

STEWARDSHIP IN QUESTION

INTRODUCTION

How should Christians read the Bible in an age of ecological disaster? How does the Bible construct for us the relationship of humans to the rest of creation? The most popular current answer to these questions is the notion of stewardship. As Christopher Southgate puts it: 'That human beings are called to be stewards of creation tends to be the default position within ordinary Christian groups.'¹

We are concerned here only with Christian theological use of the idea of stewardship. The term 'stewardship' is also now heard in purely secular discourse about environmental issues, but this secular use, because it leaves aside reference to God, in fact deprives the notion of stewardship of most of its Christian meaning. The main point of the term, in Christian usage, is the steward's responsibility to God. Secular use of the term deprives it of this essential theological content.

As a fairly representative, short statement of what human stewardship of the non-human creation is taken to mean, I have taken the following from a report published in 1991 by the Board for Social Responsibility of the General Synod of the Church of England:

We all share and depend on the same world, with its finite and often non-renewable resources. Christians believe that this world belongs to God by creation, redemption and sustenance, and that he has entrusted it to humankind, made in his image and responsible to him; we are in the position

of stewards, tenants, curators, trustees or guardians, whether or not we acknowledge this responsibility. Stewardship implies caring management, not selfish exploitation; it involves a concern for both present and future as well as self, and a recognition that the world we manage has an interest in its own survival and wellbeing independent of its value to us ... Good stewardship requires justice, truthfulness, sensitivity, and compassion.²

The main value of the stewardship model of humanity's relation to the rest of creation has been to provide a strong alternative to the idea of the human role in creation as domination and exploitation. Rather, this human role, when defined as stewardship, is one of care and service, exercised on behalf of God and with accountability to God.³ It can hardly be contested that the stewardship model has had an enormous influence for good in giving Christians a framework within which to approach ecological issues with concern and responsibility.

However, in my view, the stewardship model also has distinct limitations that consist more in what it does not say than in what it does, or in what it suggests without necessarily requiring. A review of criticisms of stewardship may appropriately begin with James Lovelock, famous for his Gaia hypothesis, who has dismissed the idea of stewardship as 'sheer hubris'.⁴

CRITICISMS OF STEWARDSHIP:

(1) STEWARDSHIP AS HUBRIS

Lovelock makes this point most fully in his recent book, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back – and How We Can Still Save Humanity*.⁵ It is not surprising that his criticism of stewardship relates closely to his idea of Gaia, and so it will be helpful first briefly to explain that idea. Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis is a scientific theory, and he rejects responsibility for the way it has been adopted into New Age religious contexts.⁶ On the other hand, he does encourage a more than merely scientific, dispassion-

ate attitude to Gaia, arguably amounting to a religious approach ('there is a deep need in all of us for trust in something larger than ourselves, and I put my trust in Gaia'). But Christian suspicion of the idea of Gaia on the grounds that it entails some form of nature religion exaggerates the problem. Simply as a scientific theory, it requires no particular form of religious stance, any more than the Darwinian theory of evolution does. However the natural world is understood, in scientific terms, to work, it is possible to elevate natural processes to divine status and ethical normativity, but it is also possible to treat them as aspects of the way the transcendent God has created the natural world.

Lovelock's theory is that the whole Earth system, which Lovelock calls Gaia – comprising both all life on Earth and the material environment – behaves as a single system, like a living organism.⁸ It is a self-regulating system that automatically controls such things as the global climate and the composition of the atmosphere in such a way as to maximise their capacity to form a comfortable environment for life. Gaia is a self-regulating system that operates to sustain the habitability of the Earth. Lovelock admits that he is far from a full understanding of how it works, but the theory has accumulated evidence and adherents since he first propounded it, even if most conventional scientists remain sceptical. We cannot enter scientific debate about the validity of the theory here.⁹

Lovelock takes the Christian idea of stewardship to mean that humans are in charge of the whole Earth and its destiny. He fully takes the point that this human role is understood to be not exploitative, but responsible and caring. But he claims that it is 'flawed by unconscious hubris'. Humans have 'neither the knowledge nor the capacity to achieve' the goals envisaged by this notion. 'We are no more qualified to be stewards or developers of the Earth than are goats to be gardeners'.¹⁰

Stewardship, he concedes, might make some sense if Gaia turned out not to be true. Then we should have to do our best to manage the Earth. But if Gaia is the case – if the Earth is a self-regulating system – then stewardship is a hubristic attempt to do what Gaia is designed to do, what Gaia has been doing for

millions of years before humans came on the scene, and what Gaia can do very much better than we can.¹¹

One does not have to adopt the Gaia hypothesis to find this kind of criticism cogent. The claim that humans simply do not have the knowledge or the power to be stewards of the Earth, i.e. to manage it for the best, is also made by Clare Palmer, along with other criticisms, in a devastatingly critical attack on the idea of stewardship in environmental ethics:

To be a successful steward, either in the feudal or the financial sense, it is necessary to understand that which is being controlled. But the natural world is not like an estate, nor like money in this respect. It is composed of complex ecosystems and atmospheric conditions that we do not understand and cannot predict.

She does not mean we can do nothing about, for example, climate change, but that the control we have is partial and 'we must see it in the context of the many things we do not know and perhaps will never know'.¹²

This kind of criticism of the notion of stewardship makes a strong case.¹³ It can be very dangerous to overestimate one's power to achieve or to control things. Arguably, the ecological crisis of the last few decades has its roots in generally well-meaning scientific and technological projects whose benefits seemed obvious but whose catastrophic effects were not foreseen. The whole of the modern scientific-technological project of dominating nature and exploiting its resources for the good of humanity presumed that total mastery of the Earth's natural processes was within human grasp. It exaggerated what was known and turned a blind eye to what was not. On a small scale, this need not be disastrous: one can learn from mistakes and nature has the resources to repair the damage. But the bigger the scale, the more dangerous it becomes. And in the face of all the examples that should have taught humans this lesson, the optimistic progressivism that stakes everything on achieving total control survives. It is alive and well among the technophiliacs who assume that we shall be able to

create a technological fix for climate change and every other danger that comes along, as well as the biotechnologists and the artificial intelligence people who dream of a world in which technology has taken over from evolution.

Lovelock appropriately refers to the idea of a 'technological fix' for climate change as 'breathhtaking hubris'.¹⁴ Even if it were possible, do we really want to be in charge of such things as climate change? Lovelock says:

The more we meddle with the Earth's composition and try to fix its climate, the more we take on the responsibility for keeping the Earth a fit place for life, until eventually our whole lives may be spent in drudgery doing the tasks that Gaia had freely done for over three billion years. This would be the worst of fates for us and [would] reduce us to a truly miserable state, where we were forever wondering whether anyone, any nation [the USA? China?] or any international body could be trusted to regulate the climate and the atmospheric composition. The idea that humans are yet intelligent enough to serve as stewards of the Earth is among the most hubristic ever.¹⁵

Others would point to an even worse danger: that developing technology in this direction, technology so smart and so powerful it could manage tasks as formidable as the global climate, will lead to the point where technology in the form of artificial intelligence will take over from us, either replacing us or modifying human nature itself to the extent of creating a new species. This is the posthuman future envisaged by the technological futurists (many of them actually working in bioengineering or in the development of artificial intelligence). It may seem odd to find it in the vicinity of the notion of stewardship, but there is a real connection. If stewardship requires total control of the Earth's processes, only posthumans will be equal to the task.

Thus one major problem about the modern Christian idea of stewardship of creation is this: if it means that humans consider themselves to have controlling charge over the Earth, then it is

indeed hubristic, consciously or not, since the facts of human knowledge and power do not measure up to such a role. The concept of stewardship is usually represented as an interpretation of the human dominion over other creatures granted to humans by God in Genesis (1:26 and 28). It is, we should remember, an interpretation, which says more than the text indisputably does. In order to discuss the text without pre-judging issues of interpretation, and since there is no doubt that it uses the notion of 'rule,' I shall call what God gives to humans in Genesis 1 the human dominion. Does this dominion, as presented in Genesis 1, entail total control over the rest of creation on Earth, or mandate a project to achieve such control?

For a start, it is well worth observing that this 'totalising' reading of the dominion is a peculiarly modern one. No one before the early modern period read it in that way. Medieval western Christians, for example, supposed it to refer to the kinds of use of other creatures and the environment that were normal in their time: farming, hunting, building, mining and so forth. They did not suppose that Genesis 1 set humanity a task of achieving total control over the Earth. Total control obviously belonged to God alone. The totalising interpretation of the Genesis dominion is typically modern in its aspiration to reject all limits on human power and activity, to throw off all the constraints of nature, to remake the world according to human design, to become in fact some kind of god over the world. It was Francis Bacon, in the seventeenth century, who hijacked the Genesis text to authorise the project of scientific knowledge and technological exploitation whose excesses have given us the ecological crisis. The modern project of domination is indeed hubristic in that it aspired (and for technophilic progressivists still aspires) to the kind of control that had always been thought to belong to God alone.¹⁶

Christian thought about the world, drawing on its biblical sources, has normally supposed that all human action takes place within the larger framework of divine providence, which may work to limit the effects of our evil or to prosper the effects of our good actions. It has also supposed that there are structures of order

inherent in creation as God has made it that humans violate at their peril. Whatever dominion or stewardship might mean it must belong within those limits. If James Lovelock is right about Gaia, I see no difficulty at all in seeing the self-regulating Earth system as part of the order of creation within which humans must live.¹⁷ *Of course* it can do the job better than we can: God has designed it to do so. So science and good theology may combine to require a more modest, more limited understanding of the human dominion than the hubristic and dangerously exaggerated notion that has been with us for the last four centuries. We need to cut the dominion down to size. In the present chapter, we shall attempt that by observing carefully the limits on dominion that the Bible itself sets and the qualifications of dominion that the Bible itself gives it. Interpretation of the dominion has gone wrong when Genesis 1:26 and 28 has been isolated as the only part of Scripture used to define the God-given relationship of humans to the rest of creation. We need to put it back into a much larger context of the rich resources of scriptural treatment of the human relationship to other creatures.

CRITICISMS OF STEWARDSHIP: (2) STEWARDSHIP EXCLUDES GOD'S OWN ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD

This second criticism is a more theological parallel to the first. It alleges that the notion of human stewardship neglects God's own continuing involvement with his creation. Extreme advocates of stewardship have even suggested that God has entirely delegated his governance of the world to humans. This is supposed to be the meaning of the fact that, in Genesis 1, God created humans on the sixth day of creation, at the end of all his acts of creation, and then rested on the seventh day. With the creation of humans God had nothing more to do himself, having put the world into the hands of humans, and so could now rest. Such a view is even more subject to the charge of hubris than those discussed in the previous section. It states outright that humans assume the role of God in relation to the world.

Such a conclusion can be reached most easily in a secular context in which God is for all intents and purposes dead. In the absence of God, whether resting or dead, humans must play God and exercise a divinely powerful and extensive dominion over creation. But of course this is not the biblical view. God is constantly active in his creation in ways that have nothing to do with humans as well as in ways that do. Humans should care for creation within the context of God's own caring for it, not in place of God's caring for creation.

CRITICISMS OF STEWARDSHIP: (3) STEWARDSHIP LACKS SPECIFIC CONTENT

A different kind of problem is that stewardship has proven to be a very flexible term. Once we get beyond the rather general ideas we have already noticed, there are a whole range of different understandings of what our stewardship of the Earth actually requires of us. For example, is it a hands-on or a hands-off job? When the idea of human stewardship of the Earth was first used in the seventeenth century, especially by the lawyer Matthew Hale, it went with a very high view of the need for human intervention in the rest of creation for creation's good.¹⁸ Nature would run horribly wild if humans were not there to keep it in order.¹⁹ For many environmentally minded Christians today, on the other hand, stewardship is mainly a matter of preserving creation from human damage to it – letting nature be itself, intervening only to protect, not to improve.²⁰ Stewardship is about preserving, not changing.

There are very different evaluations of wilderness in play here. For seventeenth-century people, wilderness was a waste and a mess that needed clearing up and putting in order. In the modern period too, nature has often been viewed as something sadly unfinished until humans set about improving it.²¹ On the other hand, for environmentally sensitive contemporary people, it would seem that wild nature can do perfectly well without us. Intervention is likely to spoil it, not improve it. But then again, there are enthusiasts for biotechnology who see the Genesis

dominion as a mandate for scientists to take control of the evolutionary process, to bring nature to new stages of development it has not yet reached, and cannot without us to transform it technologically.²² So the notion of stewardship as such offers little guidance as to how we should relate to nature beyond exhorting us to seek the good of other creatures as well as of ourselves. But what is that good?

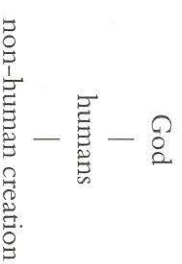
Stewardship certainly implies that the rest of creation somehow needs us. But why, and how? In a contemporary context one could easily imagine that the rest of creation would be much better off without us humans. It is we who have made such a mess of the world. It is our unstoppable interference, our arrogant assumption that we can improve nature, that has destroyed so much of it. One illustration Christopher Southgate gives of how humans might contribute to the healing of nature, instead of its destruction, is 'a reduction of extinction', i.e. of the extinction of species, though he admits that this 'would take a great deal more wisdom as well as a great deal more knowledge than we currently possess'.²³ But how significant is this in the context of contemporary ecological disaster? Doubtless we humans could preserve a few species that might, apart from us, die out (species have been going extinct continuously since life began on Earth). But, in practice today, it is hardly possible to distinguish those rather few naturally occurring extinctions from the much larger number of species that have died out or are in danger of dying out because of human activity. (Global warming will bring about the extinction of vast numbers of species.) We humans are surely in practice the only competitors that count.

So it is hardly surprising that many Christian advocates of stewardship today see stewardship as a matter of protecting nature from harm by humans, and repairing the damage humans have done to it. This view of stewardship implies that it is a task that is only needed because we humans are in the world. Without us, creation would get along perfectly well (and did so, of course, for millions of years before we came on the scene),²⁴ but, since God wanted to put us here, nature now needs us to protect it from us.

An analogy might be: suppose you tell a child to tidy their room; the room does need tidying, but only because there is a child there who makes it untidy.²⁵ Is human stewardship of the Earth like that? Such a modest account is attractive but I find it difficult to believe that the dominion in Genesis 1 means no more than that. On the other hand, the more positive interpretations on offer tend to sound highly unrealistic to anyone who is properly aware of how destructive our relationship with creation really has been in the modern period. In this context, ideas of humans as co-creators with God or co-redeemers with God²⁶ are nothing but red rags to bulls. Whatever might be said of them in the abstract, in the context of the modern technological project of total domination of nature they pander to the hubristic modern aspiration to the role of gods over the world. Whatever the rest of creation may need from us, it is certainly not the tyranny of pretended divine power. I have long found the question ‘why should the rest of creation *need* us?’ the hardest question about the meaning of the Genesis dominion and the human relationship to the non-human creation.²⁷

CRITICISMS OF STEWARDSHIP: (4) STEWARDSHIP SETS HUMANS OVER CREATION, NOT WITHIN IT

The fourth criticism of the notion of stewardship – one that is central to my aims in this book – is that it depicts the relationship of humans to other creatures in a purely vertical way, without a corresponding horizontal dimension. By that I mean that it places us above creation, in a sort of hierarchy:



The notion of stewardship does not encourage emphasis or reflection on the fact that humans are also creatures, rooted like other creatures in this earthly home that we share with them. Steward-

ship puts us in authority over, but not in community alongside and with other creatures.

Another aspect of this limitation is that the stewardship model is a one-way relationship, in which humans rule and care for creation, but creation is merely the passive recipient of our work. A broader picture of a community of creatures in which we participate will open up reciprocal relationships, recognising our fundamental dependence on other creatures and the benefits they give us.

In my view, it is the exclusive focus on a vertical relationship to the rest of creation – whether it be called rule or dominion or stewardship or even priesthood – that has been one of the ideological driving forces of the modern technological project of dominating nature. Modern western people, beginning with the Renaissance, forgot their own creatureliness, their embeddedness within creation, their interdependence with other creatures. They sought to liberate themselves from nature, to transcend their own dependence on nature, and conceived themselves as functionally gods in relation to nature.²⁸ While stewardship avoids the themes of domination, exploitation and re-creation that fuelled the modern project, it retains the purely vertical relationship. This by no means simply invalidates it, but it is a limitation that suggests that the stewardship model by itself could be a perilously one-sided model for a relationship so complex as the human relationship to other creatures.²⁹

CRITICISMS OF STEWARDSHIP: (5) STEWARDSHIP TENDS TO ISOLATE ONE SCRIPTURAL TEXT

Finally, a criticism that leads directly into what I shall do in the rest of this book. It is that the idea of stewardship depends for its biblical support on the same single scriptural locus as the talk of rule or dominion: Genesis 1:26 and 28. Admittedly, the location of this text in the Bible highlights its special significance: it is connected with the very creation of humans. For a canonical reading of Scripture, Genesis 1:26 and 28 can certainly not be left aside. But nor should it be lifted out of the rest of Scripture. Too

often this text has been isolated from its context in the canon of Scripture. A major aim of this book is to place the Genesis concept of dominion within its wider biblical context, indicating both the ways in which it is interpreted by other texts and also that it is one theme among several that the Bible uses to speak of the place of humanity within creation. It will open up some of the rich and diverse resources the Bible as a whole offers us for thinking about our human relationship with the rest of creation and for responding to the ecological destruction of our time and the ecological threats of the future.

However, it will be useful to begin by reconsidering the passage in Genesis 1 on which the whole discussion of stewardship ultimately rests. We need to place the commands to 'subdue the Earth' and to 'have dominion' over other creatures in their context in the Bible's opening account of creation in seven days (Gen. 1:1—2:4), and to reconsider their meaning within that context.

UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 1: (1) THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

Genesis 1:1—2:4 uses the biblical notion of a week, in which there are six days for working and the seventh day for rest, as the framework for an account of creation in which God creates on six days and rests on the seventh. The passage is carefully and intricately structured, and much of the meaning is embodied in the structure. The following diagram explicates the most important elements in the structure of the six days narrative:

Environments and Names	Inhabitants and Tasks
[pre-creation: Earth, waters, darkness: formless and unproductive]	
(Day 1) Light – separated from darkness <i>God saw that it was good</i> God names: Day and Night	(Day 4) Heavenly lights Task: to separate day from night, to give light, to rule <i>God saw that it was good</i>
(Day 2) Firmament – separates waters God names: Sky	(Day 5) Water produces water creatures Birds in sky <i>God saw that it was good</i> God blesses Task: to be fruitful and fill
(Day 3) Dry land – by gathering waters God names: Land and Sea <i>God saw that it was good</i> Land produces vegetation <i>God saw that it was good</i>	(Day 6) Land produces land creatures <i>God saw that it was good</i> Humans in God's image God blesses Task: to be fruitful and fill and subdue Dominion over creatures of (5) and (6) All creatures of (5) and (6) to live from vegetation of (3) <i>God saw all that he had made and it was very good</i>

Despite the use of a scheme of days, the allocation of material to the days follows primarily a spatial rather than a chronological arrangement. On the first three days God creates the three environments that constitute the ordered space of creation, and then, on the fourth, fifth and sixth days, he creates the inhabitants of each of these cosmic habitats in turn. Each of the habitats is named

by God, and two of them (the waters and the land) participate in the creation of their inhabitants. Vegetation is treated as an aspect of the third environment, rather than as inhabitants of it, because it is viewed as part of the land's provision for the living creatures that inhabit it. The inhabitants are all animate creatures, including the heavenly bodies (seen as animate at least because of their regular and autonomous movement). Whereas God names the environments, he gives to each category of inhabitants (with the exception of the non-human land creatures³⁰) a task that relates both to their specific environment and to the continuance of the created order in the future. In the cases of the creatures of sea and air and of humans, the task is given along with God's blessing because it is this that enables them to procreate and multiply, sharing to that extent in God's creative work.

The scheme is primarily spatial. There is also a degree of logical sequence: the work of the third day has to follow that of the second, and the environments have to be created before their respective inhabitants. What is lacking, however, is any sense of building towards a culmination. Humans, the last creatures to be created, have a unique role within creation, but they do not come last because they are the climax of an ascending scale. The 'creeping things' (reptiles and insects), created on the sixth day, are not higher, in some order of being, than the birds, created on the fifth day. So this scheme of creation has nothing in common with that progressivist reading of evolution that envisages a process of increasing complexity and increasing intelligence that culminates in human beings.

If the scheme is primarily spatial rather than chronological, we may wonder why it is set in a framework of seven days. One function of the temporal framework is to convey that, along with creating a spatially ordered creation, God created a temporal structure for that creation (the perpetuation of which is entrusted to the heavenly lights). But the fact that the number seven symbolises completeness (not unconnected with the fact that a week has seven days) is also important. As well as the sequence of seven days, the micro-structure of the account is replete with series

of sevens, of which the most important is the sevenfold occurrence of the word *bara'* (to create).³¹ That God completed his whole work of creation in the six days is emphasised in the account of the seventh day, on which he rested, presumably with the implication that he rested in appreciation of all that he had brought into being. The seventh day (rather than the creation of humans) is the true culmination of the work of creation, but not in the sense of ending a series that moves progressively towards it. Rather, the seventh day, radically different in kind from the others, relates directly to each of the six, and forms the vantage point from which the work of all six days may be seen, not as a sequence, but as a whole.

God's approbation and appreciation of every part of his creation is conveyed by the refrain, repeated at each stage of creation: 'God saw that it was good.' This indicates that each part of creation has its own value that does not depend on its value for other parts. The environments, for example, are not valued only because they serve as environments for their inhabitants. While the account stresses the importance of vegetation as food for the land animals, it does not require us to think that this is its only value. God appreciates the trees and plants also for their own sake. Nevertheless, the creation was designed to be an interconnecting and interdependent whole, and so the refrain is varied at the end of the work of the sixth day: 'God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (1:31).³² The value of the whole is more than the value of the sum of its parts.

In its own way, the Genesis 1 account of creation is 'ecological'. It stresses the profusion and diversity of living things, and it portrays the creation, animate and inanimate, as an interdependent whole. Humans belong integrally to that interdependent whole. They are essential to the design of the whole, but so are the other parts of creation. The view, which was common in much of the Christian tradition, that the rest of creation was created for the sake of humans, finds no support in the text. It is within that context of creation as an interdependent whole that we need to understand the special role that they are undoubtedly also given.

UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 1: (2) THE HUMAN PLACE IN CREATION

Humans are one of two categories of creatures to whom God gives the special task of 'ruling': the sun and the moon 'rule' (*imashal*) the day and the night (1:16–18), while humans 'rule' (*yaddah*) all the creatures that inhabit sea, air and land (1:26 and 28). The latter are created in 'the image of God' presumably, whatever more precisely the phrase may mean, because this is what makes it possible or appropriate for them to rule over other living creatures. But we need to look quite closely at the way the human dominion is introduced and described in the two divine speeches:

Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, and **let them have dominion (*yaddah*) over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals³³ of the land, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the land.** (1:26)

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the land and subdue (*kabash*) it, and **have dominion (*yaddah*) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the land.** (1:28)

The dominion is described in the portions of the text printed in bold type. Despite much confusion by exegetes,³⁴ the words that begin the second quotation are not part of the mandate of dominion. They correspond rather to what God has said to the sea creatures and the birds:

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the land. (1:22)

The only difference is that humans are told to 'subdue (*kabash*)' the land. When this verb is used with humans as its object, as it mostly is in the Hebrew Bible, the meaning seems to be something like 'to take by force' or 'to make subject' (e.g. 2 Sam. 8:11; Esth. 7:8; Jer. 34:11), but when 'land' (*'eret*) is the object, the meaning seems more like 'to occupy' or 'to take possession' (Num. 32:22, 29; Josh.

18:1; 1 Chr. 22:18). The action, in these cases, requires defeating the enemies who previously occupied the land, but the land itself has only to be possessed. It is not itself an enemy to be forcibly subjugated.

In Genesis 1:28 the 'land' that is to be 'subdued' is the same 'land' that is to be 'filled' by humans (i.e. all the land in the world), and the two actions are closely connected. It seems likely that 'subduing' the land here refers to agriculture, since the only way humans are able to fill the land is to cultivate it and so to make it yield more food than it would of its own accord. As we have noted, the element of force may not be intrinsic to the verb *kabash*, but if it is, then the reference is to the fact that farmers must work the land to make it yield crops.³⁵

Agriculture makes the difference between fish and birds, on the one hand, and people, on the other. Without agriculture the land does not produce enough food for humans to fill it. Since God's command to humans is not only that they should multiply, but that they should do so to the extent of filling the land, they must also 'subdue' the land, i.e. farm it. Other land animals, confined to habitats that supply their food without needing to be farmed, cannot fill the land. (As well as farming, it is possible that 'subduing' the land alludes also to mining metals and quarrying stone; cf. Deut. 8:7–10.)

Of course, the command to 'fill the land' should not be taken over-literally. The biblical writers were aware that there were some areas of wilderness in which humans could not live. But a more serious issue is that the creation account clearly assigns the land also to all the land animals. So God can hardly intend humans to 'fill the land' at the expense of other animals. This is why, rather oddly, God's grant of 'every green plant' to the land animals for food (1:30) is not spoken to the animals themselves, but appended, as information for humans, to his grant to them of seed-bearing plants for food (1:29). The point must be that humans should not grow food for themselves (and so fill the land) to an extent that competes with the livelihood of other living creatures. Humans and other creatures are to share the land, and humans are responsi-

ble for seeing that their own use of the land does not negate this sharing.

For the mandate to fill the land and subdue it, we may appropriately use the term stewardship, since it is a right to responsible use of the land that belongs ultimately to God. But (*contra* most exegetes) in Genesis this is to be distinguished from the dominion over other living creatures. There is, implicitly, a connection between the two. The uniquely human practice of agriculture enables humans to multiply and spread so that they become the dominant species on Earth (even in the Old Testament period this must have seemed to be the case). But the dominion granted by God presupposes more than this fact of power. It also presupposes that humans bear the divine image, so that God can authorise them to use their superior power in a way that reflects God's own rule over his creation. Whereas they are to 'subdue' the Earth, they are to 'rule' (*radah*) the other living creatures.³⁶

Unlike *kabash*, which is elsewhere used of land as well as people, *radah* is used, outside Genesis 1, almost exclusively with human individuals or groups as its object.³⁷ It is not surprising that, since it refers to rule or supremacy, it is often associated with violence or force, but this does not mean that violence or force is integral to the meaning of the word. In Ezekiel 34:4, it is used of the shepherds of the flock (representing rulers of the people) who are accused of not caring for the sheep but instead ruling (*radah*) them 'with force and harshness'. The implication is probably that they should have ruled (*radah*) with care and compassion, as God, the true shepherd of his people, does.

It is not clear whether the dominion over other living creatures includes the right to use them in any way. In the context of Genesis 1, there is no question of killing them for food: both humans and animals are vegetarian. Other uses of animals – as beasts of burden, for wool or milk – can apply only to the domestic animals, and so could constitute only a minor part of what dominion over all living creatures – in the sea, in the air and on the land – could mean. It seems better to exclude use of animals from

the meaning of dominion. The human dominion, like God's, is a matter not of use but of care.

It is therefore significant and intelligible that the image of God is connected not with the subduing of the Earth but with the dominion over other living creatures. When humans obey the command to be fruitful and to multiply, to fill the Earth and to subdue it, they are not imitating God in a unique way but behaving like other species. All species use their environment and, though agriculture is unique to humans, it can be seen as a peculiarly human extension of the right of all animals to use their environment in order to live and to flourish. If the human dominion over other creatures were merely a matter of power, it too would be only the superlative version of what other creatures have. What links it to the image of God is that it is a delegated participation in God's caring rule over his creatures.

The fact that humans are commanded to do what other species do as well as, uniquely, to exercise dominion over other species, is important to our understanding of the latter. Creation in the image of God does not make them demi-gods. They are unequivocally creatures. They are land animals who must live from the land as all land animals must. They participate in the ordered interdependence of the creatures as Genesis 1 portrays them. The dominion God gives them is over fellow-creatures and it reflects God's rule in a necessarily creaturely way. It is to be exercised within the created order that God has established and must serve that order.

The dominion is over living creatures, not inanimate nature. This makes the verb *radah*, which elsewhere has only humans as its object, appropriate. Unlike the sun and the moon, who rule only the day and the night, humans rule other sentient beings, who are to some degree subjects of their own lives just as humans are. Genesis does distinguish quite sharply between living creatures and the rest of creation. The covenant of Genesis 9 is made by God with Noah and his descendants and 'with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the Earth with you, as many as came out of the ark' (9:9–10). It is

assumed that, unlike trees and mountains, animate creatures are suitable partners in a covenant (cf. also Hos. 2:18). (Our modern use of the term ‘the environment’ – as a single term embracing landscape, flora and fauna – thus fits the perspective of Genesis very badly.)

We have contextualised Genesis 1:26 and 28 in their context in the creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:4. In the rest of this chapter we shall consider aspects of their context in the rest of the Torah (Pentateuch), picking up those passages that can function as further exposition of the human role in creation initially set out in Genesis 1. In this treatment I am not concerned to distinguish the various sources that scholars recognise in the early chapters of Genesis and in the Torah as a whole. Other studies of our subject have taken the approach of distinguishing the theologies of the two creation narratives (Gen. 1:1–2:3 and Gen. 2:4–25) and of the several sources that can be traced through the rest of the Torah.³⁸ Doubtless such sources existed, but in the Torah as we have it they have been combined by editors who surely did not simply cut and paste them, but brought them together intelligently into what they perceived as a coherent whole. It is this final form of the text that constitutes Scripture for Jewish and Christian readers, and so it is this final form that exegetes have primarily the responsibility of interpreting. This matters especially in our reading of Genesis 2, the second creation account. It is, of course, a distinct narrative, and its interests and emphases are significantly different from those of the first account. Therein lies its value. But the editors of Genesis evidently did not see the two accounts as incompatible. It makes good sense to read the second as complementing what we have learned from the first.

UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 2: (1) HUMAN SOLIDARITY WITH THE REST OF CREATION

Whereas the seven-days creation account ensures the creatureliness of humans by placing them within the order of creation, the Eden account does so, perhaps more emphatically, by stressing Adam’s kinship with the Earth and the other creatures of Earth.

God, we are told, ‘formed the human being (*’adam*) from the dust of the soil (*’adamah*)’ (2:7)³⁹ – the pun draws attention to the relationship and indicates its appropriateness. (Loren Wilkinson offers an English equivalent to the Hebrew pun: ‘God made humans out of humus’,⁴⁰ while Carol Newsom puts it: ‘we share common ground with the Earth because we are *common ground*’.⁴¹) This earthiness of humans signifies a kinship with the Earth itself and with other earthly creatures, plants and animals.⁴² Human life is embedded in the physical world with all that that implies of dependence on the natural systems of life.

It is for neglecting this earthiness of humans that John Haught has criticised the idea of stewardship: ‘a theology of dominion or stewardship fails to accentuate that we belong to the Earth more than it belongs to us, that we are more dependent on it than it is on us, that we are *of* the Earth and not living *on* the Earth’.⁴³

The animals are created from the soil, all of them individually moulded, like Adam, by God (2:19). God animates the clay figure of Adam by breathing into him ‘the breath of life’ (2:7), which is the same breath that animates all living creatures (7:22). Though not specifically mentioned in the account of the creation of the animals (2:19), it must be assumed, because otherwise the animals would not be alive. The summary account probably assumes that, just as God himself formed both Adam and the animals from the soil, so God himself breathed the breath of life into both Adam and the animals (where else would it have come from?). The phrase ‘living being’ (*nefesh hayyah*), used of Adam in 2:7, elsewhere always refers to animals. Nothing in their created constitution differentiates humans from other animals, according to this account.

UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 2: (2) CARING FOR THE LAND

Moreover, Adam’s life remains bound up with the soil. Before we hear of him, we hear of the soil’s need of him: ‘there was no one to till (*’avad*) the ground (*’adamah*)’ (2:5). Once created, Adam is placed by God in the garden he has planted ‘to till (*’avad*) it and to