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https://doi.org/10.38140/q1x9xs86

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2026
46(1):60-82

Date received:
4 August 2025

Date accepted:
17 April 2026

Date published:
30 June 2026

Co-creating kinship in the anthropocene:[1] A planetary theological ethic from Hefner and Haraway[2]

ABSTRACT

This article develops a theological-ethical framework for the Anthropocene, by bringing Philip Hefner's concept of the created co-creator into dialogue with Donna Haraway's post-humanist ethics of making kin. It proposes co-creating kinship as a model for understanding human beings as relational agents embedded in ecological and evolutionary life. While Hefner grounds human vocation in divine co-creation, Haraway decentres human agency and emphasises multispecies responsibility. Their dialogue yields a planetary theological ethic shaped by relationality, conditioned freedom, socio-ecological justice, and eschatological hope. In this way, the article reimagines Christian anthropology as a call to humility, care, and shared flourishing within a damaged world. It offers a constructive vision for theology that is ecologically attentive, ethically responsible, and responsive to the challenges of planetary life.

Published by the UFS
http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at

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1 The term "Anthropocene" is widely used across the environmental humanities and related disciplines to designate the scale of human impact on earth's systems. However, it has not been formally ratified as a distinct unit of the geological time scale, and many geologists continue to regard such formalisation as premature. I use the term, in this instance, in its broader interdisciplinary sense.

2 I am thankful to my advisor, Dr. Ho-Hyun Sohn.

1. INTRODUCTION

The accelerating ecological crisis of the 21st century, often described through the framework of the Anthropocene, has prompted a profound rethinking of humanity's role within the natural world. As climate change, species extinction, and environmental degradation intensify, traditional anthropocentric models that place human beings at the centre of creation are increasingly viewed as inadequate ethically, theologically, and ecologically. Within this context, both secular and religious scholars are seeking alternative frameworks that redefine human agency, responsibility, and belonging in more relational and holistic terms. Two significant voices in this conversation are Donna Haraway and Philip Hefner, whose work challenges the modern separation of humanity from nature. Haraway's concept of "kin-making", introduced in her influential book *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), invites us to form ethical, multispecies relationships rooted in interdependence and care. Rather than perpetuating the illusion of human autonomy or mastery, Haraway proposes that we "make kin" with all forms of life – recognising our shared vulnerability and responsibility in a damaged but still hopeful world.

Philip Hefner, a theologian, offers a parallel insight through his concept of the created co-creator. He argues that human beings are not simply products of divine creation, but active participants in God's ongoing work of shaping the world. For Hefner, human creativity, culture, and technology are not opposed to divine purposes but are integral to them. This theological anthropology grounds human responsibility in the evolutionary and ecological processes from which we emerge, calling for a more ethical and collaborative engagement with nature. This article argues that integrating Haraway's multispecies kin-making with Hefner's created co-creator offers a robust and transformative framework for environmental ethics in the Anthropocene. This synthesis challenges dominant narratives of human exceptionalism, critiques the socio-economic forces driving ecological harm, and provides theological and ethical tools for imagining more equitable, sustainable futures. Through interdisciplinary analysis and engagement with recent ecological data and case studies, this article seeks to articulate a vision of human identity that is both theologically grounded and ecologically responsive.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The escalating ecological crisis of the Anthropocene demands ethical frameworks that move beyond anthropocentrism toward relational and integrated approaches to human-nature interactions. The Anthropocene, coined by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), marks a proposed geological epoch

in which human activities dominate earth's systems. Steffen *et al.* (2011) identify planetary boundaries, namely climate, biodiversity, and land systems, whose transgression risks irreversible environmental shifts. These realities require a fundamental ethical rethinking. Environmental philosophers such as Holmes Rolston III (1994) and J. Baird Callicott (1997) have long urged expanding the moral community to include non-human life and ecosystems. Yet, as Latour (2017) argues, an adequate response must consider the entanglements of politics, science, and theology. Morton's (2013) concept of hyperobjects, non-local, temporally dispersed phenomena such as global warming, challenges modernist divisions between subject and object, or human and nature. Similarly, Plumwood (2002) and Light (2002) advocate for ecological responsibility rooted in mutual vulnerability and interdependence.

Haraway's *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) furthers this turn, by introducing "making kin" as a practice of multispecies ethics and worlding. Her notion of the "*Chthulucene*" decouples ethics from human exceptionalism, emphasising relational ties across species, interdependence, and co-creation. Her view resonates with indigenous epistemologies that position human beings within a web of kinship (Todd 2016), influencing ecofeminist, post-humanist, and environmental humanities discourses. Multispecies ethnographers such as Kirksey (2014) and Kohn (2013) support this shift from stewardship to interspecies collaboration grounded in ethical reciprocity. Haraway's kin-making also critiques extractive, colonial, and speciesist logics (Tsing 2015; Todd 2017), offering a relational ethic that finds theological resonance in Hefner's concept of the created co-creator. In *The human factor: Evolution, culture, and religion* (1993), Hefner reimagines human beings as created co-creators, beings shaped by evolution yet endowed with freedom to shape creation. Human creativity and technology, for Hefner, are intrinsic to divine evolutionary purpose. His idea of "conditioned freedom" underscores the tension between biological constraint and moral agency. Scholars such as Peacocke (1998, 2004), Thweatt-Bates (2012), and Lorrimar (2017) have developed Hefner's thought, by extending his theological anthropology into conversations with science, technology, environmental ethics, cybernetics, biotechnology, and contemporary scientific paradigms. His theology rejects dominionistic readings of Genesis 1:28 in favour of relational stewardship, mirroring Haraway's kin-centric ethic. Both frameworks assert that human distinctiveness entails responsibility, not supremacy, within the evolutionary community of life.

These converging views have influenced ecological theology and post-humanist ethics. Moltmann's *God in creation: An ecological doctrine of creation* (1985) envisions human beings as part of, not above, creation, while

McFague's (1993, 2001) body of God metaphor views the cosmos as divine embodiment. Yet, despite these contributions, a cohesive ethical framework that synthesises Haraway's kin-making and Hefner's ecological theology remains underdeveloped. This article addresses that gap, by constructing an integrative environmental ethic grounded in multispecies responsibility, theologically informed co-creatorship, and systemic critique. Such a synthesis offers a compelling alternative to dualistic and anthropocentric paradigms, affirming that ecological flourishing in the Anthropocene depends on reimagining humanity as relational, accountable, and embedded within a wider community of creation.

3. PHILIP HEFNER: THE CREATED CO-CREATOR AND CONDITIONED FREEDOM

3.1 Evolution and human distinctiveness

Hefner's theological anthropology is grounded in the affirmation that human beings are the products of biological evolution. He embraces the Darwinian framework of genetic variation, natural selection, and ecological adaptation as the scientifically authoritative account of life's emergence and insists that theology must be articulated within this evolutionary world view (Hefner 1993:27-30). In contrast to classical theological models that locate human uniqueness in metaphysical attributes such as rationality or the possession of a soul, Hefner (1993:34) identifies symbolic consciousness – manifested in language, culture, ethics, and technological capacity – as the defining feature of human distinctiveness. For Hefner, these symbolic capabilities are not merely evolutionary by-products; they are theological indicators of divine intentionality realised through natural processes. Accordingly, Hefner introduces the concept of the human as a "created co-creator" – a being who is both the product of nature and a participant in its ongoing development. This dual identity emphasises that human beings are not autonomous creators, but evolutionary agents called to collaborate with God in shaping the future of creation (Hefner 1993:32-33). His model thus reframes human uniqueness in functional rather than ontological terms: human beings are not set apart from the rest of nature but are distinct insofar as they possess the capacity to act intentionally within it.

This theological reading of evolution aligns with the tradition of theistic evolution. Peacocke (2004:56-57, 63) describes evolution as the "instrument of God's creativity", stressing the need to integrate scientific accounts into doctrines of creation. Similarly, Southgate (2008:8) argues that evolutionary processes are not barriers to divine purpose but its very expression. Hefner

builds on these insights, by presenting a theological anthropology that locates human beings within the evolutionary continuum, while affirming their distinct role as moral and cultural agents. Hefner's model resonates with Van Huyssteen (2006:219-225), who views human uniqueness as arising not from metaphysical separateness but from embodied rationality shaped through evolution and culture. In this instance, symbolic behaviour grounds moral agency and theological vocation. As Hefner (1993:17) notes, "We are the products of nature's evolutionary process ... and at the same time, we are its most remarkable expressions." The concept of the created co-creator captures this dynamic vision: human beings are fully natural – composed of the same elements and shaped by the same ecological forces as other species – yet uniquely called to participate in creation's unfolding. This reframes anthropocentrism through a participatory model of stewardship. Human agency is not about dominance but about a relational vocation to nurture, sustain, and co-create within life's interdependent web (Gregersen 2001; McFague 2001).

3.2 Conditioned freedom: Human agency in theological and evolutionary perspective

A central pillar of Hefner's theological anthropology is the concept of "conditioned freedom", which reconceives human agency not as absolute autonomy, nor as deterministic passivity, but as an emergent capacity grounded in natural and cultural processes. According to Hefner (1993:32-33), human beings are "created co-creators", a designation that captures both our embeddedness in evolutionary systems and our unique ability to participate in shaping the future in alignment with divine purposes. Freedom, in this model, is not given despite our biological and cultural conditioning but through it. It is exercised within the constraints of heredity, environment, social norms, and ecological entanglements, yet enables ethical decision-making, symbolic thought, and theological reflection (Hefner 1993:14, 39-41). Hefner is unequivocal in locating human emergence within the broader evolutionary process. He asserts that "[w]e are the products of nature's evolutionary process ... and at the same time, we are its most remarkable expressions" (Hefner 1993:17). This dual identity enables human beings to reflect on the very conditions of their existence and to respond with purpose. For Hefner (1993:27-30, 34), theologically significant human freedom arises from our symbolic capacity: the ability to imagine alternative futures, construct cultural meanings, and make moral commitments. These capacities are not supernatural interruptions, but evolutionary developments that signify the creature's invitation into divine relationality.

What gives conditioned freedom theological depth is its alignment with a kenotic model of divine action. Rather than coercive intervention, Hefner (1993:33) views divine purpose unfolding through natural processes and the agency of creation.

> God's purpose for humanity is to carry forward the evolution of life on this planet in a way that corresponds to God's intention for its good.

Human freedom, then, is not mere license but a vocation – co-creative responsibility grounded in our evolutionary nature (Hefner 1993:45). This challenges Cartesian dualism and Enlightenment individualism. Hefner (1993:40) rejects the notion of an isolated rational self, instead situating the human within genetic, environmental, and cultural systems. His systems-based anthropology frames rationality and ethics as evolutionary developments, where the biological and symbolic are integrated aspects of human existence. Hefner's theology is teleological without being triumphalist. He affirms human responsibility, while recognising the evolutionary realities of suffering, death, and ecological fragility:

> Our conditioned freedom calls us to responsibility for shaping the future of nature and culture as expressions of God's continuing creation (Hefner 1993:45-46).

In this instance, freedom grounds both accountability and hope. This model aligns with other theological perspectives. Van Huyssteen (2006:219-225) argues that emergent rationality and symbolic consciousness enable theological ethics within evolutionary continuity. Gregersen (2001:198-199) similarly views co-creation as a bridge between contingency and vocation, with human beings "theologically empowered to continue God's creative project". Hefner's concept thus joins a broader discourse that avoids both human exceptionalism and reductionist determinism. In the Anthropocene, where human agency significantly reshapes planetary systems, this theology becomes urgent. Steffen *et al.* (2011) note that destabilised planetary boundaries such as climate, biodiversity, biogeochemical cycles are largely driven by human actions. Hefner (1993:139) interprets this agency as divinely enabled and ethically accountable:

> The challenge is to bring the powers of our symbolic behavior under the discipline of a new story that expresses the divine purpose.

3.3 Created co-creator: Reimagining the *imago Dei* as functional and participatory

Hefner's theological anthropology advances a paradigmatic shift in the interpretation of the *imago Dei*, reconfiguring it from a metaphysical or ontological essence to a functional and participatory vocation. In contrast to classical theological models that identify the divine image with static human attributes such as rationality, will, or dominion, Hefner (1993:35-36) asserts that human beings image God by virtue of their symbolic capacity to participate in God's ongoing creative purposes. This model reframes theological anthropology in light of evolutionary theory and embeds human uniqueness within the natural order rather than above or outside it. According to Hefner (1993:32-33), the *imago Dei* is not a substance possessed but a task enacted. Humans, as "created co-creators", are evolutionary products equipped with freedom, imagination, and cultural tools that enable them to shape their environments in ways that align with divine intentionality. enacted in the "freedom to shape our world in alignment with divine purposes" (Hefner 1993:36). This enactment includes developing technologies that enhance life rather than exploit it, creating cultures that nurture justice and human dignity, and caring for creation as a sacred trust rather than a resource for domination. This freedom, however, is always conditioned by genetic, ecological, and cultural factors which further grounds human agency in relational responsibility rather than sovereign autonomy (Hefne 1993:39-42).

This reconceptualisation of the *imago Dei* holds critical ecological and ethical significance. Hefner's approach rejects dominion-based readings of Genesis 1:28 that have historically sanctioned human superiority over nature. Instead, he aligns with more relational and kenotic interpretations that call for co-creativity, stewardship, and moral accountability within the planetary community:

> We are to use our freedom in service of the future of nature that has birthed us, and for the purpose that God has ordained (Hefner 1993:32).

This participatory vision finds resonance in the broader theological discourse. Moltmann (1985) describes the *imago Dei* in relational terms, where human beings act as mediators between God and creation, affirming mutual belonging and ecological care. Similarly, McFague's (2001:69, 79) metaphor of the world as God's body calls for theological models that embrace interdependence, embodiment, and responsibility toward all forms of life. These perspectives converge with Hefner's claim that human agency must be viewed as a calling to contribute to the flourishing of the earth community, not as lords over it, but as participants in its co-evolutionary becoming.

Moreover, Lorrimar affirms the adaptability and dynamism of Hefner's created co-creator model in dialogue with biotechnology and ecological ethics. She emphasises that this model allows theology to remain scientifically literate, while retaining its normative and eschatological commitments (Lorrimar 2017:793). Likewise, Peacocke (2004:56-63) regards human creativity as an extension of divine creativity, interpreting evolutionary emergence as the medium through which divine purposes are progressively realised. In this light, Hefner's reframing of the *imago Dei* offers a theological anthropology capable of responding to the ecological crises of the Anthropocene. It affirms human distinctiveness not as a metaphysical privilege but as a vocation of responsibility; one that invites participation in the healing, sustaining, and envisioning of an equitable planetary future. Human beings, as created co-creators, are thus not separate from creation, but deeply embedded within its fabric, entrusted with the task of discerning and enacting life-affirming possibilities.

3.4 Beyond Anthropocentrism: Limitations and the call for multispecies relationality

While Hefner's concept of the created co-creator offers a compelling synthesis of theological anthropology and evolutionary theory, its limits become clearer in light of ecological crisis and post-humanist critique. Hefner (1993:32-36) affirms human distinctiveness through symbolic consciousness, cultural creativity, and technological agency, qualities that make human beings co-participants in divine creativity. Scholars such as Peacocke (1998, 2004) and Lorrimar (2017) commend this model for preserving scientific and theological coherence, while Thweatt-Bates (2012) extends it into post-human contexts, by exploring cybernetic and enhancement technologies as possible expressions of co-creative vocation when guided by theological ethics and ecological humility. Yet Hefner's framework also risks a subtle anthropocentrism. By privileging human symbolic and technological agency, it can sideline the role of non-human life in theological accounts of creation. Deane-Drummond (2014:98) responds, by calling for a theology centred on creaturely vulnerability, shared suffering, and ecological interdependence. Haraway sharpens this critique through her multispecies ethics. Haraway's (2016:103) call to "make kin, not babies" disrupts anthropocentric imaginaries and urges human beings toward intentional multispecies relations. Her ontology of becoming-with further emphasises relational world-making and situated response-ability within multispecies entanglements (Haraway 2016:58-60).

The divergence between Hefner and Haraway opens productive space for theological reconfiguration. Hefner offers a strong account of human agency as divinely enabled and evolutionarily formed, while Haraway widens the ethical

horizon, by extending moral concern beyond the human. Bringing her kin-centred ethics into conversation with Hefner's anthropology makes possible a model of co-creating kinship that joins human vocation with ecological embeddedness. This approach preserves Hefner's emphasis on purposeful human creativity without isolating it from the wider community of life. It resonates with McFague's (2001) vision of the world as God's body and with multispecies ethnographies that highlight interspecies entanglements (Kirksey 2014; Kohn 2013). A co-creating kinship model thus offers a theological response to the Anthropocene that acknowledges human uniqueness without turning it into supremacy.

4. DONNA HARAWAY'S MULTISPECIES ETHICS AND KIN-MAKING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

4.1 From Anthropocene to *Chthulucene*: Reimagining geological narratives

Haraway critically interrogates the Anthropocene as a geohistorical framework. While it captures the planetary scale of human-induced environmental change, she argues that it also universalises human agency and obscures the uneven structures of power such as colonialism, racial capitalism, and patriarchy, that shape ecological devastation (Haraway 2016:44-47; Moore 2016). By treating "the human" as a single agent, the Anthropocene can flatten the multispecies and multi-scalar dynamics of ecological crisis into a human-centred narrative. In response, Haraway introduces the *Chthulucene*, not as a chronological successor to the Anthropocene, but as an ethical and ontological reorientation. The *Chthulucene* names an ongoing process of becoming-with, marked by entanglements among human beings, non-human beings, technologies, and ecosystems. Haraway (2016:51) writes that it is about "learning to stay with the trouble in the midst of ruins". Rather than seeking redemption through technological salvation or apocalyptic rupture, the *Chthulucene* calls for enduring practices of care, accountability, and ecological attunement.

This framework rests on response-ability, the capacity to respond within interdependent networks of life (Haraway 2016:34). Haraway's image of "collecting up the trash of the Anthropocene" captures both material and symbolic labour: mourning, accountability, and the effort to imagine futures shaped by collaborative survival (Haraway 2016:51). At the centre of this vision is kin-making, which challenges genealogical norms and reproductive futurism. Her call to "make kin, not babies" advances a multispecies ethic grounded in affinity, care, and co-becoming rather than biological inheritance (Haraway 2016:102-103). Drawing on feminist science studies and indigenous

ontologies, Haraway presents kinship as intentional, situated, and cross-species in scope.

Haraway's notion of worlding further deepens this account by presenting ethics as the collaborative shaping of environments, narratives, and futures: "Worlding is always becoming-with" (Haraway 2016:101). In this view, sustainability is not a technical solution but a practice of mutual adaptation and ethical co-creation. Her claim that "we are compost, not post-human" condenses this vision into a powerful image of finitude, decay, and regeneration as conditions for co-flourishing (Haraway 2016:55). The *Chthulucene* thus rejects mastery, extraction, and fantasies of transcendence, offering instead a relational ontology of entanglement and care. In doing so, it becomes an important resource for reimagining ethics, politics, and theology in a damaged world.

4.2 Making kin: An ethic of relationality and response-ability

The concept of making kin sits at the centre of Haraway's post-humanist ethics, pushing relationality beyond biological reproduction and species boundaries. Drawing from indigenous epistemologies and feminist science studies, she frames kinship as an ethical, political, and ontological project that fundamentally reorients how we understand human and non-human relations under conditions of ecological devastation and systemic inequality (Haraway 2016:102-106; TallBear 2017). Kin-making, for Haraway, is not merely metaphorical. It is a situated and embodied practice of worlding, an effort to co-create multispecies futures through reciprocal attention, shared vulnerability, and situated knowledge (Haraway 2016:103; 2003). This practice reflects her broader commitment to response-ability, an ethic of accountability grounded not in abstract universals but in partial perspectives and co-constitutive relationships with specific others (Haraway 1988).

What makes this ethic compelling is the demand it places on moral imagination amid the compounding crises of the Anthropocene. Kin-making offers a genuine alternative to modernist fragmentation and domination, proposing that ethical life arises through care, cohabitation, and shared becoming rather than mastery (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Todd 2017). Haraway (2016:103) insists that kin-making must be done with intention, particularly in contexts shaped by colonial and capitalist residues where relationships have been instrumentalised or severed. Her provocation to make kin rather than prioritise biological reproduction challenges genealogical essentialism without dismissing creaturely life. This resonates deeply with indigenous knowledge systems that affirm non-human agency and practice relational ethics rooted in reciprocity and respect (Whyte 2018; Kimmerer 2013). Kin-making, then, is

a praxis of reweaving broken ties between human beings and other species, between settlers and indigenous communities, and between ecological care and social justice.

There is also something theologically significant in all of this. By rejecting dominion-based stewardship, Haraway reframes responsibility as response-ability, the situated capacity to respond meaningfully to the needs and agencies of others. This finds unexpected resonance with theological traditions centred on co-suffering, creaturely vulnerability, and covenantal ethics (Deane-Drummond 2014; McFague 2001). Rather than appealing to abstract rights or a generalised reverence for nature, she advocates practices of attunement, humility, and embodied solidarity that take seriously the historical injustices and structural asymmetries embedded in multispecies relationships. Kin-making is not a utopian escape from ecological grief. It is a commitment to staying with the trouble, to cultivating multispecies flourishing amid ruin and resilience (Haraway 2016:106).

4.3 Situated knowledge and the refusal of human exceptionalism

Haraway's post-human ethics is rooted in her epistemology of situated knowledge, first developed in "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective" (1988). In that essay, Haraway rejects the fantasy of disembodied objectivity, or the "god trick" that claims to see everything from nowhere. Knowledge, for Haraway (1988:581-584), is always partial, embodied, and located within material, social, and historical relations. This epistemology of accountability becomes central to her ecological and post-human ethics, where knowing is not detached observation but responsible participation in the worlds we help to describe. When applied to environmental thought, situated knowledge challenges the view of nature as a passive background for human action. Instead, the environment appears as a dynamic field of relations in which human beings, animals, plants, microbes, technologies, and ecosystems participate in the making of worlds (Haraway 2016:100-103). This view destabilises anthropocentric assumptions, by refusing to treat human beings as the sole bearers of agency or meaning. Haraway's concept of becoming-with gives this claim ethical force. Survival in the *Chthulucene* depends on sympoiesis, or making-with, rather than on isolated human mastery (Haraway 2016:58-61; 2008:15). Ethical subjectivity, therefore, emerges through relation. The human is not an autonomous moral centre standing apart from nature, but a symbiotic being formed through interactions with many others. This relational ontology challenges the human/nature dualism that shaped Enlightenment humanism and contributed to ecological degradation and colonial violence (Haraway 2003:6-9; Plumwood 2002:8-11).

Haraway's cyborg figure further unsettles human exceptionalism. As a hybrid of organism and machine, nature and culture, the cyborg disrupts fixed boundaries and allows for more partial, responsive, and relational identities (Haraway 1991). Her later claim that "we are compost, not posthuman" deepens this refusal of purity and separateness, by grounding ethical life in finitude, interdependence, and shared vulnerability (Haraway 2016:55). Response-ability, then, means more than recognising entanglement. It requires practices of care, reciprocity, and accountable action that sustain the relations through which life is shared (Haraway 2016:100–104). This has important implications for environmental justice, especially where indigenous knowledges and non-anthropocentric world views expose the limits of modern claims to mastery (Whyte 2018; Todd 2016). Haraway's insistence that science is never innocent calls for epistemic humility and for place-based, multispecies ways of knowing (Haraway 2016:110). Her post-human ethics thus replaces sovereignty with solidarity, mastery with mutuality, and separateness with interdependence. It offers an ethical vision grounded in compost, kinship, and co-flourishing.

4.4 Companion species and multispecies justice

Haraway's *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness* (2003) reconfigures ethics through the co-evolutionary relationship between dogs and human beings. Ethics, for Haraway, does not descend as a human-centred code imposed upon non-human life. It emerges in situated, embodied encounters, in what she calls "significant otherness" (Haraway 2003:15-17). Companion species, therefore, unsettle the fantasy of autonomy. They show that moral life is formed through daily practices of co-domestication, co-training, vulnerability, and interdependent living. Haraway radicalises this relational ethics in *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), where the Chthulucene names an ecological and temporal register shaped by multispecies entanglement. Her "humus politics" turns away from purity, progress, and salvation, and moves instead toward decay, compost, and regeneration (Haraway 2016:31, 55). Haraway (2016:12) writes that "[i]t matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories", linking survival to practices of care, accountability, and shared worlding. In this sense, interspecies care becomes more than affection. It becomes ecological and political resistance against capitalist extractivism and anthropocentric violence.

Haraway's work also shapes multispecies ethnography and the environmental humanities. Tsing's *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins* (2015) develops the idea of "collaborative survival" in damaged ecologies, showing how coexistence continues amid environmental and economic collapse. This resonates with Haraway's call to "make kin, not babies", which reimagines futurity through ecological

responsibility and relational multiplicity (Haraway 2016:103). Kohn's *How forests think: Toward an anthropology beyond the human* (2013) similarly challenges anthropocentric epistemology, arguing that plants, animals, and ecosystems participate in semiotic processes that shape agency and cognition. These works extend Haraway's claim that multispecies encounters carry ethical and epistemological weight. They require a rethinking of subjectivity and justice beyond the human. Companion species, then, are not limited to pets. They include fungi, bacteria, technologies, and other beings that co-constitute human life through becoming-with. As Haraway (2008:16) puts it, companion species are formed through "entanglements of cross-species sociality", where no being exists prior to the relations that help constitute it. Ethics begins there: in material and affective entanglement, in the recognition that embedded life demands attentiveness and accountability.

This critique of human exceptionalism rests on a post-humanist ontology of relation. Barad's (2007:33) notion of intra-action helps clarify this point, since it describes entities as constituted through relations rather than existing before them (Haraway 2016:93-95). Haraway's (2016:97) claim that "we are all compost, not posthuman" presses the same argument through a more earthy register, undoing binaries between nature and technology, organic and inorganic, purity and mixture. In the face of climate change, extinction, and injustice, multispecies justice calls for staying with the trouble, not escaping it (Haraway 2016:1). In this instance, justice does not begin with abstract rights alone. It takes shape through care, repair, reciprocity, and response-ability with human and non-human kin. Haraway thus shifts ethics and politics away from the human as moral arbiter and toward the human as co-participant in a wider web of becoming. Her account of companion species and multispecies justice offers a decisive challenge to anthropocentrism, grounding ecological thought in interdependence, care, and the unfinished labour of cultivating liveable worlds.

4.5 Haraway's limits and theological openings

Haraway's post-humanist ethics, while grounded in secular feminist materialism, intersect meaningfully with theological anthropology, especially Hefner's notion of the created co-creator. Both critique anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, emphasising relationality, accountability, and embodied existence within ecological systems. Hefner (1993:33-36) defines human agency as "conditioned freedom", emerging through evolutionary processes and divine vocation, resisting both determinism and radical autonomy. Similarly, Haraway's (2016:34) "response-ability" underscores ethical action through relational, multispecies entanglements; "worlding with" rather than "acting upon". Yet Haraway's framework challenges theology. Her rejection of transcendence, eschatology, and teleology grounds her ethics materially but

leaves it metaphysically lean. Her sympoietic vision – collaborative becoming without centralised purpose – contrasts with Hefner's theological teleology, in which human cultural agency shares in divine creation (Haraway 2016:60-61; Hefner 1993:32-33). Her radical immanence encourages ethical attentiveness but risks ethical indeterminacy absent a guiding telos.

This divergence opens space for theological dialogue. Haraway's resistance to divine intentionality prompts re-examination of ethical grounding amid planetary crises, while Hefner provides symbolic orientation through the myth of co-creation. Hefner (1993:32) contends that theology must interpret humanity as both natural and divine. Yet, Haraway challenges the anthropocentrism that lingers in Hefner's emphasis on symbolic agency. Her kinship model, "*oddkin*", is grounded in shared vulnerability rather than likeness (Haraway 2016:101-103). Her depiction of human beings as holobionts – multispecies symbiotic assemblages – destabilises traditional notions of individuality and moral agency. Her concept of speculative fabulation – narrative strategies that resist normativity and imagine alternative futures – also invites theological creativity. Rather than doctrinal closure, Haraway (2016:2-4) proposes mythic openness and adaptive storytelling amid ecological uncertainty. These approaches resonate with theological forms such as lament, improvisation, and prophetic vision (see Gutiérrez 1984; McFague 2001). The dialogue between Haraway and Hefner illuminates both tension and promise. Haraway offers a post-anthropocentric ethic of relationality and multispecies justice; Hefner, a theological vision grounded in divine purpose and human vocation. Their convergence gestures toward a renewed theological ethic, one that affirms human co-creative responsibility, while remaining attuned to the interdependent networks of planetary life. Such a synthesis invites humility, ecological care, and collaborative world-making in the Anthropocene.

5. CO-CREATING KINSHIP: TOWARD A PLANETARY THEOLOGICAL ETHIC

Co-creating kinship arises from a critical encounter between Hefner's theological anthropology and Haraway's post-humanist ethics. Although they emerge from distinct traditions, both challenge anthropocentric accounts of the human as isolated, sovereign, or self-grounding. This dialogue yields a theological-ecological reorientation, in which human beings are best understood as co-creating kin: neither masters standing above creation nor passive beings absorbed into it, but relational creatures embedded in multispecies life and called to exercise conditioned agency toward shared planetary futures.

Its first dimension, kin, draws from Haraway's notion of "*oddkin*" and stresses that human beings exist within multispecies entanglements rather than apart from them. Kinship thus exceeds genealogy and includes the relations whereby life is sustained across species and material forms (Haraway 2016:102-105). This kinship is not merely descriptive; it carries moral obligations of care, reciprocity, and accountability toward those with whom life is shared. TallBear and Simpson sharpen this ethical claim, by framing kinship as reciprocal responsibility across human and more-than-human relations, foregrounding consent, guardianship, obligations to land and non-human persons, and the place-based character of relational life in ways that unsettle settler-colonial and anthropocentric assumptions (TallBear 2017; 2018:153-159; Simpson 2017:58-61). Its second dimension, co-creators, comes from Hefner's theological anthropology. Hefner's concept of "conditioned freedom" presents human beings as capable of transformative participation in divine and material processes, yet always within biological contingency and divine calling rather than sovereign autonomy (Hefner 1993:36-39). Keller (2014:57-59) reinforces this participatory view of divine creativity, while Callicott (1989:112) extends moral concern beyond the human to the integrity of the biotic community. These dimensions reimagine human identity as relational, situated, and accountable. To be human, on this account, is not to stand above creation but to dwell responsibly within it. On this basis, a planetary theological ethic can articulate human moral responsibility in the Anthropocene by integrating multispecies kinship, theological co-creatorship, and socio-ecological justice.

5.1 Relational ontology: Kinship as situated becoming

A planetary theological ethic must begin with a relational ontology. Haraway's (2016:58-60) account of sympoiesis, or "making-with", unsettles the idea of the human as a bounded and autonomous individual, by locating life within multispecies assemblages and processes of becoming together. Her notion of making kin extends this, by framing survival as collaborative and by emphasising care-based relations that exceed genealogy and human-centred forms of belonging (Haraway 2016:103-106). Organisms, in this view, do not exist as self-contained entities; they emerge through webs of ecological, material, and interspecies relations. Her holobiont ontology presses this further, portraying beings as assemblages of microbial and macroscopic collaborators whose boundaries are always permeable and shared (Haraway 2016:60-63). Strathern's (1988:13) claim that "a person is the form relationships take" captures the same insight from within anthropology: identity is constituted through relation, not prior to it. Kohn (2013:12-14) deepens this, by showing that non-human beings participate in forms of meaning-making that exceed the human domain entirely, dismantling the assumption that semiotic life

belongs to us alone. Together, these perspectives shift ontology away from separability and toward entanglement, vulnerability, and co-constitution.

Hefner grounds human ontology in the *imago Dei*, but he does not read the divine image as ontological superiority. Hefner (1993:29-31, 36) portrays human beings as created co-creators whose symbolic capacity and conditioned freedom emerge within evolutionary and ecological processes, directed toward participation in God's ongoing creation. Keller's (2014:57-60) relational theology deepens this, by presenting divine and creaturely agency as mutually emergent rather than unilateral or dominating. On this reading, the *imago Dei* does not set human beings above creation; it situates them within it, while still affirming a distinctive vocation of responsibility. Haraway and Hefner together make possible a theological ontology of co-creating kinship, one that understands the human not as a sovereign self but as a relational being formed within multispecies entanglements and called to participate responsibly in shared worlds. The *imago Dei*, reimagined through this lens, becomes not a mark of separation but a summons to relational participation within the wider community of life.

5.2 Moral agency: From stewardship to co-creative response-ability

Traditional stewardship ethics often emphasise human centrality, by assuming that human beings stand over against the rest of creation as its managers. A planetary theological ethic must move beyond this model toward what I call co-creative response-ability. Hefner (1993:40-42) grounds moral agency in the vision of *shalom*, a holistic flourishing of human beings, creation, and divine purpose, while Haraway (2016:102) redefines ethics through response-ability: situated and embodied attentiveness to the specific needs of entangled beings. In dialogue, they shift ethics away from detached control and toward relational participation in the flourishing of shared worlds.

On this account, moral agency is neither autonomous nor possessed in isolation. Haraway's (2016:4, 102-105) insistence that "we become-with each other or not at all" explains that ethical life emerges within relations of mutual dependence rather than outside them. Despret (2016) deepens this insight, by showing that agency is co-produced through interspecies encounters. Plumwood (1993) presses the point further, by exposing the inadequacy of ethical models that treat vulnerability and interdependence as secondary concerns. Hefner's (1993:40-43) notion of "conditioned freedom" holds this in theological tension, by portraying human agency as both shaped by, and accountable to divine creativity and ecological embeddedness. Callicott's (1989:112-115) land ethic and Tsing's (2015:287-290) account of collaborative

survival in damaged ecologies extend this moral horizon outward, situating human responsibility within the wider biotic community rather than above it. Moral agency, then, is not a capacity human beings exercise from a position of control. It is a shared vocation cultivated through co-creative relationships with God, others, and the earth.

5.3 Interdisciplinary imagination: Theology in the *Chthulucene*

Once moral agency is understood as relational, situated, and ecologically embedded, theology can no longer remain confined within its own disciplinary boundaries. Both Haraway and Hefner press theology toward a broader mode of reflection that takes science, narrative, and ecological reality seriously. Haraway's (2016:10-12, 134) speculative fabulation and Terrapolis imaginary invite theology to engage biological life, multispecies worlds, and activist forms of imagination in response to the crises of the *Chthulucene*. Hefner (1993:29-31) likewise develops theological anthropology through sustained dialogue with evolutionary theory, seeking theological coherence within a scientific world view. Stengers' (2010) notion of "cosmopolitics" reinforces this need for alliances across knowledge systems in the work of sustaining planetary futures. A planetary theological ethic, therefore, requires a broader theological imagination, one that brings empirical attentiveness and theological discernment into conversation, in order to respond responsibly to a more-than-human world.

5.4 Political-theological praxis: Kinship and justice

A planetary theological ethic must take concrete form in practices of justice. Haraway's account of kinship is crucial, in this instance, because it resists romantic or abstract appeals to interconnection. Her notion of "*oddkin*" draws attention to the histories of colonialism, capitalism, and ecological violence that shape relations among human and more-than-human beings (Haraway 2016:103-105). TallBear (2017) sharpens this critique, by showing how settler-colonial kinship logics erase indigenous ontologies and ecological responsibilities, and by calling for forms of relation grounded in reciprocity, consent, and obligation. Kinship, then, cannot be separated from power. It must be reimagined through attention to wounded histories, asymmetrical relations, and the demands of socio-ecological repair.

This emphasis on justice also deepens the theological vision developed in Hefner's account of co-creation. If human beings are called to participate in God's ongoing creativity, that vocation must include solidarity with vulnerable human communities and the more-than-human world. McFague (2001) and

Keller (2014) extend Hefner's anthropology in this direction, by foregrounding the vulnerability of creation and the moral imperative to resist structures that degrade life. In this light, justice becomes more than an ethical supplement to theology. It becomes a concrete expression of co-creative responsibility within a damaged world. A planetary theological ethic is, therefore, not only relational and imaginative, but also politically disruptive and restorative, committed to forms of life that sustain both ecological flourishing and social repair.

5.5 Eschatological vision: Composting hope

This planetary ethic culminates in a reimagined eschatology attentive to the moral contours of planetary crisis. Hefner and Haraway, though working from distinct intellectual traditions, offer complementary ways of rethinking human purpose and hope. Hefner (1993:43-45) envisions a theologically grounded telos, in which human beings, as created co-creators, participate in the unfolding of divine creativity through evolutionary and cultural processes. His eschatological vision understands human vocation not as domination, but as co-participation in the redemptive transformation of the world. Haraway, by contrast, offers an earthy and non-teleological vision grounded in sympoiesis, the entangled becoming-with of human and more-than-human life. Haraway's (2016:55) claim that "we are compost, not posthuman" reframes hope through decay, regeneration, and embodied finitude rather than transcendence or mastery. In place of utopian or apocalyptic abstraction, Haraway (2016:134-137) calls for staying with the trouble through situated practices of care, mourning, and renewal.

These visions do not simply oppose one another. Haraway's suspicion of transcendental closure challenges theology to resist triumphalist eschatologies, while her emphasis on relationality and response-ability resonates with Hefner's (1993:35-39) account of conditioned freedom, in which human agency remains shaped by ecological and biological embeddedness. At the same time, Hefner's evolutionary eschatology gives theological direction to the work of co-creation, by orienting it toward the flourishing of life. In both thinkers, hope is not deferred to a distant beyond. It takes form in the present through humility, relational responsibility, and shared efforts to sustain a damaged world. Read through the metaphor of compost, eschatological hope no longer points toward escape from the earth, but toward fidelity within it. Together, Hefner and Haraway make possible a planetary eschatology that resists despair without returning to mastery, and that locates hope in the unfinished work of co-creating liveable futures amid planetary precarity.

6. CONCLUSION

This article brought Hefner's theological anthropology into critical dialogue with Haraway's post-humanist ethics to develop a theological response to the ecological and ethical challenges of the Anthropocene. By placing Hefner's concept of the "created co-creator" in conversation with Haraway's account of "multispecies kin-making", the article proposes co-creating kinship as a constructive model for planetary theological ethics. This model redefines human vocation not as autonomous stewardship or exceptional agency, but as responsible participation within interdependent and multispecies worlds. Hefner offers a theological account of human distinctiveness grounded in symbolic capacity, conditioned freedom, and participation in divine creativity. Haraway, by contrast, exposes the anthropocentric limits that often remain in theological accounts of vocation, by stressing response-ability, mutual vulnerability, and the entanglement of human and more-than-human life. The concept of "co-creating kinship" emerges from this tension as a way of rethinking human identity, responsibility, and hope. It names a form of life in which human beings remain morally accountable yet understand themselves as embedded within a wider community of creation. In this way, the article argues for a planetary theological ethic grounded in relationality, ecological responsibility, and socio-ecological justice. Such an ethic does not seek escape from planetary crisis but calls for faithful participation in the difficult work of sustaining shared worlds. It offers a constructive framework for Christian theological anthropology in a time of ecological precarity. It invites theology to imagine human life with greater humility, care, and responsibility within the multispecies future of the earth.

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Keywords	*Trefwoorde*
Co-creating kinship	Mede-skepper verwantskap
Created co-creator	Geskape mede-skepper
Multispecies ethics	Multi-spesie etiek
Planetary theological ethic	Planetêre teologiese etiek