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Toward the Humilocene: The Embodied Rhetoric of St. Francis Assisi

Cynthia Rosenfeld

In the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*, cultural ecologist and geophilosopher David Abram (2020) recommends abandoning the term Anthropocene in favor of calling our current epoch the *Humilocene*. Some may read Abram's suggestion with an "enough already" attitude. We have the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Platationocene, and Chtulucene.[1] We have been over-ocened. But anyone familiar with Abram's work knows the exacting yet soulful investigations of language of which Abram is capable and is likely to be interested in the proposed Humilocene.

Abram is sensitive to scientists' desire to highlight the devastating effects of human activity on Earth. He understands the rhetorical appeal of a term that calls out and calls on humans to do better, but he thinks that *Anthropocene* is too anthropocentric to get us there. The Anthropocene does not place us in a more-than-human world. Nothing exceeds us in the Anthropocene. The Humilocene, on the other hand, derives from *humus*: earth underfoot. It is from humus that we get human and humility. The Humilocene calls humans out, while also directing our attention to some necessary and well-earned humiliation at how poorly many of us have taken care of our home, our more-than-human family, and begging of us to move forward with humility (Abram 2020, 9).

I agree with Abram, and I also acknowledge that a productive humility that inspires action is hard to achieve. When we look at those things which invite humiliation, it can be easy to fall into paralyzing despair or cognitive-dissonance-reducing anger. This is not limited to environmental issues, of course. Robin DiAngelo (2018) uses the term "white fragility" to illuminate how conversations about racism can so easily fatigue white people and invite a variety of defensive positions rather than motivating change. Thus, I argue that we need some help getting back to a state of humility. Literary critic Kenneth Burke (1973) told us long ago

[1] The Anthropocene is a term referring to a geologic epoch notable for the effects human activity has had on global climate and ecosystems. The term highlights the culpability of all humans—*anthropos*—and some critics have offered alternative -cenes that do not paint with as broad of a brush. The Capitalocene offers a Marxist critique of our current ecological crises by situating responsibility with global capitalism. The Platationocene is a critique of capitalism but also directs attention to the enduring effects of colonialism and racism. The Chtulucene names "a kind of time-place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (Haraway 2018, p. 81).

that literature can serve as equipment for living, and so that is where I begin my search for equipment for learning humility. In this paper, I offer the embodied rhetoric of St. Francis of Assisi as equipment for humility and, through that humility, living.

My aim for this essay is not to be a hagiography of St. Francis. As such, when referencing St. Francis, I will refer to him as Francis, not to secularize his identity nor deny his honored position in the Catholic faith, but as a reminder that Francis's way of listening, hearing, and responding to the world "are things that can happen to any one of us" (Sweeney 2019, 18). Because I am looking for equipment for living, my reading of Francis concentrates on those aspects of his life and teachings that I find most relevant and helpful to our present times. Such an emphasis should not be understood to suggest that Francis's model is a perfect one. There are no infallible human or acts in this essay, which is—ironically—very Franciscan. Further, there are numerous places that one might find equipment for humility that is neither Franciscan nor Christian. For example, Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) *Braiding Sweetgrass* offers a most loving, humble, and gracious kits for living well. I turn to Francis not for conversion but for Burkean identification (1969), that is, to be able to articulate deep ecology in a manner that identifies with the attitudes, ideas, and imagery already shared by so many people either as practicing Christians and Catholics or influenced by Christian culture.

I begin this essay by addressing Lynn White, Jr.'s (1967) well-known critique that a particular reading of Judeo-Christianity, inherited from medieval traditions, is the cause of our current ecological crisis. I then briefly discuss some contemporary attempts to read the Old and New Testaments in a more harmonious with White's critiques and recommendations. Next, I explore the embodied rhetoric of Francis. I argue that Francis's manner of embodying three of Cicero's canons of rhetoric is relevant to contemporary rhetoricians and to deep ecologists. I conclude the paper by discussing the social functions performed (Herrick 2018) by Francis's rhetorical style. I offer a Franciscan rhetoric to help us move through the humiliation, humility, and redemption afforded by Humilocene.

Christianity Against Ecology?

In 1967, Lynn White published an oft-cited article in *Science* positioning a prominent interpretation of the Judeo-Christianitian origin story found in *Genesis* as the root of the ecological crisis. There are many mobilizing Great Fall narratives in the environmental humanities. Great Fall narratives provide coordinates for locating influential paradigms that contribute to our instrumentalization of the more-than-human world. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1755/2009) located the Great Fall as the time when the first person enclosed an area of land, called it "Mine," and convinced others to treat it as such. Carolyn Merchant (1980) locates the

Great Fall more recently in Sir Francis Bacon's—the "father of science"—promulgation of a science that was infused with attitudes of human domination of nature. White (1967) argued that the Western science of Bacon and our industrial technology arose in a culture that already took for granted that "man" had a God-given dominion over (cf., Merchant 1989, 164 for a feminist critique of masculinity, technoscience rationality, and dominion), and the authority to exploit the Earth and all its creatures.

White (1967) contended that science and technology will have little to offer in terms of solving ecological problems as long as the hegemonic view that earth exists *for* humanity persists. Consider the following analogy: Think of the products developed and marketed toward women in the early 20th century. While it is true that many products made tasks easier—vacuuming versus beating rugs, in-home dryers versus clothes line (each of which have their own ecological implications)—the products also arose from the dominant narrative of a woman's role as a tidy housekeeper and then reinforced that narrative by providing tools to make upholding that narrative more efficient. Further, as technology helped women to perform chores more efficiently, there was less need for that work to be shared across the family, thus helping to solidify the view of household chores as work for "mother" (Cowan 1983). If technological advancements are produced within a culture that values earth as a resource for humanity's so-called "progress," it seems likely that Earth would suffer the same fate as mothers.

White, a historian of medieval European technology, had written favorably of the role technology plays in freeing humans from "mindless toil" but grew concerned about the exponential growth of our technologies within a paradigm of human exceptionalism and domination (Riley 2014, 243) [2]. Thus, White (1967) stated that first, we need an alternative Christian view that displaces humans from atop the species hierarchy. He offers two possible solutions: one, find a new religion, or two, rethink Christianity.

White is inclined toward the latter recommendation. Not only is it more pragmatic to work with existing faith communities and texts, White is a life-long Presbyterian who sought not to denounce all of Christianity but to extend its ethics of care to all of creation (Riley 2014). To be sure, we need varied and plentiful equipment for living humbly, and I believe that much of this equipment can and should be areligious. However, environmental humanities and activism would do well to consider White's call for re-reading Christian texts. Approximately 75% of Americans identify as Christian (Pew Research Center 2015) and the United States is disproportionately responsible for anthropogenic climate change (Gillis and Popovich 2017).

[2] Old Testament scholar Norman Habel (2009) makes a similar point when he compares God's punishment of the more-than-human inhabitants of Israel to the destruction wrought by contemporary technologies like nuclear weapons.

This is not to say Christianity bears the disproportionate burden of anthropogenic climate change; rather, I am asserting that environmental activists would do well to consider how to articulate their causes with Christian morality[3]. For many people, the Bible is a master frame of reference from which all other frames—unconscious constructions through which individuals make sense of roles, structures, and relationships in the world —are derived[4]. Although communities will disagree on whether the Bible is an ontological document, it may be read as an important text conveying, for many, the "stories we live by" (Stibbe 2020, 2).

One's master frame is not primarily a matter of *logos,* or logical reasoning. Master frames are often matters of *pathos* and affiliation. It is important to recognize what kind of frame a theological frame is, to better understand what kinds of views, beliefs, and actions it might inspire. As literary critic John Gray (2019, 12) writes,

> … apologists for theism have tried to develop theories that explain the origins of the universe and humankind better than prevailing scientific accounts. In doing so they are conceding to science an unwarranted authority over other ways of thinking. Religion is no more a primitive type of science than is art or poetry. Scientific inquiry answers a demand for explanation. The practice of religion expresses a need for meaning, which would remain unsatisfied even if everything could be explained.

White began the project of searching for a meaningful ecological theology himself in his famous essay and returned to this project throughout his last two decades of scholarship (Riley 2014), and others have continued this project in their own ways. Old Testament scholar Norman Habel (2009) queried if the "grey" texts of the Bible—those passages that couldsanction anthropocentric domination—could be read in a "green" way and suggests "retrieving" the Earth's voice from the text. For example, when God grants Adam dominion over the Earth, we can hear Earth asking, "*Where is the justice…Why should I be subdued*" (Habel 2009, 68; emphasis in original). Another re-engagement with the foundational Christian text comes from *The Green Bible* (TGB, 2008). TGB offers substantial essays, tips, resources, and an environmental-themed topical index. Whereas Habel develops a new hermeneutical approach for reading the Bible, TGB offers a New Revised Standard Version of the Bible with its more-than-human themes colored green. Both approaches have their affordances and constraints,

[3] Of course, environmental issues extend beyond climate change: the Trump administration's relaxation of laws protecting endangered species and public lands, global deforestation associated with unsustainable dietary habits, out-of-control consumption of plastic and other commercial products that wind up contaminating the oceans and killing countless marine creatures—to name but a few.

[4] For more on frames and master frames, see Lakoff 2010.

and they are certainly not the only approaches to "greening" Christianity (cf. Evangelical Environmental Network 2020).[5]

In this essay, I pick up with White's (1967) hunch that a greener Christianity would rely heavily on the teachings of Francis of Assisi. "Possibly we should ponder the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ: Saint Francis of Assisi…. The key to understanding Francis is his belief in the virtue of humility—not merely for the individual but for man (sic) as a species" (White 1967, 1206). White would go on to further detail Francis's radicalness and assert Francis's teachings move us from the dominion-stewardship binary and into a "spiritual democracy of all God's creatures" (White 1973, 61). Whether or not the editors read White's (1967) text, they seemed to have arrived at a shared conclusion about how to recast Christianity: An effective framing of Christian environmentalism begins with Francis of Assisi. Once inside the cover, immediately after the title page, before the books of the Bible are listed, TGB begins with the poem "Canticle of the Creatures" by Saint Francis of Assisi. Thus, before encountering any of the text of the Bible, we are first offered a text inviting us to consider that Sun is our "brother" and is made in God's likeness; that Wind, Water, Moon and Fire are all our siblings; and that Earth is our "sister" and "mother" who governs us (TGB 2008, front matter). Using St. Francis as the lens for looking at TGB—and for doing daily life—requires an exploration of how St. Francis's life and teaching function rhetorically.

The Embodied Rhetoric of Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone

Although I agree with White (1967) and TGB that Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone, better known as Francis, is the best candidate for introducing a Green Christianity, I am concerned with some of the interpretations that "Canticle of the Creatures" affords. While some readers see continuity between humans and nature, others, including notable writer G. K. Chesterton, focus on the word "sister" in Francis's phrase "Sister Mother Earth". While the outcome of this interpretation is still one of care—Chesterton writes, "Nature is a sister, and even a younger sister … to be laughed at as well as loved" (TGB 2008, I-45)—it positions humanity as equal to, if not slightly superior to, Earth. This view makes it easy to fall back on anthropocentric

[5] Atmospheric scientist Katharine Hayhoe is a prominent voice working to bridge the gap between science and Christian communities. Hayhoe is an evangelical Christian and the director of Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University. When she is not conducting her research, she presents a message of creation care (e.g., via TED Talks, *Years of Living Dangerously*, helping train new Climate Reality presenters). Creation care is a commitment to

> a ministry that educates, inspires, and mobilizes Christians in their effort to care for God's creation, to be faithful stewards of God's provision, to get involved in regions of the United States and the world impacted by pollution, and to advocate for actions and policies that honor God and protect the environment (Evangelical Environmental Network 2020).

justifications for the treatment of Earth. For example, if the Earth is our little sister, then hegemonic notions of both gender (e.g., it is chivalric for males to protect females) and age (i.e., adults/elders are to guide the less mature) would tell us it is our duty to protect Earth from herself.

In the rest of this essay, I first discuss Francis as a rhetorician and what rhetoric has to offer deep ecology. I then explore two questions to get to the heart of Francis's rhetorical appeal: how can Francis be understood as a fundamentally embodied rhetor and what does Francis's embodied rhetoric do for the more-than-human world today? Francis has been called a pantheist, Protestant, devout Catholic, Catholic liberationist, and heretic (Sorrell 1988). Most importantly for this essay, I will call him a human.

Why Francis and Why Rhetoric?

Francis is the most obvious choice for a figure in the Christian faith tradition who inspires sentiments harmonious with deep ecology. Devall and Sessions (1985, 92) reference Francis as a source of a deep ecological perspective and share his "Canticle of Brother Sun, Sister Moon". White (1967) identified Francis as the most obvious choice of model for a helpful change in course of Christian thinking. Scholars from many disciplines have looked to Francis for guidance on how to live in a more-than-human world. Pope Francis took the saint's name for guidance and inspiration and is the first pope to offer an encyclical on environmental concerns (for various and detailed ecologically philosophical perspectives on the Pope's encyclical, see *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*'s 2018 and *Environmental Humanities's* 2016 special foci on *Laudato si*).

It may be somewhat less obvious why I position Francis as a rhetorician. For some, "rhetoric" leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Popularly, some connote rhetoric with the sort of hot-winded and empty promises, pleas, and apologies made to either whip up votes or manage one's public image. In academia, some see contemporary rhetorical studies as critically reactive, offering little generative value—not actually delivering any equipment for living. Rhetorical criticism may have, like Latour (2004, 225) suggests of all varieties of critical studies, "run out of steam".

A full recounting of the generative capacities of rhetoric is beyond the scope or purpose of this paper, but highlighting a few examples may help make sense of my focus on Francis's role as rhetor. Aristotle defined rhetoric as an ability to observe all "the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 1991, 36). By seeing rhetoric as encompassing *all* the available means of persuasion, we do not limit our studies to mindful, deliberate speechcraft and delivery but welcome an investigation of the everyday ways in which we may be moved by the words, actions, beliefs, or practices we encounter in the more-than-human world. Classics scholar George Kennedy (1992)

understood this when he wrote of rhetoric as pre-lingual and pre-human. Of Cicero's (1976a) three aims of oratory—to teach, to delight, and to move—none of them actually require oratory.

This is not to say that Francis could not be understood as a classical oratorical rhetor. Below, I discuss how his adeptness at *memoria* contribute to his persuasive, poetic mode of address. However, to focus solely on Francis's speechcraft would neglect what I hope to demonstrate as Francis's most powerful persuasive appeals: his embodied rhetoric. Francis's emphasis on embodied experience is so well developed that long before we had the language of "rhetorics of display" (Prelli 2006), or formally recognized the pedagogical value of situated learning (cf. Gallagher, Renner and Glover-Rijkse's 2020 article exploring how a virtual recreation of a Martin Luther King speech enables learning and inspires social consciousness), Francis "realized how powerful it can be to imagine oneself contemporary with Jesus in events such as his Passion and Nativity" (Sweeney 2019, 26). His teachings formed the basis for the embodied rituals of the Stations of the Cross and the Nativity *crèche* (Sweeney 2019).

Francis offers a compelling understanding of embodied rhetoric: relational bonds are not formed solely or primarily through elaborate speech acts; they are manifested in and through our creaturely being. Francis offers "devotional experience" rather than "abstract doctrine" (Coupe 2013, p. 104, emphasis mine). Francis "used gestures to communicate, and shows of emotion before others" (Sweeney 2019, 2). He "used his dramatic flair" that he "learned from entertainers and storytellers who were popular in late medieval Europe" to "awaken others" (Sweeney 2019, 4). He would often begin his services with dance, "transforming his sermon into a kind of musical entertainment, full of lively rhythms" (Dario Fo quoted in Sweeney 2019, 4). How Francis used his body may seem a banal choice of exploration. What is more transient and ephemeral than a gesture? Sermons can be transcribed and become preserved in cultural memory. But reading *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, there is a great deal of attention paid not only to what Francis said but what Francis did. Francis taught not only by instruction but by action. Francis, Cunningham (1972) writes, did not love humanity or nature in abstract. He loved them individually—human by human, wolf by wolf, stone by stone—easily and often.

Exploring how Francis embodies rhetoric and how his rhetoric is embodied contributes to our understanding of both ecological theology and rhetoric. Cicero (1976b) told us that the five canons of rhetoric are *inventio* (coming up with the idea), *dispositio* (the ability to arrange and organize), *elocutio* (style choices, which includes gesture, tone, pace, word choice, and practices of visualization), *memoria* (knowledge and understanding), and *actio* (the act of delivery, including eye contact, dress, posture). Bacon's conception of rhetoric moved from studying rhetoric's operations/canons and occasions (i.e., epideictic, deliberative, or forensic) to an "art and action" conceptualization of rhetoric that focuses on the relation and effect

rhetoric has on the faculties (Cogan 1981). However, the operations of rhetoric need not be read as counter to understanding rhetoric as an active art, as I believe Francis's instantiations of *actio, memoria*, and *disposito* make clear.

Actio and the Wolf of Gubbio

In *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, the story is recounted of how Francis counseled a wolf outside the town of Gubbio. The wolf had killed not only animals of the town but some of the human citizens, as well. Francis decided to go meet the wolf, despite the warnings of the townspeople. The people watched as Francis approached the wolf, who lunged at him. Francis did not raise an arm to the wolf but commanded the wolf to do no harm. He came gently to Francis, who then discussed with the wolf—as the story is a dialogue between a chatting man and a yielding wolf—his concerns over the wolf's attacks. Francis tells the wolf that he "merit[s] the gallows" (Ugolino 1390/1998, 48) for his actions. However, Francis desires that peace be made between the town's people and the wolf. The wolf shows submissiveness by lowering his head. Francis takes this behavior as indication of the wolf's humble acceptance of Francis's request. Francis then promises the wolf that he will see to it that the wolf is regularly fed, as he understands that the wolf's actions were brought about by hunger. The wolf then follows Francis back to a town of astonished citizens who have gathered in the piazza to see Francis with the wolf. To those gathered in the piazza, Francis says,

> Hear ye, my brethren. Friar wolf, who is here before you, has promised and sworn fealty to me, that he will make peace with you and never more offend you in anything. Do ye now promise him to give him what he needs every day, and for him I give you my word that he will faithfully observe this covenant of peace.

Francis then asked the wolf to plead fealty again in front of the people, and the wolf placed his right paw in the hand of Francis, at which sight "the people were filled with great joy and wonder alike" (Ugolino 1390/1998, 49). The wolf is said to have lived two more years in the town, spending his remaining days welcome by the town's citizens, being well-fed, and dying of old age.

Of course, one could read this story as an allegorical tale promoting domestication. Indeed, Francis tames the wolf by initially commanding him in Christ's name[6]. and there is a very long, well-known, and ugly history of the atrocities committed when Christians have commanded

[6] As with the recent scientific theories that recognize the wolf's participation in domestication, it would be a mistake to consider the wolf at Gubbio as lacking agency in this encounter. The point being made here concerns Francis's *verbal* use of the imperative rather than the invitational.

Others—thus conceived as radically and problematically different—to act "in Christ's name". We could be tempted here to go down a tragic route and seek to purify ourselves of Christianity for these sins. However, I would prefer we tend to Burke's notion of the comic frame. Much like White's call to re-read the Christian creation narrative through a Franciscan lens, the comic frame is concerned with re-birth rather than death. The comic frame allows us to be aware of our errors so as not to repeat them. We may learn the ultimate lessons of "humane enlightenment" when we admit our errors with humility (Burke 1937/1984, 41). To view the atrocities mentioned above in a comic frame is neither to negate them nor diminish their horror but is an attempt to salvage the good in our necessary renovations.

As critics, when we are careful of the destructive and salvage the productive, we offer "arenas in which to gather" (Latour 2004, 246). The arena or piazza for gathering in this tale of Francis is his humble method of *actio.* I refer to his actions in this story as *actio* and not *elocutio* because I do not read Francis's actions as pre-determined stylistic choices, but as a mindful rhetor attending to his audiences and adjusting his posture, gaze, and actions as he goes along. In this story, Francis's *actio* places Francis—already a respected figure— in what Carolyn Marvin (2006) calls "the body class".

Marvin (2006) elucidates the troubling distinction between the textual class and the body class. The textual class, which includes politicians, clergy, and academics, is skilled at using texts that shield and preserve their bodies from hardship and danger. Presidents do not raise swords but sign documents to send people to war. Clergy can save or damn souls at a distance, and academics—like myself—can point to problems that they ask others to address. Meanwhile, the body class is asked to do the hard and dangerous work. Although Francis was already a respected religious leader when he encountered the wolf outside Gubbio around year 1220, he—of his own doing—never left the body class. Francis rarely wrote, though he sometimes asked his companions to write down his ideas. Francis gave up a life of ease associated with the material wealth he was born into and instead chose to effort at sustaining his existence. Francis served and cleaned the bodies of people who had an infection caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*, which produces a disease known as Hansen's disease today and leprosy in Francis's time (Sweeney 2015, 2019; Ugolino 1390/1998).

Thus, at Gubbio, the body of this respected spiritual leader is the material rhetoric: he places his body between the townspeople and the wolf. Owing to Francis's modest manner of existence, the townspeople could see themselves in Francis's body, even if they did imagine his spirituality exceeded theirs. He did not approach the wolf with any advanced weaponry or alchemical concoction to which they would not have access. He approached and risked his body, for the sake of the wolf *and* for the sake of the people. In *Spinoza and Deep Ecology*, Eccy de Jonge (2004, 1) acknowledges the critique that some wage against deep ecology for failing

"to address what might be termed the human rights issue". In Francis's ministry at Gubbio, we are reminded that care for human creatures is not in opposition to care for the more-than-human world. Caring for humans is caring for beings whose intrinsic worth is a fundamental recognition of deep ecology (Devall and Sessions 1985). At the same time, Francis directs the citizens' attention away from the wolf's previous harms and toward the wolf's intersubjective struggle for survival. Francis used his body to create a community that included the wolf.

Memoria and the Things Francis Carried

Memoria may seem an odd choice for emphasis in the so-called Information Age, an era marked by economy dependent on information technology. We have "all the data typically needed in business or any endeavor … instantly accessible from a desktop personal computer" (Gillis and Popovich 2017). With "information at your fingertips" (Markoff 1990), why put the cognitive labor into carrying information in your mind? According to Plato (1995), Socrates warned that writing would encourage mental lethargy; we would no longer recall information from within ourselves but always direct our knowledge to the external marks of letters on a page. Knowing where to look something up is not true wisdom but a semblance of wisdom, according to Socrates.

Francis was a reluctant writer and a sporadic reader (Sweeney 2015). However, he loved to listen to people and knew many of the poems of troubadours by heart. Francis exhibits a mode of attending to the more-than-human world that allowed Francis to carry stories with him, in his body. These stories were then available for his recall, to be re-arranged (*dispositio*), re-presented, and brought to life again in myriad situations. For example, Sorrell (1988, 70) states that:

> Francis knew troubadour poetry by heart and quoted it to advantage on occasion. Once he was drawn to attend a dubbing ceremony, and gave a sermon based on the chivalric couplet, "I aspire to so great a treasure/That all pain for me is pleasure"—thoughts that … reveal a process of reinterpretation he must often have applied to the lyrics he knew and loved.

The above story serves to illuminate why Charles Darwin (2004) stated that attention—a sense of curiosity and an ability to become absorbed by that to which one is attending—is a faculty of utmost importance. We often dismiss memorization in our modern practices of learning, and surely memorization alone is incomplete for any philosophical or pedagogical purpose. However, there is something compelling about how we carry our observations, encounters, quotes, poems, and our beloved lyrics. I carry a notebook with me so that I may jot down to-do lists, notes, and reminders when they come to mind. I can feel the relief in my body when I get

the note written now, the release of the pressure to remember. Sometimes, I take a photograph for similar purposes. I see a black racer snake on a walk in the woods, and I ask my partner to fetch the camera so that we may remember the snake after the encounter. Deep ecology is a commitment to asking deeper questions (Naess in an interview with Bodian 1995), and here Franciscan rhetoric raises some evocative questions for me. What if I endeavored to remember more encounters and more beings *in my body*? What if I inscribed the encounter not in graphite or pixels but in my cells? Might I be more persuasive if I could quote Francis or Naess from heart rather than from text?

Dispositio and Francis's Cortesia

Sorrell (1988, 69) claims that many official biographers "display an ecclesiastical bias against the secular ideals of chivalry" and so have downplayed the profound influence that chivalry had on Francis[7]. I suggest that we read chivalry and religion diffractively in Francis's life. Diffractive readings can be understood as "respectful engagements with different disciplinary practices" (Barad 2007, 93) and understanding how boundaries *have* been made and how they can be *remade* toward inclusion. To read chivalry and religion diffractively in Francis's life is *not* to look for a singular, anchoring center from which all acts could be properly understood but, rather, to read his chivalric acts through his religion and to read his religion through the phenomenon of chivalry. Francis's ability to arrange ideas, beliefs, and meanings—his ongoing, lifelong enactment of *dispositio*—is particularly compelling and is perhaps best exemplified through his arrangement of codes of chivalry diffracted with religious teachings.

Sorrell (1988) describes the great courtliness (*cortesia-curialitate*) of Francis. Courtliness, *curialitas*, is a chivalric code of moral terms, a measured role of action, and an embodiment of the code of conduct of nobility, which includes a joyful disposition, helpfulness, considerateness, and courage (Rubinstein 2004). *Cortesia* can be understood as courtesy, but Sorrell (1988) instructs us that Francis's courtesy is not our commonsense understanding of courtesy. Rather, Francis's *cortesia* is a courtesy of spiritualized largesse and noblesse oblige, a courtesy that maintains the dignity of all interacting individuals, and is a relative of charity. *Cortesia*, Francis said, "extinguishes hatred and keeps love alive" (Sorrell 1988, 72).

[7] Roger Sorrell (1988) uses sources even earlier than *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, which is a primary source for this essay and for the Sweeney (2019) text, which is also fundamental to my accounting of Franciscan rhetoric. Sorrell states that because *Little Flowers* was written about a century after Francis's death, the more contemporaneous accounts by Thomas of Celano (*First Life of Francis*) and compiled by Brother Leo and other companions (*The Legend of Perugia*) should be considered more trustworthy. Sorrell also notes that *Little Flowers* is the most popular accounting of Francis's stories, and it is because of its popularity and circulation that I find it a suitable text for discussing the art and function of Franciscan rhetoric for contemporary audiences.

That Francis is known to extend *cortesia* to human strangers (see numerous accounts in Sweeney 2015, 2019; Ugolino c. 1390/1998) is perhaps unsurprising of someone the Catholic faith has deemed suitable to bestow sainthood. What makes Francis unique is his extension of *cortesia* to the more-than-human world. Francis's *cortesia* to more-than-human animals is well-known, such as when Francis convinced a young man to give Francis the turtledoves that the young man had captured. Francis released them from their cage and built nests for them (Ugolino 1390/1998, 50). But Francis's concern extended beyond kingdom Animalia and, indeed, beyond life as we understand it.[8]

Long before Jane Bennett's (2009) *Vibrant Matter* invited us to respect inanimate matter, Francis was "lovingly" patching tunics (Sweeney 2019, 32) and instructing others to "walk carefully over them" (Sweeney 2019, 31). Centuries later, poet Mary Oliver (2014, 71) would ask us if stones feel and would say that while most of the world says no, she refuses "to think to such a conclusion/too terrible it would be, to be wrong". Kantian moral philosopher Christine Korsgaard also finds herself tempted by the extension of consideration to inanimate objects: "At the risk of being thought a complete lunatic … perhaps we *should* treat every kind of thing in accordance with its nature, in accordance with the kinds of goods and evils to which it is subject" (2018, 94, emphasis hers).

What makes Francis's treatment of tunics and stones compelling and harmonious with deep ecology is that his treatment is a *way of being*, a spiritual *cortesia*, that does not require a propositional calculus-style reasoning to decide what entities merit consideration and under what circumstances. Because he saw the Creator in all creation, *cortesia* was a given.

Through exploring Francis's facility with *actio*, *memoria*, and *dispositio*, we have come to an understanding of how Francis embodies rhetoric. Now, we direct our attention to what kind of work Francis's embodied rhetoric performs. Contemporary rhetorical critics tend to concern themselves more with what a thing *does* than what a thing *means*. Rhetorical scholar James Herrick (2018) asserts that the art of rhetoric performs the social functions of assisting advocacy, distributing power, and building community. The embodied rhetoric of Francis described above offers insight into rhetorical practices that assist advocacy through transforming everyday experience, building community by cultivating an unqualified love for others in the more-than-human world, and distributing power through a persistent humility.

[8] Tarizzo (2017) offers a compelling, Foucauldian accounting of when and how we came to understand the force-of-life in modernity.

Assists Advocacy: Transforming Everyday Experience

Rhetoric is how we direct attention to our private ideas, how we advocate for what we believe (Herrick 2018). There are some powerful tales in the Franciscan legacy, such as the accounting of the ministering to the wolf outside Gubbio. However, what is more significant to Francis and to deep ecologists than such exemplary, singular acts is Francis's transformation of daily life. The banal, the everyday, the routinized constitute our lives, and it is in our daily lives that we "negotiate relations with globalized consumer culture" (Dickinson and Maugh 2004, 259). It is in our practices of daily life that we can most come to understand that we are "bound in an interdependent relationship to our conception of the world" (Naess 1989, 56) and increase our identifications with the more-than-human world. Francis certainly embodied a most transformed living. He went from being adorned with the nicest of clothes to lovingly patching drab, earthy robes. He thought caves were ideal locations for prayer. He referred to humans, birds, stones, and death as siblings. He was not fond of monastic book culture because he saw that attention to textuality could encourage forgetfulness of one's embodiment. He asked his followers to joyfully serve the needs of others (Sweeney 2019). Francis's daily life was an embodied appeal to other, possible ways of living.

This is not to say that there cannot be a *kaioritc*, or opportune moment, for transformation and that rhetorical events cannot be the inspiration for such transformation. Certainly, Francis's interaction before the people of Gubbio was a powerful and timely event. However, what is most important to my reading of Francis's interaction with the wolf is what happened *after* his talk in the piazza. The people interacted differently with the wolf. They fed the wolf. The wolf came and went amongst the people and their homes. Their day-to-day relationship changed. What Francis did in the piazza, his way of living among and with wolves, was achievable for every person of Gubbio.

The focus on day-to-day transformation is not meant to ignore the infrastructural, political, and industrial changes needed to address an issue like climate change, nor is it intended to evoke the bright green critiques that deep ecologists espouse "disenchanting notions of living in a fallen world" and "nostalgic visions of transcendent future in which might, once again, live in harmony with nature through a return to … hunter-gatherer life" (Schellenberger and Nordhaus 2011). Rather, it is a recognition that:

> The meaning of life is not a solution to a problem, but a matter of living in a certain way. … It is not something separate from life, but what makes it worth living … a certain quality, depth, abundance, and intensity of life … salvation turns out to be an embarrassingly prosaic affair—a matter of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, and visiting the imprisoned. … Anybody can do it. (Eagleton 2007, 94-95)

Although the above quote comes from literary critic Terry Eagleton, it could have come from *The Little Flowers*. What Francis might add, or at least make more explicit, is that sometimes the hungry is a wolf whose territory has been disrupted by homes and buildings, the thirsty may be a bumblebee struggling with the heat spikes of climate change, the stranger on your doorstep may be a snake who was following a meal when they encountered your home, and the imprisoned may be a mountain slated to become a repository for nuclear waste or a field "developed" for retail.

Builds Community: Francis's Agapē

Herrick (2018) reminds us that communities are not only made by geography but also constituted by common cause. "Communities are living creatures, nurtured and nourished by the practice of rhetoric" (Hogan 1998, 292). Not only are communities nurtured and nourished by rhetoric, but communities, in turn, nurture and nourish.

During a period of discouragement and disenchantment, Francis sought the counsels of St. Clare and of Friar Sylvester.[9] He asked them to pray for guidance on the course Francis's life should take and then asked them to report God's answers to their prayers. After he received confirmation from them for the life he was living, he rejoiced and with renewed passion preached to the people of Savurniano. From there, Francis saw trees full of birds and went "to preach to the birds, my sisters" and asked them to praise God because their flight and feathers were surely evidence that they were loved (Ugolino 1390/1998, 36). Francis considered this day one of the most beautiful of his life. "He felt that he owed to Clare these pure ardors that brought him into a secret and delicious communion with all beings; it was she who had revived him from sadness and hesitation" (Sweeney 2015, 91).

The Franciscans are certainly a community. They are the largest religious order in the Catholic Church (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019) and the community grew large even during Francis's lifetime. But beyond those of the Franciscan order, Francis demonstrated a love and community for all fellow travelers on Earth. We have come to call this type of relentless, universal love *agapē*, and it is perhaps best illustrated with one of the many examples from *The Little Flowers.*

Another story goes that Francis converted three thieves by showing that "nothing he had was available to be stolen" (Sweeney 31) because Francis *owned* nothing. Francis taught not to defend possessions against anyone; "Whoever may come, whether a friend or an enemy, even one who simply likes to steal, do not contend with him. It is not yours" (Franciscan teaching

[9] St. Clare of Assisi, born Chiara Offreduccio, founded the Order of Poor Ladies, now known as the Order of Saint Clare, and wrote their monastic guidelines. The rhetoric of St. Clare deserves its own treatment.

quoted in Sweeney 2019, 60). This is not to say Francis found thievery morally acceptable. When Friar Angelo first tried to deny the thieves bread and wine on account of their behavior, Francis bade Friar Angelo to take the bread and wine to the thieves and confess the Friar's own cruelty in not attending to the needs of his fellow travelers. However, after this confession, Friar Angelo was to pray that the thieves to do no more wrong to others. If they could agree, they could return with Angelo and Francis would labor to make sure their needs were met (Ugolino 1390/1998).

Certainly, Francis's *agapē* came from a sacred place, and it both embodies and anticipates Eagleton's (2007, 96) secular understanding of *agapē* that he articulates as the very meaning of life. Eagleton says that *agapē* is not about affection or admiration; it is the love of strangers, and it is a way of life, not a state of mind. "The flourishing of one individual comes about through the flourishing of others". We may think of this way of living by imagining a jazz ensemble. Each member of a jazz ensemble is improvising and free to express oneself as one desires but plays with a "receptive sensitivity" to the "self-expressive performances" of the others. "Though each member contributes to 'the greater good of the whole', she (sic) does not by some grim-lipped self-sacrifice but simply by expressing herself (sic)" (Eagleton 2007, 100)." The jazz metaphor is in joyful harmony with and an evocative imagery of Naess's understanding of humans as interdependent beings in a field of relations, or *milieu* (Naess 1989). Both Eagleton's metaphor and Naess's imagery give us different ways to imagine what it might mean *to be* in Francis's spiritual democracy of all God's creatures. Further, these varied perspectives on communal flourishing draw attention to shared goals in sacred and secular spheres.

Distributes Power: Francis as Servant

Although Francis is the head of his order, his rhetoric recognizes power and agency among the members of the Order and, indeed, among the more-than-human world. "Rhetoric is a form of social power" that raises questions of who is allowed to speak in society and about what (Herrick 2018, 19). Attending to the relations of rhetoric and power means attending to the fluidity and maintenance work of power. A Franciscan rhetoric seeks to opens the canals for power to flow rather than erecting dams to shore it up, and humility is the means by which we come to embrace this fluidity. Below are a few examples of how Francis's rhetoric acknowledges the agency of others.

Sometimes, Francis commands his friars to do something, such as when he bids Friar Leo to tell Francis that he is unworthy of a place in Heaven. He is not always obeyed, as Leo finds himself unable to fulfill Francis's command and informs Francis that his voice is moved by God (Ugolino 1390/1998). In addition to the family language Francis uses with his companions and the more-

than-human world (i.e., all entities are siblings, sometimes parents), he also refers to himself as a "servant." Not only a servant of God but a servant of God's creations, and Francis saw God's creation everywhere. Francis "appreciated the wildness of mammals, plants, birds, and fish, knowing that they understood things humans cannot" (Sweeney 2019, 25). Thus, Francis preached to people and also to birds. He cleaned the bodies of suffering strangers and also built nests for dislocated turtledoves. He fed his companions and also wolves and thieves.

Individual humility, the quality of being humble, works against an egocentric consolidation of power, and species-level humility would push against an anthropocentric locus of power. This is the humility of deep ecology; this is the humility that decenters the self and the species. It is Francis's humility and potential to "depose man from his monarchy over creation" that convinced White (1206/1967) that Francis could be a redemptive model for the role of Christianity in our current ecological crisis.

Conclusion

Humanity will only live a different kind of existence if there is "a sufficiently shared desire among humans. It won't happen through a triumph of the will … if it happens it will only be through desire" (Massumi 2002, 123). Desire is why the rhetoric of the son of a wealthy cloth merchant who turned his chivalric spirituality outward and invited others to do the same matters. TGBis not *the* answer, and neither is Francis as human nor as saint nor even Franciscan embodied rhetoric. However, a green Bible that directs our attention to the lessons of ecology and a Bible study that asks questions about humanity from a Franciscan perspective may help us ask better, deeper questions of ourselves as ecological beings and help evoke new desires. How are our actions building community with the more-than-human world? Do our texts and/or prayers align with our actions? Or, perhaps more importantly, do our actions align with our prayers and texts? How are our epistemological and moral practices distributing or shoring up power? Do our everyday lived experiences participate in or work against ecological advocacy?

Undoubtedly, these new desires are not easy. If we desire to see ourselves as companions in the more-than-human world, we will—as Abram (2020) acknowledges—experience humiliation. The cognitive dissonance that can occur when we interrogate our own practices as companions in a more-than-human world is extremely uncomfortable. Francis was no stranger to humiliation, but like Francis, from this humiliation, we may find our way to a mobilizing humility. A humility that does not see the Earth as present-at-hand, as Heidegger (2013) would say, but as possessing its own intrinsic worth and as full of knowledge that exceeds us but with which we are so fortunate to be able to interact. Francis, a synecdoche for all seeking to live in

a non-anthropocentric manner, did not need to speak to Wittgenstein's lion to know that the lion shares the intersubjective desire to continue living.[10] Francis did not need to know what it is to be a Nagelian bat to feel a sense of "radical compassion," a compassion that understands genuine knowledge of another is infinitely deferred but refuses to negate the experience of another in favor of my own (Bollmer 2013, 65).[11]

Humility may not sound as thrilling as human mastery, achievement, and progress. The trouble with mastery is that it seems to be about ends, but it reveals itself time and again to be about means, a way of living. The trouble with mastery and progress is that they are insatiable, never satisfied or fulfilled. Mastery may be insatiable, but humility may be daunting. "Far from boasting of some privileged human status, it [an animalistic humanism] would never disregard our humble, and maybe even humiliating, place in the totality of the natural order" (Burke 1972, p. 54). So, what does humility have to offer?

Joy. During a walk from Assisi to a nearby town, Francis and Friar Leo encountered some rain. Leo was not in the best spirits, and so an upbeat Francis decided to share with Leo the source of "perfect joy" (Ugolino 1390/1998, 19). Of course, Francis did not just *tell* Leo the answer, much to the dismay of Leo and many a student in the history of teacher-student relationships. Instead, Francis first explicated joy by its negation. Joy was *not* morality or education. Neither was it the existence of miracles nor even the revelation of metaphysical truth. We can imagine Leo's face during this long, walking lecture in the rain when Leo says, "Father, I pray you in the name of God to tell me wherein is perfect joy?" (Ugolino 1390/1998, 20). Francis tells him:

> If, when we arrive, we're wet down to the bones, and shivering from cold, hungry as can be, and we knock on the door to signal our arrival, and a friar opens it but doesn't recognize us, and slams it shut in our faces, fearful that we've come to rob him, and we're left standing in this rain even longer, and then perhaps we knock again and someone else opens the door and hits us with sticks, yelling at us like strangers or robbers, if we remain patient and humble and loving, even then, through all of that, well, that, Leo, reveals the source of perfect joy. (Sweeney 2019, 102)

Perfect joy is the feeling of going to bed in the evening knowing you did your best. To flourish is

[10] In *Philosophical* Investigations, Ludwig Wittgenstein comments that, "If a lion could speak, we could not understand him" (1953, 223). First, why would we assume that we could understanding Lionish? Second, even if Lionish were translated into our first languages, the human and lion experience of the world is presumed to be so remarkably different that the lion's utterances would lack meaning for humans.

[11] In 1974, philosopher Thomas Nagel asked, "What is it like to be a bat?" This question explores the phenomenological features of subjective experience and what it means to a particular, conscious organism.

to strive to do better each day and to stay with the trouble, as Haraway (2018) urges us, despite the dire predictions that come from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or the troubling headlines of the day. The struggle to be the best versions of ourselves, even if the face of astounding environmental crises, is the redemption of our guilt as ecological beings. That is equipment for living in the Humilocene.

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