

From Process Philosophy to Process Theology: The Ecological Theological Perspective of John Cobb

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Abstract

John B. Cobb Jr., a well-known theologian, philosopher, and environmentalist in the United States, has developed his own participatory ecological theology from process philosophy to process theology. Some scholars believe that it belongs to a distorted form of anthropocentrism, while others suggest that it belongs to biocentrism. However, through Cobb's attention to and exploration of environmental crises and interactions with other environmentalists, his ecological theology is shown to be a new form of participatory ecological theology which recognises the intrinsic value of all existence and affirms the participatory ecological order of nature. He challenges the traditional Christian doctrine of "dominion" and points to a more responsible concept for humanity, that is, to serve all parts of the natural world as responsible creations, just as serving God.

Keywords: Process Philosophy; Process Theology; Ecological Theology; Ecological Sustainability

Introduction

John B. Cobb, Jr. (born 1925) is an American theologian, philosopher, and environmentalist who is an outstanding scholar in the fields of process philosophy and process theology (a philosophical movement associated with Whitehead's philosophy). Due to Cobb's outstanding contributions in addressing environmental issues from a Christian theological perspective, he is recognised as the founder of Christian ecology (Sayem 2023:86). Cobb has written extensively, including books such as "Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology," "For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment," "Sustainability: Economics, ecology, and justice," "The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community" and so on. Cobb is known for his interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from various fields of study and bringing different disciplinary perspectives into productive exchanges. The recurring theme in Cobb's work is the emphasis on the interconnectedness of ecological interdependence – with each part of the ecosystem relying on other parts. Cobb believes that the most urgent task for humanity is to protect the world on which it depends for survival, a sentiment which Whitehead describes as "world-loyalty" (The Institute for Postmodern Development of China 2021).

The process philosophy in the Whitehead tradition is often regarded as primarily an American philosophical movement, but it has become global and has attracted great interest from Chinese thinkers. As one of the leaders in the field of process philosophy, Cobb has played an important role in bringing process philosophy to the East, particularly in helping China develop into a more ecological civilisation. It is widely known that sustainable development has been written into the Chinese Constitution and

Party Charter. Under Cobb's leadership, the China Institute for Postmodern Development was established in 2005, with the founders looking to China as the hope for our planet (The Institute for Postmodern Development of China 2021). They believe that China plays a unique leadership role in resisting various forms of hegemony in today's world and realising the process of postmodern transformation. The institute aims to invite talents from home and abroad, bridge Chinese and Western cultures, integrate scientific and humanistic knowledge, and expand research on China's ecological civilisation, constructive postmodern studies, process philosophy, and sustainable development within the new era, in order to promote the transformation of human civilisation towards postmodernity. In terms of academic activities, the institute has organised more than 100 large-scale international conferences with wide-ranging impacts, including the "Rural Civilization Forum" co-sponsored by the National School of Administration of China. The Clemon Ecological Civilization International Forum, co-organised with the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, has had 12 sessions since 2006 and has had a significant positive impact both domestically and internationally. In addition, the institute has organised the translation and publication of major works on Western constructive postmodern and process philosophy and has served as the chief editor of World Culture Forum News and China Process Studies, among other publications. In terms of organisational structure, the institute has established branches such as the Center for Ecological Civilization Studies, Center for Corporate Social Responsibility Studies, and Center for Sustainable Urbanization Studies. It has also established more than 30 sub-centres in mainland China to conduct specialised research on ecological civilisation, process philosophy, sustainable development, and postmodern agriculture, making China the largest academic force in the world in the study of ecological civilisation, postmodern research, and process exploration. Cobb's vision of China leading the world in ecological civilisation has garnered the attention of the highest leaders of the Party and the state. Recently, a reporter from Xinhua News Agency interviewed Dr. Cobb, and President Xi Jinping personally commented on the report, expressing his hope that relevant parties would pay attention to it. After the historic China Ecological Civilization Conference in May 2018, Cobb once again expressed his support for China in an exclusive interview with Xinhua News Agency, emphasising that "China is bringing a ray of hope to global ecological civilization" (<https://postmodernchina.org/index.html>).

Cobb's Concern and Elaboration on Environmental Issues

Since the 1960s, Cobb has been dedicated to thinking and working on environmental issues. During this period, Paul Ehrlich's "The Population Bomb" and Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of the Environmental Crisis" inspired Cobb to continuously contemplate the problem of environmental degradation. White (1967:1203–1207) held Christianity responsible for the anthropocentric view that places humans at the centre of the natural world, which has guided humanity's exploitation of nature for several centuries (see also Sonesson 1994:154–155). In other words, White believed that Christianity is the historical root of the current environmental crisis. Brennan and Y.S. Lo (2010:165) further explained White's perspective: (major premise) Christianity leads to anthropocentrism, (minor premise) anthropocentrism is harmful to the environment, and (conclusion) Christianity is the intellectual root of the environmental crisis. Like

many other theologians, Cobb found this conclusion difficult to accept.¹ Therefore, he continued to read and discovered consistency in White's argument. Cobb insisted that Christian theologians had interpreted the biblical description of human domination in the wrong way, and that the Bible concern not only humans but also all creatures. Therefore, this was not an error in the Bible, but rather a misunderstanding by Christian theologians of the meaning of human-centrism (Cobb 1992:93). Ultimately, Cobb established an environmental participation theory.

Therefore, Cobb (1992:2) believes that "Christianity was certainly not the cause of the environmental crisis," but rather the crisis is mainly caused by modern science and technology. For Cobb, technology has changed the world, but it is only a means of science. Science and technology are also responsible for the degradation of the Earth's environment. Cobb (1972:33) stated, "The present global crisis has emerged from the modern wedding of science and technology." In some ways, Cobb (1972:33–35; 1992:2) supports White's view because as the dominant religious tradition in the West, Christianity has encouraged the anthropocentric attitude of exploiting the environment. He has criticised the church and some Christian theologians for supporting the so-called human domination of nature in the name of human supremacy. He (1972:117) has said that "Christianity teaches that only man alone is made in the image of God and God has established him as lord over all other creatures.....This tendency has dominated Western Christendom.....Man may be lord of all other creatures, but he is accountable to a far superior lord, the creator of all."

According to Cobb's view, the degradation of the Earth's environment is mainly carried out in two ways: natural ways and human-made ways. Before humans arrived, natural phenomena such as epidemics, volcanic eruptions, blizzards, floods, and earthquakes were the main causes of natural degradation. With the arrival of humans, their hunting and gathering activities accelerated environmental degradation. During the period of animal husbandry and agriculture, the activities of domesticating animals and plants led to systematic degradation, and the development of human civilisation has accelerated this degradation. Along with the dominant philosophical view that humans dominate nature, modern science and technology have strongly promoted the continuation of environmental degradation. Therefore, the environment is degrading due to "mechanistic assumptions of nature, human greed, lack of long-term vision, and social arrogance" (Soneson 1994:155). Natural degradation of the environment is mostly beyond human control, so it is difficult to take the necessary action to slow down environmental degradation. Cobb believes that after each natural cause, the environment can enrich itself through self-sustaining ecosystems. However, human-made natural degradation will have sustained destruction, and humans must be very cautious about this. For Cobb, the current environmental crisis is caused mainly by human behaviour and activity, and humans' most urgent responsibility is to strive for environmental sustainability. Cobb (1972:127–130) does not focus on who or what bears greater responsibility for the environmental crisis. Instead, he tries to show a framework to address and reverse these issues. For example, in the book "For the Common Good,"

¹ For many Christians, White's discourse is controversial. They accuse White of misunderstanding the creation story in the Bible. They believe that this same Bible assigns to humanity the managerial responsibility of caring for God's creation (Soneson 1994:155). White overlooked the fact that management is a reality in his paper.

which Cobb co-authored, they emphasise ecological regionalism, which seeks to reform modern economic theory and activities to mitigate current environmental problems (see also Cobb 1972).

The Influence of Process Philosophy on Cobb's Understanding of Natural Theology

Cobb was influenced by Whitehead's process philosophy in many ways. Process philosophy connects metaphysical reality with continuous change and growth, maintaining that all things require a creative process for their growth and change. Whitehead observed that in previous eras, human understanding of science, ethics, and religion was influenced by their community worldview. Now, however, all things are influenced by Western science. Cobb disagreed with this partial view and attempted to develop a comprehensive way of thinking through process philosophy in order to express religious, ethical, cultural norms, and traditional values.

To seek a comprehensive cosmology, Whitehead developed his process philosophy in a new dimension (Sayem 2021:32). For him, nature has an intrinsic value, and each part of the environment is real and participates in it in its own way along with humans. For Whitehead, all organisms, living and non-living, in nature are interconnected, and he criticised those who denied this fact. He identified two types of evil: firstly, the neglect of the real relationships of all organisms in the environment; and secondly, the denial of their intrinsic value. And Whitehead views the entire universe as a gigantic ecosystem (Cobb 1972:112–113). Cobb was deeply influenced by this idea and applied some of its concepts to the natural view of Christianity. Ultimately, Cobb transformed Whitehead's process philosophy into a theology of the environment, developing his own perspective on process theology.² He used process theology to shape a new Christian perspective, in order to reverse the destructive practices supported by dominant theology in the past. In this view, Cobb viewed creation as a dynamic process of shaping, growth, and change, with all things following this process, originating from nature and returning to nature. In this sense, God is also described as a creator of the process. Many scholars refer to the process as natural law, but Cobb prefers to refer to it as nature, hence nature is sacred.

This naturalistic perspective greatly assisted Cobb in comprehending ecology. As a natural system, ecology concerns the relationships and interconnectedness between biological organisms and their environment. Such a natural view believes that everything is interconnected and interacts with each other, while also competing with other groups for existence and growth. Interdependence and competition are both necessary for the ecological system. In Cobb's view, as a part of nature, humans must respect this wonderful natural system. Going against this system is a betrayal of humanity itself. Cobb pointed out that nowhere in the Bible is it indicated that this natural system is valueless. After rejecting the traditional Christian anthropocentric view held by radical humanism, Christianity is committed to the rights and values of ecology from the perspective of self-constructive process theology.

² The core of process theology involves process philosophy, which rejects the dichotomy between mental and material realms and does not support the notion of "every entity existing independently of all other entities." Rather, it advocates for the idea that "every event is largely composed of its relations with other events" (see Cobb 1972:33–35; 1992:2–3).

Traditional Christian Ecological Theology

To some extent, Cobb is critical of the Christian ecological view derived from traditional creation theology. Traditional Christian theologians and scholars believe that in the creation story in Genesis, God tells humans to control nature (Genesis 1:27–28). It is this idea of humans being commanded to conquer other animals that leads to the belief that humans are superior and other things inferior (Northcott 1996:125). They cite other biblical passages, claiming that other living things and organisms have instrumental rather than intrinsic value and are therefore not considered valuable. However, in Cobb's view, this Christian faith path has given humans unrestricted permission to exploit nature for several centuries. He believes that for a long time, relevant biblical verses have been misunderstood by theologians (Cobb 1991:27; 1992:92–93; Daly and Cobb 1994:393). From the same biblical text, Cobb shows that humans are responsible for taking care of God's creation, rather than merely exploiting creation for their own benefit.³ Since humans were created in God's image, this is an indication that humans are superior to other created beings and that the Bible also tells humans to manage other created beings. However, at the same time, this creation story describes Adam as a worker and caretaker in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, Santmire (1985), Bouma-Prediger, and Bakken (2000:232) have further elaborated on the same view. This means that the special status granted to humans is to protect nature, not to exploit it.

Cobb (1991:27) points out that before humans, creations were considered good by God, and after humans were created, the entire creation was very good in God's eyes. This shows the intrinsic value of other creations, that their value does not depend solely on their relationship with humans. What Cobb (1992:117) intends to point out is that when other creations are created by God other than humans, they have intrinsic value, and this value comes from their creator, not humans. According to this argument, human co-creative identity is among all of God's creations, not external to them, and vice versa. Similarly, Jesus in the New Testament showing concern for the value of sparrows suggests the intrinsic value of other animals (Cobb 1994:18). Matthew 6:28 ("How the lilies grow in the wild") shows that plants also have intrinsic value. Paul's redemption theory includes all created beings. Similarly, the Noah's Ark shelter for other creations is also in God's command, and the rainbow covenant after the flood also includes the animal world (Cobb 1991:23–24; 1994:18).

Cobb points out that the Bible opposes anthropocentrism and often places humans within the natural world (although with special emphasis). It does not view human and nature through a binary perspective, but this is often overlooked by those who reject the authority of the Bible (Cobb 1992:92–93). He notes that first, compared to the religious traditions of India and China, the Bible does seem to be human-centered. Only humans are created in God's image. Jesus emphasises God's care for humans, while Paul's doctrine of redemption primarily focuses on humanity. Second, compared to primitive religions, the religious traditions of countries such as India and China have a strong human-centeredness. All of these religions are religions that save humans. However, it is important to note that although the Bible strongly tends to focus on humans, it does not separate humans from the rest of creation. God views other creations as good, even before the appearance of humans. Jesus' comparison of humans and sparrows suggests

³ There are 46 references in the Bible to humanity's responsibility to care for the natural environment.

that God also cares about sparrows. Paul's doctrine of redemption includes the redemption of the entire created world (Cobb 1992:92). Cobb straightforwardly points out that, "if there is a dualism, it is between creator and Creation"(Cobb 1992:93). He (1992:93) continues, "...the Bible does not support strict centrism in terms of the relation of human beings to other creatures..." For Cobb (1992:93), the Bible calls for a strong theocentric consistency, which has been replaced by an anthropocentric viewpoint. However, Cobb points out that a theocentric perspective can also be misunderstood. These misunderstandings arise due to the following reasons: First, it was interpreted through anthropocentric perspectives (Cobb 1992:93); Second, service to God was separated from service to creatures. God was separated from creatures other than human beings, and nature was considered to be external to humanity. However, according to the theocentric path, service to creatures should be seen as service to God, as one of the ways to please God. In other words, one cannot deny the value of sparrows, whether it be for their own sake or for the sake of God (Cobb 1992:94). Therefore, the theocentric path pushes for "participatory inclusion" (Cobb 1992:93).

From Cobb's interpretation, the conclusion can be reached that the Bible does not support this kind of human-centered perspective that seems to have assigned value only to things that enter into a relationship with humanity. On the contrary, the Bible mentions the relationship between all creatures and God, and their Creator has designed them for a special purpose. This is why all organisms, living and non-living, have their own value in nature, regardless of human beings' intrinsic value. By rejecting the traditional human-centered path, Cobb discusses a participatory view of nature, which has close links to a biocentric environmental ethics. However, in the most genuine sense of the term, it is not a biocentric path.

Cobb's Participatory Ecological Theology View

Environmental ethics can be divided largely into anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric paths (Vromans 2012:59). Cobb considers both of them, but is not satisfied with the current form of environmental ethics, as they are not sufficient to address the environmental crisis. For him, the current environmental ethics fail to create a strong sense of nature and an inner consciousness within human thought. Furthermore, he believes that without cooperation between religions, such a spiritual sense and inner consciousness cannot be generated. Cobb first tries to transform the human attitude toward nature and persuade people to practice a lifestyle that is compatible with ecological sustainability. In this regard, he sees religion as a positive force to achieve this goal. He tries to reinterpret Christian teachings to give Christianity a brand-new face (Cobb 1972:55–56). If Cobb's ecological theology view is evaluated based on the value path of environmental ethics, it can be found that it is quite in line with the biocentric value path. Northcott (1996:161) pointed out that Cobb's environmental ethics path is between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism: he is not entirely biocentric.

For Cobb, although all creatures have their inherent value, their values are not all at the same level, and there is a hierarchical system of value between them (Birch and Cobb 1982). He supports Leopold's (1949:215) biotic pyramid theory, which states that humans have more value than animals, and animals have more value than plants, and all living organisms have more value than non-living organisms. An organic being in the environment depends on other organic beings for its survival and growth. For example,

tigers and lions feed on other animals, not on grass. Therefore, Cobb (1972:55–56) advocates a healthy biotic pyramid with humans at the top. There is a cycle in the ecosystem, and without this cycle (interdependence), nothing will exist. All things are important to others, that is, they have inherent value and instrumental value for others. Humans are also like this; they have value as a responsible part of nature and have value for others (such as becoming food for other living organisms in the environment after death). Therefore, becoming a vegetarian cannot solve the problem of animal rights. In Cobb's view (1972:55–56), when feeding on other animals, a principle of compassion-based justice needs to be constructed.

Unnecessary, luxurious, and overly comfortable lifestyles are not justifiable. As a rational being, humans should be responsible and act within reason and accountability in all their actions. Cobb (1992:34) emphasises the need for rational and responsible changes to current lifestyles to preserve every part of the natural world. However, this responsible way of life is only possible when humans see themselves as collaborators in the healing and growth process of the natural world. When mutual relationships are the primary factor and neither party displays dominance over the other, partnership entails responsibility (Cobb 1972:124).

To some extent, Cobb's understanding of Christian ecological ethics also includes biocentrism, ecofeminism, and environmental pragmatism. Although Cobb's hierarchical value system and Leopold's biotic pyramid concept have a foundational existence in anthropocentric paths, he opposes the radical anthropocentric paths that come from Christian literature and theological teachings. Dissatisfied with this approach to environmental ethics, he attempts to reconstruct it through participatory environmentalism.

Cobb also notes modern radical environmental movements such as "earthism"⁴ and refers to it as a challenge to "economism"⁵. This movement is a response to the development of the current economic system and global economic policies, which neglect the ecological response. He recognises that this movement is becoming increasingly popular and has the potential to transform current aggressive economic growth into sustainable development. He hopes that earthism can become a healthy and ideal opposition centre to economism, as only it can generate the passion and energy needed for such efforts. However, Cobb criticises the formation of this movement. He expresses it as a scientific materialism that puts the Earth in God's place and serves the Earth in the same way as serving God. Of course, Cobb cannot view Earth as God, and vice versa (see Cobb 1999:179). He compares earthism to idol worship and does not support it for the same reason (1992:40). For the same reasons, Cobb has reservations about the "Gaia hypothesis," although he appreciates it to some extent. In summary, for Cobb, viewing the Earth as a living and sacred thing is appropriate because it can help people respect the Earth without harming her. However, worshipping the Earth as the

⁴ Geocentrism refers to the efforts that are devoted towards the care of the Earth, but it is not limited to the viewpoint of looking after the Earth and all its inhabitants. Instead, it gradually becomes a kind of religion of the Earth (see Cobb 1999:168).

⁵ Economic liberalism is an opportunistic trend that emerged in the late 19th century, characterised by an emphasis on short-term economic gain and a reduction in consideration of all social factors for the sake of economic expansion. As an ideology, it has been criticised by philosophers and human rights movements for its disregard of human welfare. According to Cobb (1999:20–25, 35), economic liberalism has become so dominant that it has replaced nationalism as the dominant force in society.

ancient Greek people did and honouring the Earth as the goddess “Gaia” are unacceptable to Cobb.

Of course, Cobb’s process theology in environmental ethics has also attracted some criticism, such as from Palmer. Palmer (1998:93) argues that Cobb’s process theology contains a double statement on human superiority: one is an existing hierarchical system, and the other is that humans produce more value than other species. This process path is also not immune to anthropomorphism, ultimately distinguishing humans from other forms of life. The characteristics of Cobb’s process theology lie in the explanation of the God-human-similarity in the universe, which seems to be questionable in the construction of environmental ethics. Based on these limitations, Palmer regards Cobb’s process theology as an unsatisfactory choice for environmental ethics. she (1998:93) points out that many biologists may find it difficult to understand Cobb’s “grades of being” view. Cobb believes that human communities are classified as existing units like cells, but in Hartshorne’s view, human communities are a quasi-organism rather than a true organism like cells (see Palmer 1998:94). In Cobb’s understanding of life, there is still neglect of the function of non-perceptible entities in the environment (see Trickett 1983:93). In addition, Kreel sees that Cobb is more concerned with living organisms, although he also mentions the happiness of the unconscious (Palmer 1998:94). For this reason, Trickett (1983:93) criticises Cobb’s neglect of this issue. From an ecological perspective, non-perceptible entities cannot be denied, and when Cobb (1972:28) discusses ecological definitions, he also acknowledges this fact.

Although Cobb acknowledges the value hierarchy and the biological pyramid, which shows human superiority over other species, he does not deny the inherent value of other non-human entities in the environment. On the contrary, with his interpretation of the Bible and scientific evidence, he shows that other non-human entities have intrinsic value (Cobb 1972:117). He criticizes those Christian theologians and scholars who misunderstand the scripture (Genesis 1:28) and thereby deny the intrinsic value of other entities (Cobb 1993:92–94). He suggests reinterpreting Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 to come to a clear and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between humans and other non-human components in nature. Linked to the biocentric value path, Cobb developed his own ecological theology view of environmental ethics, which mainly focuses on the participatory relationship of all life forms on Earth.

Other Environmentalism Paths beyond Anthropocentrism

There are other influential environmental paths beyond anthropocentrism that require a comprehensive understanding.

Cobb first talks about animal rights organisations that are raising their voices against the abuse and misuse of animals in the name of food and scientific experiments. Their popular slogan is, “We should survive and let others survive.” In practice, this is almost impossible to follow, because in nature, one organism feeding on another is commonplace. However, it is logical to apply ethics to unjustified animal slaughter, and it is good to show compassion towards domestic and wild animals. Extreme ecologists support the elimination of the classification between living and non-living things. They suggest forgetting about human identity because this identity consciousness produces superior concepts in human thinking and exploits nature on this basis. Of course, this is criticised by social ecologists who believe that forgetting about human identity or

merging into nature cannot solve the environmental crisis. Instead, the solution lies in changing the organisational patterns of human life. For social ethicists, the main culprit of the environmental crisis is capitalism, so the first battle should be against capitalism. Along with social ecologists, ecofeminists also raise a strong voice against human oppression. However, they think that simply changing organisational patterns is insufficient, and they demand the complete destruction of patriarchal social order. They believe that men dominate and exploit women and nature, who both suffer torture from men. They link post-patriarchal society with ecological sustainability.

Meanwhile, extreme ecologists, social ecologists, and ecofeminists are also under attack from supporters of sustainable agriculture. They believe that these three have not provided farmers with teaching on how to produce food in a sustainable way, as they tend to focus on the wild and forget that the wild cannot sustain human beings. The animal rights movement has also failed to provide a sustainable pattern for agriculture. For them, it is important to return to the traditional wisdom of farmers cultivating the land, which is overlooked by modern science and technology. Those who focus their theories and understandings on environmental sustainability try to identify the core issue as controlling environmental degradation. They think that people are impatiently trying to reach Marxist socialism, post-patriarchal society, significant spiritual change, and a return to the traditional wisdom of sustainable agriculture, all to solve the current environmental problems. For them, rapid environmental degradation is due to the use of nuclear energy and fossil fuels to produce energy. Their focus is on how to reduce the use of these fuels and specialise in renewable clean energy, such as solar, wind, water, and biogas. Those who are committed to the Green Revolution are considered to take a moderate path. They try to incorporate all of the above environmental ethicists and environmental movements into practical work. They do not despise any group, but work with a humble spirit at the grassroots level. Their main projects include planting trees, discouraging people from cutting down trees, encouraging the reduction of natural resource consumption, and being responsible for saving the environment. This movement is becoming increasingly popular in Europe. In fact, in some European countries, such as Germany, it has become a political party (Cobb 1993:101–105).

Cobb appreciates all of the above-mentioned ideas and activities because they indicate that people are now aware of the major issue of environmental sustainability. However, he is very critical of the unnecessary arguments between these new theories and practices. He supports forming a joint force among them to solve the unprecedented ecological crisis.

He is happy to see that the church has now recognised that “human beings are not the only parts of God’s creation with inherent value.” But he thinks that this is far from enough. Cobb suggests that the church reform its policies (Frederick 1993:360). In his view, the traditional concept of management responsibility and the current environmental ethics are not enough to take care of God’s creations. A sense of responsibility must be realised, and the Christian community must do something for sustainable ecology. At the same time, we should come to an understanding that in thought and behaviour we have not neglected God’s position, which Cobb has always emphasised. Faced with the urgent need, as an ecological theologian, Cobb (1994:401–404) supports a participatory environmental ethics and strengthens this argument with evidence from the Bible and other logical analyses. Although Cobb starts from a process

theological perspective and focuses on the Christian environmental morality foundation, he wants to include all religious traditions in the discourse of ecological balance. Therefore, he advocates for inter-religious dialogues on global ecological issues, combining inter-religious dialogues with environmental concerns (Pan 2014:91–92). This is not to form a global ecological ethics based on all cultural and religious traditions, but through “the creative transformation of various religious and cultural traditions, and corresponding transformations of the world” (Cobb 1999:92).

Conclusion

From process philosophy to process theology, Cobb has developed his participatory ecological theology. Despite being misunderstood by some scholars as anthropocentric due to his endorsement of a value hierarchy system and biological pyramid, Cobb’s discussion on Theocentrism reveals that his view does not belong to anthropocentrism, but rather is centred on God and recognises the inherent value of all existence based on a hierarchical order. Some scholars also consider it to be biocentric; although there are indeed many similarities between the two, Cobb’s ecological theological ethics suggests a direct and unique measure to address current environmental issues. Cobb’s environmental ethical path is between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, dramatically deviating from traditional monotheistic Christian theology and sharing many similarities with a holistic, mystical, and ecologically centred ecology. However, Cobb does not confine himself to the interpretation of relevant biblical scriptures, but integrates himself with modern biological scientific knowledge. By connecting faith tradition with philosophy and science, he presents a comprehensive understanding of life based on ecological sustainability.

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