying to find a different paradigm.

[15] Willem Styfhals (2020) describes the different paradigms of Blumenberg and Latour. While it is perplexing how he accuses Blumenberg, who wanted to liquidate any form of political theology, exactly of not having one, it is an interesting discussion nonetheless.

[16] Which is not entirely superposable with the ἀποκατάστασις condemned during the Council of Constantinople of 543. The "new Skies and new Earth" implies, after the Final Judgement, a form of renovation and reintegration, but not directly a restauration. On the doctrine of Apokatastasis and its transformations, cf. the monumental work by Ilaria Ramelli (2013). The concept is itself highly problematic, as it was at different times refused and accepted from a doctrinal perspective, already since its first appearances in authors such as Origen.

[17] The difference between the Cappadocian Fathers and the African Fathers has been discussed in an interesting way in Blumenberg's last major work (Blumenberg 1989, pp. 208–22).

[18] The works of Paul Gavrilyuk (2016) are important in this sense. More recent developments are discussed (although briefly) in Orr (2017) and Gschwandtner (2018). On Pavel Florensky's theology, cfr Tagliagambe (2013). Some interesting remarks on Sophianism can also be found in Carchia (2021).

[19] And his sons. One of them was working with Vladimir Vernadsky, who coined the term *Noosphere*, which is a direct antecedent to the idea of the Anthropocene (on the anthropocene, Missiroli 2021).

[20] Respectively Blumenberg (1997, 2010) (but cf. Blumenberg 2007). Blumenberg's theory of metaphor is phenomenologically oriented and has a broader theoretical scope than equivalents such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) or even Ricœur (2006).

[21] Although Blumenberg himself would undoubtably reject this interpretation, as he was, in fact, an atheised Catholic with little to no interest in politics (cf., for example, Zill 2020).

[22] Cf. the saying by Etty Hillerum: "You God cannot help us, but we must help you and defend your dwelling place inside us to the last" (Hillesum 1996, p. 178).

[23] Montanari then deals with the recent development proposed by a recent book by Elizabeth Johnson (2018), intended to propose a new cosmological order in a theological sense, a "theology of accompaniment, extending the possibility of redemption to the whole of Creation. This implies a *metanoia* towards the "community of Creation".

[24] While it has become somewhat a staple of recent phenomenological research, Schmitz's (and Böhme's) theories are highly problematic, especially because of a certain vagueness about them. On the development of the concept of atmosphere, cf. Radermacher (2018), while for a critique of Schmitz, cf. Micali. I have dealt with Schmitz and Böhme in one of my own upcoming publications.

[25] Whereas in Henry—and in Barbaras, as we shall see, we *are inhabited* by the process of Life as that which manifests itself.

[26] At least in public. In some later notes, he asks whether an *allgemeine Geisteswissenschaft* would be considered an anthropology (Husserl 1973, Hua XV).

[27] I have dealt with the topic in some of my own earlier works {not mentioned in the bibliography for peer-review purposes} and also in some of my forthcoming ones. The best reconstruction of the problem of anthropology, according to Husserl, is, to my knowledge, Buongiorno (2011) and, more recently, Serban (2020).

[28] Don Ihde (2010), from a "postphenomenological" perspective, has moved his own critiques from a more "embodied" perspective on technology. Yet, this kind of downplaying of the more ontological and even metaphysical (in a broad sense) implications is what we are trying to counter.

[29] As Cusinato (2018) remarked, Scheler developed his *Leib**Körper* distinction earlier than Husserl. The fact that Scheler was influenced by Bergson somewhat favoured his early reception in French phenomenology, as appears, for example, in Sartre.

[30] If this actually contributes to solving the problems posed by the transcendental immanence of the Ego or if it is an oversimplification of Husserl's position, it is open to debate.

[31] Hünefeldt and Schlitte (2018) contain many materials on and by such authors.

[32] In a sense, he has re-Hegelianized phenomenology through a processual metaphysics.

[33] For a more complex reading of Barbaras, also discussing his "reoccupation" of Heidegger's topics, see my forthcoming. . . a more superficial reading that also discusses Henry in my 2021 essay [covered for peer-review purposes].

[34] This is somewhat typical of French phenomenology, as the well-known *querelle* started with Dominique Janicaud (cf. Janicaud et al. 2001).

[35] While Gabellieri is critical of Husserlian phenomenology and his objective is to propose a sort of different "Phenomenological" canon (with authors such as Maurice Blondel, Gabriel Marcel, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Simone Weil, and Romano Guardini), I think his theory can also be developed in a post-Husserlian metaphysical sense.

[36] But what if the machine was empty? Its inaccessible core would nonetheless be producing results. It is what Furio Jesi described as the "mythological machine" (Jesi 2023). A certain Machiavellism is always necessary when dealing with politics, especially when theology is asked to participate in it . . .

[37] Phenomenology is a philosophy with a descriptive vocation. The description can only become critical if inserted with a moral framework, where what *is* acquires value according to what *should* or *ought* to be. Precisely what phenomenology in a strictly Husserlian sense cannot provide, as it becomes a self-sustaining ethos of striving towards precision.

[38] While Leder's book is often overlooked, it is one of the very few original works that have tried furthering Merleau-Ponty's approach towards a more complex phenomenological understanding of various bodily functions (e.g., digestion, breathing, and such). An important development of this idea is in one of the most important collections by anthropologist Thomas Csordas (2002), whose perspective of a "cultural phenomenology" while simply an eclectic summation of perspectives from Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty (and, later, Foucault, cf. Csordas 2015) it is still one of the foremost uses of phenomenology within cultural anthropology.

[39] I am conscious that I can fall here to the critique of Marion (2024), who instead thinks of God not as Being but as a deeper process of donation, which is also one of the grounds of the interrelation of the three persons of the Trinity. How to harmonise this ecological perspective with *both* politics *and Phänomenologie des Unscheinbaren* (Heidegger 2001), which is at the centre of much debate in French phenomenology, is a problem that shall not be dealt with here.

[40] I am using a "concentrical" conception: Incarnation is embodiment taken in a cosmological sense within the process of manifestation, and "embodiment" is the general being and having a lived body. It is conceivable that what we are proposing here could be developed as a series of recursive dynamics of reciprocal foundation, in a dialectical fashion (Cf. Chiereghin 2011). In this sense, every "crossing" would become part of the constitution of a different order. But this would imply a form of hierarchy, as for example in Plessner's (2019) or Nicolai Hartmann's (2019) idea of a *Stufenfolge* where every subsequent step is grounded in the preceding ones. But this is out of the scope of the present essay.

[41] Descola and Ingold are among the anthropologists of the so-called "ontological turn". It must be remarked that, while Descola's fourfold theory of ontologies has often been rejected as unviable, the theory of discontinuities upon which it is built at a basic level is still holding. The cosmological topic of human–animal–plant distinctions is also very important in anthropology, especially in

the branch dubbed "ontological turn". While his theories have been strongly criticised, Philippe Descola proposed to study the discontinuities between nature and culture, animal and human, etc., in his seminal work *Par-delà nature et culture* (Descola 2014). For a critique of the ontological turn, cf. Mancuso (2018) and Gamberi and Brigati (2019).

[42] For example, a recent proposal by Sean McGrath (2023) has even gone so far as to rediscover the political potential of Christian eschatology in an endangered world, while Arianne Conty (2023) works from within the framework of the ontological turn, much in the same area we are covering here, but our conclusions go in a somewhat opposite direction.

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