Class 1: The Anthropocentric Orthodoxy

*Source Sheet by* [*Benjamin Fried*](https://www.sefaria.org/profile/benjamin-fried1)

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| [**Genesis 1:24-31**](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1.24-31)  (24) God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. (25) God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. (26) And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” (27) And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (28) God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” (29) God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. (30) And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. (31) And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. | [**בראשית א׳:כ״ד-ל״א**](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1.24-31)  (כד) וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֗ים תּוֹצֵ֨א הָאָ֜רֶץ נֶ֤פֶשׁ חַיָּה֙ לְמִינָ֔הּ בְּהֵמָ֥ה וָרֶ֛מֶשׂ וְחַֽיְתוֹ־אֶ֖רֶץ לְמִינָ֑הּ וַֽיְהִי־כֵֽן׃ (כה) וַיַּ֣עַשׂ אֱלֹהִים֩ אֶת־חַיַּ֨ת הָאָ֜רֶץ לְמִינָ֗הּ וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה֙ לְמִינָ֔הּ וְאֵ֛ת כָּל־רֶ֥מֶשׂ הָֽאֲדָמָ֖ה לְמִינֵ֑הוּ וַיַּ֥רְא אֱלֹהִ֖ים כִּי־טֽוֹב׃ (כו) וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֔ים נַֽעֲשֶׂ֥ה אָדָ֛ם בְּצַלְמֵ֖נוּ כִּדְמוּתֵ֑נוּ וְיִרְדּוּ֩ בִדְגַ֨ת הַיָּ֜ם וּבְע֣וֹף הַשָּׁמַ֗יִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה֙ וּבְכָל־הָאָ֔רֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶ֖מֶשׂ הָֽרֹמֵ֥שׂ עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ (כז) וַיִּבְרָ֨א אֱלֹהִ֤ים ׀ אֶת־הָֽאָדָם֙ בְּצַלְמ֔וֹ בְּצֶ֥לֶם אֱלֹהִ֖ים בָּרָ֣א אֹת֑וֹ זָכָ֥ר וּנְקֵבָ֖ה בָּרָ֥א אֹתָֽם׃ (כח) וַיְבָ֣רֶךְ אֹתָם֮ אֱלֹהִים֒ וַיֹּ֨אמֶר לָהֶ֜ם אֱלֹהִ֗ים פְּר֥וּ וּרְב֛וּ וּמִלְא֥וּ אֶת־הָאָ֖רֶץ וְכִבְשֻׁ֑הָ וּרְד֞וּ בִּדְגַ֤ת הַיָּם֙ וּבְע֣וֹף הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּ֖ה הָֽרֹמֶ֥שֶׂת עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ (כט) וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֗ים הִנֵּה֩ נָתַ֨תִּי לָכֶ֜ם אֶת־כָּל־עֵ֣שֶׂב ׀ זֹרֵ֣עַ זֶ֗רַע אֲשֶׁר֙ עַל־פְּנֵ֣י כָל־הָאָ֔רֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵ֛ץ אֲשֶׁר־בּ֥וֹ פְרִי־עֵ֖ץ זֹרֵ֣עַ זָ֑רַע לָכֶ֥ם יִֽהְיֶ֖ה לְאָכְלָֽה׃ (ל) וּֽלְכָל־חַיַּ֣ת הָ֠אָרֶץ וּלְכָל־ע֨וֹף הַשָּׁמַ֜יִם וּלְכֹ֣ל ׀ רוֹמֵ֣שׂ עַל־הָאָ֗רֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ֙ נֶ֣פֶשׁ חַיָּ֔ה אֶת־כָּל־יֶ֥רֶק עֵ֖שֶׂב לְאָכְלָ֑ה וַֽיְהִי־כֵֽן׃ (לא) וַיַּ֤רְא אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָשָׂ֔ה וְהִנֵּה־ט֖וֹב מְאֹ֑ד וַֽיְהִי־עֶ֥רֶב וַֽיְהִי־בֹ֖קֶר י֥וֹם הַשִּׁשִּֽׁי׃ (פ) |

**Sa'adya Ga'on Commentary on Genesis 1:26**

Being created in the image of God means being assigned to rule over creation.

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| [**Rashi on Genesis 1:26:5**](https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis.1.26.5)  (5) וירדו בדגת הים AND THEY SHALL HAVE DOMINION OVER THE FISH … [AND OVER THE BEASTS] — The expression וירדו may imply dominion as well as descending — if he is worthy he dominates over the beasts and cattle, if he is not worthy he will sink lower than them, and the beast will rule over him (Genesis Rabbah 8:12). | [**רש"י על בראשית א׳:כ״ו:ה׳**](https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis.1.26.5)  (ה) **וירדו בדגת הים** יֵשׁ בַּלָּשׁוֹן הַזֶּה לְשׁוֹן רִידוּי וּלְשׁוֹן יְרִידָה; זָכָה, רוֹדֶה בַחַיּוֹת וּבַבְּהֵמוֹת, לֹא זָכָה, נַעֲשֶׂה יָרוּד לִפְנֵיהֶם וְהַחַיָּה מוֹשֶׁלֶת בּוֹ: |

**"The Comforting Whirlwind -- God, Job, and the Scope of Creation," Bill McKibben**

We, 21st century Westerners, are beginning to struggle with an orthodoxy of our own -- the central economic and social idea that more is better, that growth is necessary...  [This orthodoxy] stems from the assumption that human beings are and should be the center of everything.  [It is] an outgrowth of the human-centered or anthropocentric understanding that has dominated modern human culture...  We believe at some intuitive level that it is all right to use everything that surrounds us for our own benefit -- that creation matters because it is of use to us.  This understanding -- this bias -- is the underlying orthodoxy from which these and other beliefs stem, the buried root that sends runners throughout the garden.

**"The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Lynn White Jr.**

God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule:  No item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes.

**White, Cont.**

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen... Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zorastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. At the level of the common people this worked out in an interesting way. In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects...

I personally doubt that disastrous ecologic backlash can be avoided simply by applying to our problems more science and more technology. Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim. The newly elected Governor of California, like myself a churchman but less troubled than I, spoke for the Christian tradition when he said (as is alleged), "when you've seen one redwood tree, you've seen them all." To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.

**Aldo Leopald, great 20th Century Ecologist**

Abraham knew what the land was for -- the land was to drip milk and honey into Abraham's mouth.

**Wallace Stegner**

Our sanction to be a weed species living at the expense of every other species of Earth itself can be found in the injunction God gave to the newly created Adam and Eve in Genesis.

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