

# SUSTAINABILITY ETHICS AND THE ECO-FEMINIST ETHICS OF CARE

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## Abstract

Sustainability ethics banks on the program of sustainable development. Sustainable development, however, is riddled with ambivalence (with the weak form or economic sustainability and the strong form or world sustainability) which renders its normative claim questionable. This paper brings into surface this ambivalence, critiques the weak form of sustainability as untenable and endorses strong sustainability substantiated by the principle of care in eco-feminist ethics. Using the ecofeminist practice and language of care, sustainability is challenged to take a serious turn to individual and collective accountability and political will that reinterprets the Biblical notion of *rada* (dominion) as a capacity to Care. The objective is to emphasize the viability of a sustainable world via the ethics of care and to mitigate the importance of economic or weak sustainability if we care to preserve our natural capital for generations to come.

**Keywords:** sustainability, ecofeminism, caring, green economics, marginal utility, Jevons paradox, kabash, rada, solidarity, community care.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development was first explored in 1972 at the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. Publications like *How to Save the World* by Robert Allen<sup>1</sup> and *Building a Sustainable Society* by Lester Brown<sup>2</sup> helped the term to gain public attention. It gained prominence in the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. One of its many recommendations is a call for creation of a “Universal Declaration on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development.” It was, however, since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Allen, *How to Save the World: Strategy for World Conservation*, New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980.

<sup>2</sup>Lester Brown, *Building a Sustainable Society*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1981.

Janeiro and the promotion of The United Nations' Agenda 21 that it became a buzzword and a desirable policy objective.<sup>3</sup> It is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>4</sup> Sustainable development became the banner for many environmental efforts which include, among others, the promotion of anti-globalization, organic foods, green building, ecodesign, renewable energy, river restorations, pesticide control, protection of wildlife and biodiversity, bicycle commuting, ecotourism, indigenous peoples' and women's rights. It was clearly ranged against business interests and all practices that contributed to the further depletion of natural resources (source) and degradation of the natural environment (sink). Climate change provided dramatic reminders about the objectives of sustainable development. The shift in paradigm about environment and development in mid-80's unveiled the narrowness of approach of environmental problems and manifested the complex interconnectedness between environment and well-being. Recognizing that ecological causes intersect with socio-cultural factors and national and political economies demand a shift in approaches and strategies.<sup>5</sup>

In 2002, The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Conference was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. It was in WSSD that sustainable development fully became more holistic and its 3 E's became its core: ecology/environment, which emphasizes on the limits of the ecosystem; economy/employment, which deals with secure employment without jeopardizing the ecosystem, and equity/equality, which connects and integrates broad issues through the sense of community building, in both global and local senses. Crucial to the idea of sustainability is the involvement of numerous stakeholders who must promote it through mutual-help and interdependence at all levels aimed at building communities. The Earth Charter of 2002 represents attempts at international cooperation and consensus among UN members; the Minnesota Planning Environmental Quality Board's Principles of

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<sup>3</sup>Philip Lawn, ed., *Sustainable Development Indicators in Ecological Economics*, Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2006, 4; Andres R. Edwards, *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift*, Gabriola Island, Canada, 2005, 4, 16ff.

<sup>4</sup>World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, chapter 2, #1.

<sup>5</sup>J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman, eds., *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2009, 296.

Sustainable Development for Minnesota shows a regional effort; The Netherlands National Environmental Policy Plan is an example of a national attempt, and the Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy Model Principles focuses on local goals. All of these represent visions and missions to promote sustainability and community.

In broad terms, a nation is achieving sustainable development if it is undergoing a pattern of development that improves the total quality of life of every citizen, both now and into the future, while ensuring its rate of resource use does not exceed the regenerative and waste assimilative capacities of the natural environment. In specific terms<sup>6</sup> we understand sustainable development to mean one or more of the following: non-declining capital (investments are still economically profitable even if portions of it are channelled towards environmental protection), non-declining natural capital (industry and commerce continues but it must not deplete natural resources), increasing economic welfare (economics must see to it that people’s well-being is not compromised but maximised), increasing eco-efficiency (technology becomes more efficient in the use and protection of the natural environment), and overshoot avoidance, that is, ecological footprint must not exceed biocapacity (environmental degradation by humans must not exceed the earth’s natural capacity for waste assimilation and regeneration). In other words, the shift in various foci of environmental thrusts or sustainability protocol is geared towards ecological and utopian economics. Nevertheless, accrued work and consumption shall still yield more problems (and rewards) and strategies, no matter how humane and unconventional shall continue to treat the planet as source and sink.

In spite of these, there are concrete indicators that show a serious turn to other plausible measures of successful sustainable development such that economic growth and environmental protection are not dichotomized: Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI), Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW), Sustainable Net Benefit Index (SNBI), and Natural Capital Index (NCI). All of these mirror varying accounts of sustainability, which balance economics with conservation or preservation objectives. Bhutan has come up with its own indicator alternative to GDP: Gross National Happiness (GNH).<sup>7</sup> On the surface at least, the ISEW, GPI, and SNBI offer solid

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<sup>6</sup>Callicott and Frodeman, *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, 31ff.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/01/bhutan-wealth-happiness-counts/> accessed 9 June 2013.

support for the threshold hypothesis and the need for countries to eventually abandon the growth objective and focus, among other things, on qualitative improvement to achieve sustainable development.<sup>8</sup>

GPI, for instance, and ISEW, which have been applied in the US, in Western Europe, Australia, Chile, and Thailand, include the following entries for accounting: (1) loss of farmland and the cost of resource depletion (lost source services of natural capital); (2) the cost of ozone depletion and air and water pollution (lost sink services of natural capital); (3) the cost of long-term environmental damage and the loss of wetlands and old-growth forests (lost life-support services of natural capital). Such indicators are forms of green accounting, which seek to “adjust national accounts to make them mirror natural asset deterioration as far as possible.”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, variations in the understanding and practice of sustainable development point to two tendencies: *weak sustainability*, which tries to preserve total capital stock and not necessarily natural capital, and *strong sustainability*, which commits to preserve for all time a portion of a country’s natural capital resources.<sup>10</sup> This ambivalence renders the language of sustainability a reflection of the tensions happening on the ground – thus lacking a normative thrust or, at least, a straightforward direction. Both tendencies, in fact, have their own ways of justifying their positions.

I intend to enter into the issue of weak and strong sustainability, favouring a position that is grounded on eco-feminist arguments. Thus, this study will strive to provide a critique of weak sustainability and substantiate the possibility of promoting strong sustainability through the eco-feminist ethics of care. Its main objective is to emphasize the viability of a sustainable world via the ethics of care and to mitigate the importance of economic sustainability if we care to preserve our natural capital for generations to come.

## 2. Sustainability Problematized

The weak form of sustainability is feeble in broadening its narrow perspective. It still tries to sustain the economy, but the ecosystem is

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<sup>8</sup>Philip Lawn, “An Assessment of Alternative Measures of Sustainable Economic Welfare” in Philip Lawn, ed., *Sustainable Development Indicators in Ecological Economics*, 139.

<sup>9</sup>Salah El Serafz, “The Economic Rationale for Green Accounting” in Philip Lawn, ed., *Sustainable Development Indicators in Ecological Economics*, 55.

<sup>10</sup>Werner Hediger, “Weak and Strong Sustainability, Environmental Conservation and Economic Growth,” *Natural Resource Modelling* 19, 3 (Fall 2006), 359-394.

treated as a subsystem of economics when in fact, the economy is a subsystem of the ecosystem. It is weak in its short-sighted awareness about the non-renewability of the three fundamental substances that support the material structures of urban life: concrete, iron, and fossil fuels taken from the land. Mayumi writes:

These three material bases for urban life are low-entropy resources made with low EFT2 in the past [EFT2=Efficiency of Type 2: it refers to output per unit time. EFT2 does not consider the amount of inputs to obtain the output]. Fossil fuels result from photosynthesis in plants and animals during the Palaeozoic era. Such results were created over grand scales of time and land, contributing to high EFT2. Limestone, a main element of concrete, comes from the debris of lime algae and iron ore comes from piled ore deposits formed through activities of iron-containing bacteria. People now enjoy high EFT2 by consuming these vast treasures.<sup>11</sup>

A civilization driven to production and commerce for gain is thus most likely difficult to maintain with the support of low-entropy resources. Since these resources are non-renewable, the language of sustainability rests on a shaky ground of constant production and consumption habits of humans which will definitely deplete natural resources.

It is a fact that industry is caught by high-output-per-unit-time fetish that still preserves the GDP as an indicator of development. It is misled in its appreciation of the maximizing input of energy to produce output of products that have less diminishing *marginal utility*. Its brand of development does not quite appeal to many serious-thinking environmentalists who fight for a stronger brand of sustainability. This understanding of nature as capital does not even include the potential of solar energy and the other materials stored in the earth’s crust and atmosphere. But, even if it includes these, its understanding of the world’s stock of natural capital is still too utilitarian, anthropocentric, and aggressively dominant – a hallmark of weak sustainability. On the other hand, strong sustainability is more aware of non-renewability of resources and thus commits itself to preserve for all time, through production and consumption controls, a portion of a country’s natural capital. In this sense, strong sustainability mitigates the exploitative drive of weak sustainability with its greater focus on environmental preservation.

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<sup>11</sup>Kozu, Mayumi, *The Origins of Ecological Economics: The Bio-Ecology of Georgescu-Roegen*, London, Routledge, 2001, 80.

Moreover, almost all sustainability arguments deal with source-and-sink problem centred on the ecosystem. In effect, the bio-psychological<sup>12</sup> environment is treated by industry and commerce as the inner-worldly source-and-sink. This is a bio-psychosocial<sup>13</sup> issue which calls for a closer look.

Some of the commonly observed negative effects of industrial activities plus their by-products on human bodies manifest in abnormal expressions like tumour, cancer, diabetes, obesity, allergic reactions like asthma, lupus, arthritis, psoriasis, feminization of the male across multiple species, and other system-dependent diseases.<sup>14</sup> Ecological factors, which include diet, lifestyle, toxic substances, stress and other environmental factors associated with work and consumption in the age of capitalism (and advanced capitalism) have mobilized the scientific community to better understand the relationship and interaction among the different determinants of epigenetic expressions in disease and abnormality.

Environmental factors that produce epigenetic transformations are abundant in stress-producing places like workplaces that require higher outputs, which can result to strained relationships. Environments would include the body (like the uterus or an acidic body), the home, neighbourhood, workplace, school, church, public places like streets and malls, state institutions, and the internet.

Foetuses deprived of proper nutrition are found to be future victims of hypertension and diabetes. Those foetuses exposed to smoking mothers are most likely to develop asthma and other allergic reactions like eczema. Exposure to environmental estrogenic chemicals (atrazine, bisphenol A,

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<sup>12</sup>Biopsychology teaches about the links between the human body (biological sphere) and human psychology (psychological sphere). It is a school of thought based on the premise that physiological influences and factors are most important factors in developing, determining, and causing behaviours and mental processes.

<sup>13</sup>The biopsychosocial model of health and illness considers that biological, social and psychological factors interact as dynamic processes in determining the onset, progression and recovery from illness. Ian P. Albery and Marcus Munafò, *Key Concepts in Health Psychology*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 3.

<sup>14</sup>U. Wahn, "The Allergy Epidemic: A Look into the Future" in eds. Ruby Pawankar, Stephen T. Holgate, Lanny J. Rosenwasser, eds., *Allergy Frontiers: Epigenetics, Allergens and Risk Factors*, Tokyo: Springer, 2009, 3; Alexander G. Haslberger, ed. and Sabine Gressler, co-ed. *Epigenetics and Human Health*, Weinheim: Wiley-vch Verlag GmbH & Co., 2010; Moncef Zouali, *The Epigenetics of Autoimmune Disease*, Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2009.

DDT, dioxin, endosulfan, parabens, phthalates, zeranol, etc.)<sup>15</sup> accounts for the increase in breast cancer in females and infertility and feminization in males. Some reactions to stress or maladaptive behaviour like smoking also bring about changes in the smoker’s body-environment, which alter genetic behaviour-expressions. Lung cancer is a case of epigenetic alteration caused by various mechanisms from multilayered ecologies. Incidentally, this sickness is stimulated by smoking, and smoking is a practice triggered by stress that produces the stress hormone cortisol; stress is often a feeling induced by economic production (work); production is a process impelled by profit and profit is an end maintained by the ideology of capitalist progress. Such a cycle cannot just be sideswiped. The notion of self-interest and economic sustainability realistically are two incongruent planes. One sphere of activity is incompatible with authentic sustainability of the world and the inner-world of humans. Allow me to illustrate this further: It will be possible to hope for a preserved nature in the future provided that, among stakeholders, there is a strong political will that is founded on two essential requirements: a constant awareness of the theory of marginal utility and Jevons paradox on the one hand, and the habitual disposition to care for the earth, on the other hand. Without these two requirements actively pushing every individual’s mind and heart, any talk about sustainability in economics will just mask or cover-up mistakes and problems. The next sections will develop these points.

### 3. Marginal Utility and the Jevons Paradox

William Stanley Jevons (1835-1882) lends a fine ecological insight with his discussion on the relationship between production, consumption, and the environment in his theory of *marginal utility*<sup>16</sup> and the Jevons paradox. Although this theory is related to scarcity as well as to practical value, it has been a useful theory in making sense of behaviour that implicates nature.

The marginal utility of something is the additional benefit or satisfaction you derive from obtaining an additional unit of that thing. The law of diminishing marginal utility states that the more one has of something, the less satisfaction an additional unit provides. For example,

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<sup>15</sup>John A. McLachlan, ed. *Estrogens in the Environment*, New York: Elsevier, 1980; John A. McLachlan and Steven F. Arnold, “Environmental Estrogens,” *American Scientist* 84 (September-October 1996), 453-461.

<sup>16</sup>William Stanley Jevons, *Theory of Political Economy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1888.

the first purchase of an android phone offers considerable satisfaction to a hardworking office staff, but each similar handset provides less satisfaction than the previous one. The next time one opts for a new handset, a smartphone has to be more advanced and more sophisticated. This means, among other things, faster chip and larger display, and ready to beat the next high-tech phone in the market. The clash of titans in smartphones gains more prominence while an economic person remains unsatisfied.

Complementing the marginal utility theory is the Jevons paradox, which states that increased efficiency usually reduces energy costs. However, prolonged and incessant efficiency increase results to sustained increase in the energy use. An example is gas/fuel consumption. The faster a car runs, the more gas efficiency is achieved. The increased efficiency results to increased energy use.

This problematic scenario is shared by both the rich and poor. Consumption of the middle class and the affluent nevertheless, could better explain the insatiable wants, which address boredom or dissatisfaction. In other words, the more wealth one has, the more one spends on wants and not on basic needs. The moneyed could change tactics by accumulating more satisfying products in more novel and fine things, avoiding less satisfying things, which they already have. The craving for 'needs' and/or 'wants' propels neo-classical theory of market choice, which currently drives industrial productions and commercial marketing strategies. The theory of market choice believes in a "process by which an autonomous rational consumer allocates income at the margins among an array of consumer goods."<sup>17</sup> Whether or not such choices are valid they are creating patterns of needs. Most choices that put pressure on the biosphere are really determined by the affluents' feelings of non-satiation or boredom and not necessarily by necessity. Choices are not independent of the biological and sociological worlds that surround the decision-maker. The economy must seek to produce "newer" goods and services that cater to gratify consumers. This want-gratification further fuels industry and commerce to invent more organs of production to lessen diminishing marginal utility. Since scarcity for moneyed consumers is unsatisfactory, business must produce more and more novel array of products that generate satisfaction. This drive determines the index of growth and development requiring the use of more energy (also producing

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<sup>17</sup>Mayumi, *The Origins of Ecological Economics*, 7.



depletion and degradation) and manufacture of the same. Nevertheless, the more efficient use of fuel in cars clamours for production of bigger cars with more efficient compressors. With bigger cars, more resources are depleted and more carbon emissions are released, which can cause more health problems while traffic problems may remain unsolved.

The list of wants (and dissatisfaction) can go on and on yet the problem is aggravated. Since more efficient organs of production are available, and people buy more, greater pressure is put on the natural environment, polluting the land, sea, atmosphere, and the bio-psychosocial (deep-ecological) environments.<sup>18</sup>

This is the Jevons paradox working in concert with diminishing marginal utility, and its implications for sustainable development. One cannot expect to be kind to the environment when everyone is trying to become a middle class or affluent because life is perceived to become more gratifying when one is a middle class or rich. When policy-making aims at development to alleviate poverty, people are actually opening the door towards the inevitable depletion and degradation of the natural environment. This however, does not mean that people should become complacent or laid-back in order to sustain energy or prevent the inevitable. Poverty-alleviation that aims at the middle-class as a model target also faces humongous problems. In China, for example, 1.4 billion consumers raise an upscale market demand. This would mean a step towards greater destruction of the biosphere and the bio-psychological sphere. Poverty-alleviation initiatives create job opportunities for people whose capacity to pay could reach beyond basic necessities while business will produce more gratifying goods for them. The ecosystem is thus pressured more, and people are impacted by the nature of their work, by the pressure of the market, and the effects on a disturbed biosphere, and so on and on.

This scenario could be avoided if the understanding of sustainability is shifted towards biospheric or ecocentric sustainability. From the standpoint of the anthropocentric neoclassical economics, stock-sustainability is what is important. This must sustain what economics has invested. This means modelling its production and consumption based on growth that depends on the present form of energy supply by which it is entrenched. This perspective, however, is too narrow and myopic since it is merely based on human exploitation and gain that do not care about the

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<sup>18</sup>Ferdinand D. Dagmang, *The Predicaments of Intimacy and Solidarity: Capitalism and Impingements*, Quezon City: Central Books, 2012, 11-14.

issues of depletion and degradation of the biosphere (and biopsychological sphere). When problem is felt because of critical build-up of pressure brought about by the dwindling source and sink, sustainable-development-of-economy paradigm is ruined. The bio-centric sustainable development paradigm is an open and viable option. Alternative models of production and consumption will have to be based on both previous and newly discovered alternative sources of energy. It is only when such alternative sources of energy respect the natural activity or “life” of the biosphere that a genuinely *strong* sustainable development argument could be possible. Harnessing sources of energy like hydropower, tidal power, wind power, pedal power, bacteria power, algae power, biogas power, etc. would not suffice to ensure future sustainability. Sustainable development paradigm to be truly holistic has yet to take into account the biopsychological dimension of the problem.

Many of the depleting and degrading pressures exerted on the planet’s biosphere are observable today and the way these depletions and degradations have turned against humans and other living beings have been documented on broadsheets and projected into our TV screens. It is easy to say that these problems will be solved if we cease treating the biosphere like the way industry and commerce do. But human behaviour does not always pay heed to advice based on remote scenarios for as long as there are still remaining sources of energy that support households and industries. In the meantime, investors will look for more innovative managers and entrepreneurs who will be able to maximize the use of what remains of fossil fuels under the earth and the seabed. It is only when the breaking point of energy source is felt by motorists, by homemakers preparing for lunch, by elderly people turning on the heaters, etc., that the message will be fully grasped. This scenario suggests that the message of the crisis of sustainability will already be an issue for the common citizen. A more concerted effort towards (strong) sustainability will thus become a reality. In this sense, the call to do the right thing becomes an urgent matter for every person in the planet.

In 1999, the American Petroleum predicted 2062 to 2094 as the possible depletion years of oil. This is based on the consumption rate of 80 million barrels/day assuming there is 1.4-2 trillion barrels supply. This reserve supply would already include oil extracted from oil sands and shale. In 2004, the consumption rate became 85 million barrels/day with 1.25 trillion barrels supply. This adjusted the depletion year to 2057. The US Energy Information Administration predicts consumption rate to

increase to 98.3 million barrels/day in 2015 and 118 million barrels/day in 2030. There is, however a decline in oil demand as reported in The International Energy Agency (IEA) which underscored that modest economic growth was limiting oil demand worldwide, and that some developed economies would see absolute declines in oil consumption in 2013. In China, the world’s No. 2 oil consumer, “weaker economic growth and lower than previously forecast March/April consumption data” support the view that demand is weakening, the IEA said. Both OPEC and the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) cut their global oil demand growth forecasts on Tuesday.<sup>19</sup>

While there is a modest development in the world’s consumption of oil and positive prospects in the future, industry and commerce still proceed with rebalancing, that is, searching for and relying on alternative sources of energy banking on the fact that the supply of coal is projected to last for about 155 years. Hence, work, production, and consumption will definitely continue. Perhaps, the Jevons paradox and diminishing marginal utility will still be debatable with more variations of sustainability arguments. Yet with economic growth in tow, individual self-interest must be challenged by ethical positions. The following section shall unfold an ethical approach towards sustainable development via the principle of care.

#### **4. Caring for the Earth**

Eco-feminist ethicists attempt to impress the language of caring and images of nature in the hope of creating “mindscape” that can stir people to non-utilitarian and non-dominating forms of action. Their voices are also heard in international fora and policy-making bodies but oftentimes, their valid concerns go unnoticed and plugged-in in the whole agenda of sustainability with its ambivalent meaning. A government’s efforts to reduce natural and man-made disasters are often halted by political agenda that put premium on economic growth and development. Although the practices of progress and development are slowly poked by the language of sustainability, policy makers’ “green accounting” and call for accountability are often highly politicized and thus “weakened.” Most of these efforts remain as principled calls, (albeit debatable ones), that are still waiting to be really heard and implemented. The *Rio+20 Earth Summit 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development* has attempted to leapfrog development by proposing green economy. In Earth Summit

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<sup>19</sup><http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/06/12/markets-oil-idUKL3N0EO0RW> 20130612/ accessed 13 June, 2013.

2013, agenda on low carbon takes a multi-faceted approach. However, the translation of theory into practice is a task that can only be feasible with a collective political will, including the will of every industrialist and businessperson. Commercial expansions by trans-national firms, finance investments of developed economies in poor nations, and manufacturing of non-essential commodities by global IT players leave us thinking whether international leaders are able to commit themselves to concrete and long-term strategies or to give in to business and First World lifestyles and adopt short-lived and economics-constrained solutions. No matter how sustainability ethics is framed and received positively by State leaders and legislators, its ambivalence creates an aporia. The transformation of the ecosystem into an everyday utility calls for a serious reflection.

The ecofeminists' retrieval of the sacramentality of creation (*Gaia and God*)<sup>20</sup> and the sacredness of nature is an audacious vehicle for promoting respect and care of creation. Rosemarie Radford Ruether uses the terms ethics of "compassionate solidarity"<sup>21</sup> and Sallie McFague, ethics of "community care."<sup>22</sup> As women, who can feel the pangs of childbirth and the exhilarating joy of seeing a child born, they recognize the fragility of the human planet and ecosystems. For them, this sacredness also functions as a sign for creative creatures to direct their glimpse towards the Creator. Hence, ecofeminists turn to the plethora of ecological problems not with quick-fix solutions but with more re-creative interventions that emphasize respect and care.

In the Philippines, a bunch of Filipino ecofeminists intermittently offers seminar workshops to concretely address the issue of ecological crisis. Inspired by ecofeminist-creation centred spirituality,<sup>23</sup> they have been conducting eco-feminist seminars to groups of women. They offer workable strategies which could be (1) *vía positiva*, which is acknowledging the ecological crisis yet rallying one's positive resources of celebration, gratitude for creation and for the gifts of life, (2) *vía negativa* which rests on the fact little could be done about it, (3) *vía creativa* which

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<sup>20</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1994.

<sup>21</sup>See her *Gaia and God*.

<sup>22</sup>Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

<sup>23</sup>"Ecofeminism: A Philippine Experience," [http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/manila-bulletin/mi\\_7968/is\\_2002\\_March\\_23/ecofeminism-philippine\\_experience/ai\\_n33102769/?tag=content;coll/](http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/manila-bulletin/mi_7968/is_2002_March_23/ecofeminism-philippine_experience/ai_n33102769/?tag=content;coll/) accessed 10 June 2012.

underscores the powers of creativity and birthing (of ideas), and (4) *vía transformativa* which is radically a call for commitment and responsibility. The *vía transformativa* stirs participants to concretely identify their advocacies which shall denounce “rape” of the earth, subjugation of nature in general and animals in particular by humankind. These steps foster greater sensitivity to the planet and humankind and create pathways to stir respect and care for the whole of creation.

### **5. *Kabash* and *Rada***

The caring of the earth is closely linked to the Biblical notion of custodianship or stewardship yet the latter is not effectual if wedded to the perpetuation of exploitation and commodification of human and non-human members of the ecosystem.

The Biblical *kabash* (“subdue”) and *rada* (“rule” or “dominate”),<sup>24</sup> have become traditionally linked to a human attitude of control, exploitation, and human dominion of the earth. These reflect the exercise of force. There is no suggestion of care in *kabash*. Joshua “subdues” the Canaanites by extreme force (Joshua 18:1) giving us a hint that humans are conquerors rather than caretakers. The presumption is that the more dominant testosterone-driven aggressive and combative androcentric behaviour pushes males away from tenderness and authentic care for the environment. But, the vital question is why should we care? The following may give us a hint about the urgency to care.

An eco-feminist ‘caring being’ recognizes the vitality and fragility of all forms of life. In her tender hands rests the vibrance of creation meant not just for utility but also for admiration and wonder. This tender regard for creation also appreciates nature’s intrinsic value, and away from the instrumental purposes of exploitative humans. Moreover, embraced by an eco-feminist’s delicate arms, the fragility of nature could be one wrapped like a child in a mother’s hands. This is not a male’s common gesture towards nature. Only a woman’s sensitivity, an eco-feminist’s kindness, could bring out that side which is habitually subordinated and ravished by males.

Caring quizzes us about our set of priorities and values, which ultimately lead us to ethical decisions. Certain assumptions we have as human beings about the hierarchy of things legitimize the structures of power. Parallel to power however, could be layers of responsibilities

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<sup>24</sup>James Stambaugh, “Creation’s Original Diet and the Changes at the Fall,” <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/tj/v5/n2/diet> / accessed 12 December 2012.

toward nature – inanimate and animate. The *creating God* among *caring humans* (caring as history’s co-creative act) can aid and fortify our own sustainability paradigm. Hence, there is a need to re-emphasize caring as a value and as an ethical duty.

A re-interpretation of *rada* (“rule”) as “tending” (caring) is appropriate. Its meaning as caring can be grounded on three things: a) To care is to actively feel, empathize, with the other. Caring is a feminine quality that shows a profound identification with the other but this feminine characteristic can be also be developed in males. One who cares sees the other (non-human) as another who is stamped by a steward (human) who is an *imago Dei*. Thus, caring is able to regard the other as a gift, reducing the prospect of harm. b) To care is to recognize that there is a limitation to personal freedom. Extinction of animal species, storage of nuclear wastes, destruction of natural habitats will definitely cause ecological imbalance within a peculiar ecosystem. A caring stance to the other is an affirmation of the boundaries of human freedom and power. It must also highlight the caring stance of every move to walk on earth and face creation. c) To care is to “tend.” The task of seeing to it that everything is alive and in its proper order is incumbent to human beings mandated to “tend” the earth.

The economic divide (North/South) has to be minimized by caring leaders if authentic development is seriously sought for. Dominion, which is profoundly rooted in the interpretation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in Genesis requires a fresh reinterpretation of *rada* as caring.

Genesis 1-3 offers a relevant refrain: “And God saw that it was good.” Good is an expression of ‘satisfaction’ over God’s handiwork, including human beings, both male and female. God saw that what he fashioned were good and God was delighted. The sequence, whether humankind’s creation was first or last (Genesis 1 vs. Gen. 2) was just peripheral to the central theme of God’s act of creation. Man and woman were created in God’s own image and likeness *just like the Creative God*.

God was happy with what He saw and rested from all work (Genesis 2:1). Such rest could indicate a sense of security that God’s masterpiece, the human beings, could be entrusted with the task of continuing Creation as co-creators in-charge of creative re-creation. Such is the confidence the Maker has on the masterpiece. This must be similar to mentor-mentee relationship. When the student-apprentice is deemed ready, the teacher takes the backseat and allows his/her student to continue with the task, banking on one’s years of training and learning. God, far from human

calculations and comparisons, relies on human participation and care in the exercise of dominion over Creation.

Caring read in this light, becomes not merely a female attribute but an inherent capacity of all God’s creatures. Caring is akin to humanness. When we care, we unleash our deepest powers to preserve, protect and create. On the other hand, without care, the world reverts to its chaotic state. Our caring stamps God’s image and trust in our innate propensity to be responsible creatures and stewards of Creation.

It is not infrequent that we see humankind obscuring this image in their daily grind. The ‘rape’ of the earth, the alteration of natural habitat, the fished-out seas, the dumping of toxic chemical waste, etc. are incongruent with the dynamic act of co-creation incumbent upon us as custodians or caretakers of creation. Our destructive acts can never be justified by our reading of ‘dominion’ as part of God’s plan.

God’s grand plan unfolds every time humans make use of their ability to care. In caring, we can turn to the other as equals, whether it is human or non-human. Each tiny system is treated with respect because it is part of God’s creation. This care then recreates patterns of care in the whole cosmos.

In the exercise of dominion humans ought to mirror and fulfil the Creator’s grand plan. Our abilities to think, to tinker, to discover, to innovate and to be creative are to serve God’s grand plan. To misuse our abilities and mistreat the planet obliterate the hand of God in creation. It is in a sustained act of *caring* via our human activities that God’s image shines forth.

If sin (cf. Genesis 3) is a conscious turning away from God, caring is a conscious, enduring stance towards the whole of creation. To re-commit to caring and to think of the well-being of the future generations coalesce with the mandate of *rada*. Human race is called to explore this order, to examine it with due care and to make use of it while safeguarding its integrity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Roger S. Gottlieb, ed., *The Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature and Environment*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004, 182ff.

## 6. Conclusion

For its ambivalence, the sustainability paradigm in economics must be analysed and uncovered for its confusing bipolarity as either weak or strong sustainability. If sustainability should mean sustainability of the world as God's creation, its strong stance should be advanced and be fortified by an ethics of care.

As a reaction to the years of modern industry and commerce, various pro-environment (strong sustainability) positions were born. These promoted, in varying degrees, conservation, preservation, protection, care, admiration, and respect of nature. These positions have evolved through the years with a growing emphasis on conservation's or care's broader context: the whole ecosystem which includes humans as mere members.

With Care as principle of strong sustainability, it would be the logical nemesis against the exploitative and degenerative directions of humanity's economic and industrial programs that constantly bombard the biosphere and humans themselves.

Caring is a potent ground that can be tilled and allowed to blossom in slow but steady movement. It can serve a countervailing force against subjugation and subordination. Therefore, the sustainable development model is challenged to find its equilibrium in the re-interpretation of *rada*. Sustainability development model cannot continue to reduce people into injured agents while relying on them to work for extrinsic benefits that continue to destroy the ecosystem. Sustainable development fashioned after an exploitative notion of *rada* will never promote ecojustice for there is no authentic development while agents (humans and non-humans) are continually harmed and subjected to suffering.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Some parts of this paper had been written during the 5-week Research Fellowship at the Chung Chi University in Hong Kong as a scholar in IASACT.