

“Everything is Interconnected”: *Laudato Si’*, an Ethical Framework to Guide Environmental Policy?

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In May 2015 Pope Francis published *Laudato Si’, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home*.¹ This work of two-hundred pages addresses many aspects of the complex challenge presented by the ecological crisis. Francis proposes that we adopt a personal and cultural attitude of “integral ecology” recognizing that “everything is interconnected.”² The issues whose connection need to be recognized include education, culture, spirituality, and religion. However, they also include natural science, social science, policy-making, and bridge between these and ethics. Given the target audience of *Working Notes*, I focus on this latter set of questions. In doing this, I avert to reflection being conducted in Germany by academics linked to “think tank” research institutes, and place these in dialogue with *Laudato Si’*. I do this hoping to be of service to those who reflect about environmental policy in Ireland.

Pope Francis produced *Laudato Si’* six months before the international gathering of government leaders, “COP 21,” to be held in Paris in December 2015. He did this in the explicit hope of helping a positive outcome emerge from that meeting. Some commentators suggest that the encyclical was at least partially successful in achieving this goal.³ Five years later, the letter continues to be taken seriously. At an academic level, many agree with Francis that, in the face of the ecological challenge, “the fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation of bits of information can actually become a form of ignorance, unless they are integrated into a broader vision of reality.”⁴ It would

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home*, (May 2015) http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.htmlhttp://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed May 2020)

² The following reflections are influenced by, *Everything is Interconnected: Towards a Globalization with a Human Face and an Integral Ecology*, eds. Joseph Ogbonnaya and Lucas Briola (WN: Marquette University Press, 2019.)

³ A representative of the Holy See to COP 21 expresses his opinion that *Laudato Si’* contributed positively to the success of COP 21, see Paolo Conversi, “COP 21 e *Laudato Si’*” in *Laudato Si’, il testo ci interroga, chiave di lettura, testimonianze, e prospettive* (Roma: G&B Press, 2014.) See also, Joe Ware, “COP21: *Laudato Si’* a major talking point at climate change talks in Paris,” *The Tablet*, 6 December 2015.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, paragraph 138 (subsequent citations are from the numbered paragraphs of the encyclical, not from page numbers.)

seem that the following sentiments of Pope Francis remain at least as relevant five years after *Laudato Si'* as when they were published:

“Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. This necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production and consumption. *It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected.*”⁵

Those interested in employing the encyclical as a point of reference will notice one striking fact: the Pope makes few concrete proposals. Rather, he stresses the importance of improved processes of dialogue that he hopes will produce proposals, actions, and results. These processes include, “dialogue on the environment in the international community,” “dialogue for new national and local policies,” dialogue and transparency in decision-making,” “politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfilment,” and “religions in dialogue with science.”⁶ My focus is primarily on the areas, “dialogue for new national and local policies,” and “politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfilment.”

Edenhofer’s Policy Contribution

In 1992, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) was founded in a town near Berlin. It is a think-tank dedicated to the scientific study of questions related to globalization, climate impact, and sustainable development.⁷ It is funded by the German government, employs about 400 people, and enjoys a high international reputation. In 2018 two joint directors were appointed. One of these is Ottmar Edenhofer, who had previously been Deputy Director.⁸

Edenhofer is an economist with a high international profile.⁹ He was the main author of the Fourth Assessment Report on Climate Change published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2007, the year when the IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Much of his work is at a technical level, studying questions on the boundary between natural science and economics. However, his interests expand beyond economics. One example is that he is the author of a book whose German title translates as *Climate Politics, Goals, Conflicts, Solutions*.¹⁰

Placing the thought of Edenhofer in dialogue with *Laudato Si'* is illuminating. He agrees with *Laudato Si'* that the ecological crisis has many dimensions, including climate change, the reduction of biodiversity, and the reduction of access for humans to clean

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 138 (emphasis added.)

⁶ These are the sub-headings of Chapter 5, “Lines of approach and Action,” *Laudato Si'*, 163-201.

⁷ <https://www.pik-potsdam.de/pik-frontpage> (accessed, May 2020.)

⁸ The other Co-Director of the PIK is Johan Rockström, from Sweden.

⁹ Ottmar Edenhofer is Director and Chief Economist of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research as well as Director of the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change and Professor of the Economics of Climate Change at the Technische Universität Berlin.

¹⁰ Ottmar Edenhofer and Michael Jakob, *Klimapolitik: Ziele, Konflikte, Losungen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017). See also a YouTube lecture in English by Edenhofer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrQHKyqDWxw&t=1432s> (accessed May 2020).

water. He suggests that the problem of climate change is the most urgent of the ecological issues and acknowledges that this needs to be addressed by a variety of means. However, he brings to the centre of attention the question of “carbon pricing,” an issue that is not treated in *Laudato Si’*. He expresses a confidence in the ability of governments to intervene in the market mechanisms of modern economies in such a way as to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change. He claims that if carbon prices are set high enough, they can go a long way to achieving these goals¹¹

While he acknowledges that debates about the causes of climate change can be complex, he insists that, at their heart, there is a simple insight: once emitted, carbon remains in the atmosphere for a long time. He traces how emissions of greenhouse gases by industrialized economies are the principle means by which humanity is feeding carbon into the atmosphere. He then speaks of the existence of a “carbon budget.” He explains that when carbon in the atmosphere reaches a certain level its budget will have been exhausted. At this point, a saturation will occur which will cause accelerated climate change with catastrophic consequences for human society. He explains that humanity has already gone a long way toward consuming its budget.¹²

However, it is not too late for humanity to radically reduce its carbon emissions and thus mitigate the worst effects of climate change. He warns that, given how much of our carbon budget we have already consumed, world economies will need to reduce carbon emissions to zero by the year 2050, to allow for an increase of world temperature of between 1.5 and 2.0 degrees centigrade. Such climate change will still have major negative consequences, but he describes how world economies may be able to adapt to such changes. Consequently, the terms “mitigation” and “adaptation” become important parts of his vocabulary.¹³

Regarding mitigation, Edenhofer focuses on issues of carbon pricing while also touching on its effective implementation within wider climate policy frameworks.¹⁴ It involves both carbon taxes and mechanisms for carbon trading. He argues that government intervention in market mechanisms in modern economies can be effective. He attributes the damage that has been done to the environment thus far in terms of “externalities.”

¹¹ Edenhofer acknowledges that, the success of carbon pricing regime will depend on other necessary factors. One of these will be the availability of supplies of alternative energy at attractive prices so that consumers can switch from fossil-fuel sources. On this issue, he invokes the principle of economic theory that measures the “elasticity,” or speed of response, of both producers and consumers to the market signal of price change. See, (see, “ A meta-analysis on the price elasticity of energy demand,” Xavier Labandeira, José M.Labeagac, and Xiral López-Oteroa, *Energy Policy*, Volume 102, March 2017, 549-568.)

¹² For further analysis of the carbon budget, see the web-page of the Mercator Research Institute, of which Edenhofer is director: <https://www.mcc-berlin.net/en/research/co2-budget.html> (accessed May 2020).

¹³ The argument for carbon pricing is found in IPCC, “First Assessment Report,” <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar1/wg3/> (accessed May 2020), and all subsequent Assessment Reports.

¹⁴ Ottmar Edenhofer, Christian Flachsland, Matthias Kalkuhl, Brigitte Knopf and Michael Pahle, Options for a Carbon Pricing Reform (gGmbH, 2019) https://www.mcc-berlin.net/fileadmin/data/B2.3_Publications/Working%20Paper/2019_MCC_Options_for_a_Carbon_Pricing_Reform_ExecSum_final.pdf

This begins with the principle that states that producers of goods and services should pay for the real costs of the factors of production that they employ. Here he describes a commonly accepted principle: that costs of production should include rents paid on the ownership of natural resources. This rent should normally be paid in the form of a tax to the government that represents the interests of the entire population of a country in which the natural resource is found. Next, he points out that it is often the case that there are factors of production for which producers do not pay. These are “externalities” which never arrive on the balance sheets of the producer. He notes that economists have long argued that externalities should be “internalised,” especially through taxation. If not, market imperfections exist that give the lie to those who defend the capitalist system as based on a free market system.

Edenhofer next points out that externalities that have been particularly neglected are those that appertain to the “global commons” that is the Earth’s atmosphere. He acknowledges that this is an externality that is trans-national and so particularly difficult to claim rent upon. However, he argues that, given the reality of the carbon budget to which scientists are calling our attention today, the need to internalise these externalities has become urgent. He suggests that, ultimately, this theoretical discussion culminates in a principle that appeals to common sense: “the polluter pays.”¹⁵

Edenhofer next explains how a notion of carbon pricing involves both mechanisms of taxation and “carbon trading.” This latter principle represents a transitory step in a process toward a global economic system with zero net carbon emissions. It involves distributing rights to pollute the atmosphere among different countries and permitting richer, more industrialised, countries, pay for the right to pollute that is owned by poorer countries. He insists that there is empirical evidence that policies of carbon pricing can be effective. He outlines what is called a “Pigou effect” whereby policies of government-caused price increases shift practices of both production and consumption within economies. As a secondary issue, he speaks of how the revenues from carbon taxes will remain at high levels for several years until they eventually disappear. He studies how such tax revenues can be “recycled” to compensate both producers and consumers who are most negatively affected by the transition to a zero-carbon-emissions economy.¹⁶

Finally, Edenhofer’s technical reflections on carbon pricing extend to a study of efforts to reach intergovernmental agreements on carbon emissions, negotiations in which he has been personally involved. Here again he employs principles from welfare economics which study how self-interest can operate in negotiation processes. Problems to be addressed here include that of the temptation of “freeloading,” where one country seeks to let other countries make the painful decisions about carbon emission reduction, hoping to reap the common climatic gains in the longer run. Another involves questions of justice—which policies of carbon trading seek to address—where poor countries with little history of emissions are asked to make the same sacrifices as those that consumed most of the carbon budget of the world.

However, even when Edenhofer makes efforts to respect the realities of the political process, he still finds himself disappointed. For example, in October 2019, he

¹⁵ Edenhofer, “Governing the Commons,” 44-46.

¹⁶ Edenhofer, “Governing the Commons,” 46-50.

addressed a committee of the German government, the “Climate Cabinet,” at which the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, was present.¹⁷ He noted that Germany was not living up to the promises it had made in the annual intergovernmental, “Conference of Parties” (COP), meetings, associated with the IPCC targets on carbon emissions. He suggested that a reason for this was that the government had set the price of carbon too low. He proposed that carbon price be set at €50 per tonne of carbon emitted—a price that would guide subsequent taxation levels. The Climate Cabinet thanked him for his contribution and subsequently decided to set the price of carbon at €10.

Such an experience was not new to Edenhofer. He had long been aware that challenges exist in winning political acceptance for policies that he considers to be scientifically rational. He was also aware that academic reflection was needed about how proponents of environment policy should engage with the imperfect reality of politics.

Policy Making in “A Second Best World”

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis touches upon the question of how to engage with the imperfect world of politics. He expresses admiration for the IPCC and the annual meetings of COP, but states, “it is remarkable how weak international political responses have been,” adding that this has amounted to a “failure of global summits on the environment.”¹⁸ He avoids laying exclusive blame on politicians who fail to think of the long term interests of their peoples, and recognizes that also to blame is the “powerful opposition” of economic interests as well as a “more general lack of interest” in the voting population.¹⁹ He states, “political realism may call for transitional measures.”²⁰

Edenhofer seeks to explore what such political realism might involve. He was instrumental in setting up a think-tank in 2012 that would complement the work of the PIK: The Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC)²¹ The aim of this institute, based in Berlin, is to provide concrete “scientific assessments” of the carbon emissions of institutions and to offer proposals for how they might mitigate these. Another aim is to study issues on the interface between science, policy making, and ethics.²² Edenhofer also produces publications on similar lines to this working group. In collaboration with other experts he has published in areas that continue to employ welfare economics but extend this to the realms of behavioural economics and political science.²³

¹⁷ See, <https://www.mcc-berlin.net/en/news/information/information-detail/article/mcc-and-pik-deliver-detailed-assessment-of-german-climate-package.html> (accessed May 2020).

¹⁸ *Laudato Si'*, 54.

¹⁹ *Laudato Si'*, 14.

²⁰ *Laudato Si'*, 180.

²¹ The Mercator Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change, <https://www.mcc-berlin.net/en.html>

²² See Working Groups of the MCC, including “Scientific Assessments, Ethics, and Public Policy” : <https://www.mcc-berlin.net/en/research/working-groups/scientific-assessments-ethics-and-public-policy.html>. See also working groups on “Economic Growth and Human Development,” and “Sustainable Resource Management and Global Change,” and “Governance.”

²³ David Klenert, Ottmar Edenhofer et. Al. “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” in *Nature Climate Change* Vol. 8, August 2018, 669-677. See also, Michael Jakob, Ottmar Edenhofer et al “Governing the Commons to Promote Global Justice: Climate Change Mitigation and Rent Taxation,” in *Climate Justice*:

An application of welfare economics employed by Edenhofer in such studies is that which studies the dynamics of economies that exist in a “second best world” characterized by market imperfections. Here, for example, Edenhofer recognizes that the effect of recycling income from carbon taxes may be affected by the fact that the tax system in some countries are already unbalanced. Reflections of this kind tend to lead to conclusions proposing “lump sum transfers” of funds to targeted audiences rather than across-the-board tax reductions. An example of this is how the French government, under President Macron, transferred considerable funds in the form of wage subsidies to those living on the minimum wage, thus quieting the “Gilet Jaunes” protests of 2018-2019, which were provoked by a petrol tax. By leaving the petrol tax in place, President Macron hoped to exercise a Pigou effect of reducing petrol consumption. In the end, he was obliged to transfer more funds to the poorer sectors of society than would ever be collected by this tax. However, from the point of view of welfare economics, this outcome can nevertheless be considered positive.²⁴

Another aspect of welfare economics has already been referred to. It involves looking at carbon taxes as rent collection on property rights awarded to economic producers and consumers for use of the global commons of the Earth’s atmosphere.²⁵ This notion of taxing rent for access (or ownership) of natural resources has raised anew the concept of applying such taxes to other externalised “commons.” Here arguments are recalled that were first proposed by a conservative economist in the nineteenth century, Henry George.²⁶ This New Yorker reflecting on taxation patterns in his own city, noted that taxing land, could provide necessary income for governments while causing a minimum of distortion to the operating of free markets. Ecological economists revisit this argument noting that land taxes could also have positive effects on carbon emissions. This is because they can help reduce urban sprawl. They acknowledge that this would require a reduction in rates of home ownership and a cultural readiness to live in apartment buildings (something acceptable in countries such as Austria, Germany, and Denmark, but less so elsewhere.)²⁷

Next, the publications of which Edenhofer is part employ the insights of political science and behavioural economics. A first insight is an obvious one. The level of acceptance of innovative proposals on environmental policy will be a product of general levels of education about the ecological problem. A second one is that acceptance of ecological policies will have a lot to do with how much citizens trust politicians in general. They explain: “public distrust of politicians and perceived corruption have been robustly associated with weaker climate policies”²⁸ and note that evidence points to a significant drop in political trust in many countries in recent years. Causes of this seem to include the perceived mishandling of the financial crisis of 2008, as well as perceived inequitable

Integrating Economics and Philosophy, Ravi Kanvur and Henry Shue (eds.) (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018), ISBN-13: 9780198813248, 43-62.

²⁴ See, “Macron Buys Off His Critics: A Chastened President Offers Concessions Worth Euro 10 billion,” *The Economist*, 11th December 2018

²⁵ Edenhofer, “Governing the Commons,” 44-46.

²⁶ Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (NY: Robert Schalkenpach Foundation, 1879); see also Mattias Kalkuhl and Ottmar Edenhofer, “Ramsey Meets Thünen: The Impact of Land Taxes on Economic Development and Land Conversation,” *International Tax and Public Finance*, 24(2): 350-80.

²⁷ Edenhofer, “Governing the Commons,” 50-55. See also, “Land Tax, Why Henry George Had a Point,” *The Economist*, 2 April 2015.

²⁸ Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 672.

taxation systems and unequal distribution of wealth. Edenhofer et al, focus on questions of “distributional fairness,” and “revenue salience” and add: “We argue that traditional economic lessons on efficiency and equity are subsidiary to the primary challenge of garnering greater political acceptability.”²⁹ Consequently, those who seek to promote responsible ecological policies propose that governments should also seek to address those issues that sow the seeds of such generalized distrust.

Another insight deriving from political-scientific surveys is that voter attitudes to the ecological policies tends to be closely related to partisan political opinion. Here, a distinction is drawn between those who hold political philosophies that are broadly “egalitarian-communitarian,” and those that are “hierarchical-individualistic.” Evidence suggests that the former set of views result in a greater tolerance for ecological policies than the latter. Policy proposals based on these insights include presenting ecological policies in a vocabulary that attracts those of a hierarchical-individualistic orientation. This can include measures as simple as calling taxes “fees.”³⁰

At this stage, some proposals seem to take on a Machiavellian air, even if articulated in the neutral-sounding terminology of employing “instruments that target behavioural biases.”³¹ Studies in behavioural economics demonstrate that voters demonstrate an “ignorance of the Pigouvian effect”³² and so have little interest in how carbon taxes will redirect economic production and consumption. By contrast, it seems that such voters can be highly interested in how the recycled tax income from carbon taxes is spent. Some proposals involve accommodating this unbalanced perception by making highly-publicised gestures of lump sum financial transfers to politically influential minorities. Such minorities might include those who hold hierarchical-individualist political opinions - e.g. soya bean farmers in the American Mid-West - and would otherwise tend to oppose ecological policies. Those who propose such policies acknowledge that money spent in this way would be directed away from recipients recommended by classical economists, including producers most hard-hit by carbon taxes. They argue that these hard-hit groups are likely to oppose carbon taxes anyway, and so the pragmatic option is to cultivate a political constituency that will counteract the pressure they can bring to bear.³³

A related point is that redistributing carbon tax money only to the poor is unlikely to build a voting majority in favour of maintaining a policy in the long-term. Here proposals are made that initiatives should be undertaken that favour both the poor and sections of the middle class.³⁴ Advice is offered about how to avoid policy reversals when governments change. On this issue, proposals are made to channel funds to influential minorities from different political philosophies.³⁵

²⁹ Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Prices Work for Citizens,” 669.

³⁰ Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 671.

³¹ Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 670.

³² Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 670.

³³ Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 671.

³⁴ “The universality of Social Security and Medicare in the United States, for example, has largely safeguarded these programmes from multiple rollback attempts” (Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 673).

³⁵ Edenhofer, “Making Carbon Pricing Work for Citizens,” 671.

Finally, these studies acknowledge that implementing effective carbon prices in ‘A Second Best World’ is not just about getting the price and redistribution correct but requires proper alignment of the entire climate policy framework towards the main goal of reducing emissions. Carbon pricing is a key component of this framework but requires supplementation by complementary climate policy instruments and measures including building renovations and updated transport and pollution policies.³⁶ Recognition that our dependence on fossil fuel cannot be reduced by a substantial amount unless there are viable alternatives makes complementary climate policies vital.

Ethics and Sustainable Development

If comments in the previous section may seem to imply a readiness to propose policies that manipulate ignorant voters, much of the work of Edenhofer, the PIK, and the MCC is idealistic in tone. They express hope in the gradual emergence of a voting population who are educated in ecological awareness and they recognize the importance of schooling of the young in these matters (the PIK runs a Summer School for students.³⁷) They also pursue an academic dimension of such an approach.

Before describing how Edenhofer and others pursue this issue, one notes that *Laudato Si’* has much to say on this matter, as it is related to the principle that “everything is interconnected.” To begin with, Pope Francis criticises how powerful economic interests gain control of political decision-making in a way that does not serve the common good. He insists, “politics must not be subject to the economy.”³⁸ He adds that opposition to the co-opting of politics by sectional economic interests must first be mobilized at the level of culture. Here, he raises the question of what kind of paradigm influences a culture. He laments that in fact, “humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm.”³⁹ He describes this as “technocratic paradigm” which produces a “distorted anthropocentrism”⁴⁰ which “tends to dominate economic and political life.”⁴¹ He states that such a paradigm does not emerge by accident, but rather is promoted by influential and self-interested forces, for whom, “power is never considered in terms of the responsibility of choice which is inherent in freedom,” but rather, “only norms are taken from alleged necessity, from either utility or security.”⁴² By contrast, he proposes a culture that would accept principles of integral ecology and comments on intellectual principles that such a culture would need to uphold:

“These problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests. A science which would offer solutions to the great issues would necessarily have to take into account the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics; but this is a difficult habit to acquire today.”⁴³

³⁶ Edenhofer et al. “Options for a Carbon Pricing Reform” 7, 8

³⁷ <https://potsdam-summer-school.org/> (accessed, May 2020.)

³⁸ *Laudato Si’*, 189.

³⁹ *Laudato Si’*, 106.

⁴⁰ *Laudato Si’*, 69.

⁴¹ *Laudato Si’*, 109.

⁴² *Laudato Si’*, 105. Here Pope Francis is quoting the philosopher Romano Guardini.

⁴³ *Laudato Si’*, 110.

Edenhofer demonstrates an openness to such other fields of knowledge by contributing to books with titles such as *Climate Justice: Integrating Economics and Philosophy*.⁴⁴ Similarly, The Mercator Institute (MCC), engages with questions at the interface of policy-making and philosophy in a yet more systematic way. In September 2019 the MCC organized a three day conference, “Divergent Values in Sustainability Assessments, Love Them Leave Them or Change Them?”⁴⁵ One of the speakers, Dr. Mark Saner from the University of Ottawa, delivered a talk entitled “Science-Policy Interfaces and Divergent Values.”⁴⁶ This talk noted that a certain number of ethical terms have widespread acceptance in international political debates. These include “legitimacy” and “good governance.” He then explains that it can be more difficult to find agreed-upon ethical terminology on environmental issues. He suggests that a partial explanation for this is that novel technologies emerge regularly introducing a “constellation” of economic possibilities with consequences for the environment that are sometimes unclear. He explains that, in terms of ethical debate, it can be difficult “to successfully navigate the risks and opportunities provided by this constellation.”⁴⁷

Dr. Henry Shue, of Merton College, Oxford University, delivered a talk, “All Things Considered: Towards Policy-Oriented Climate Ethics.” He notes how difficult it is to find individuals who are trained in one or other profession to consider ethical principles that are not directly relevant to that profession:

“Specialists tend to stew in their own obsessions. Many ethicists cannot imagine our not wanting to be ideally just. Many economists cannot imagine our not wanting the lowest cost pathway. Lawyers want us to avoid all moral hazards; and so on. But good policy-makers seem to need somehow to grant all the considerations worthy of attention their respective appropriate weights and make an all-things-considered judgement. What could this mean? How could a specialist in ethics who lacks all-encompassing wisdom embracing all disciplines nevertheless provide guidance that is less parochial, less utopian, less monolithic, more concrete, and more relevant, but still communicates the moral seriousness of what is at stake?”⁴⁸

Edenhofer also publishes reflections on such issues, and echoes the concern expressed above about the difficulty of finding consensus on ethical presuppositions in policy debates on the environment. He notes that one system of ethical discourse can be relatively acceptable in intergovernmental debates about environment policy: the philosophy of distributive justice expressed by the liberal philosopher from the USA, John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*.⁴⁹ In this, Rawls describes a hypothetical scenario

⁴⁴ Ravi Kanbur, Henry Shue (eds.) *Climate Justice: Integrating Economics and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.)

⁴⁵ <https://www.mcc-berlin.net/news/events/zurueckliegend/ethics-and-assessments-conference/conference-details.html> (consulted May 2020.)

⁴⁶ I draw on a list of abstracts of talks delivered at the conference provided privately by the organizer, Dr. Martin Korarsch, Dr. Korarsch encourages enquires into the work of the MCC, kowarsch@mcc-berlin.net.

⁴⁷ MCC conference abstracts

⁴⁸ Quotation taken from MCC conference abstracts. See also, Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.)

⁴⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.)

where a group of people would have to agree on what would be the ideal economic and political arrangement in a new society that was about to be constructed. A key condition of this reflection is that there exists “a veil of ignorance” so that no one can know in advance what level of the society being designed he or she will be born into—rich or poor.

However, Edenhofer identifies how sharp divisions quickly emerge in the manner in which representatives of negotiating governments are prepared to employ Rawls. He identifies two camps. In the first, “cosmopolitans argue that robust principles of distributive justice ought to apply globally”; in the second, “minimalists argue that stronger principles apply within states.”⁵⁰ And so the dilemma remains.

A Role for Religion?

Might religion offer help to resolve the difficulty that nations find in arriving at consensus on ethical principles that underlie environmental policy? Here Edenhofer and the think tanks with which he is associated remain silent. However, Pope Francis has a good deal to say.

In a chapter entitled, “The Gospel of Creation”⁵¹ Pope Francis recalls that a large majority of the inhabitants of the Earth considers itself to be religious. He then suggests that religion can be an important source of cultural resistance to the technocratic paradigm and to the consequent distorted anthropocentrism that is so pervasive in culture today. He points out that most of those involved in the ecology movement acknowledge that “respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality.”⁵² He adds, “no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.”⁵³ He points to the widespread acceptability of Saint Francis of Assisi who, “shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”⁵⁴

Pope Francis next explores themes of which Francis of Assisi is a model. He recalls that the title of his encyclical comes from a hymn of St. Francis that begins with the phrase, “praised be you O Lord” (“Laudato Si’, mi Signore.”) He recalls that for many people a respect for nature is related to a sense of the sacredness of nature. He also notes that many people associate key moments in their spiritual lives with the places where they underwent such an experience, encouraging in them a desire to return to such places of epiphany. He points out that, for many, “rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”⁵⁵ Turning to explicitly Christian themes, he stresses that a belief in God made human has implications for a religious appreciation of nature.⁵⁶ He adds that the symbol of the God-man crucified by sinful humanity offers a perspective on the destructive behaviour committed by human beings today both against the poor and the natural environment.

⁵⁰ Edenhofer, “Governing the Commons,” 48.

⁵¹ *Laudato Si’*, 62-100.

⁵² *Laudato Si’*, 63.

⁵³ *Laudato Si’*, 63.

⁵⁴ *Laudato Si’*, 10.

⁵⁵ *Laudato Si’*, 13.

⁵⁶ *Laudato Si’*, 96-100.

He suggests that a sense of compassion prompted by contemplation of Christ on the Cross can prompt the insight: “A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings.”⁵⁷ He adds that a belief in the Second Coming of Christ can prompt a sense of responsibility for the care of our common home because “creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself.”⁵⁸

Pope Francis confines such reflection primarily to one explicitly theological chapter in his book. Otherwise, he acknowledges that “in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator” or, at least, those who “view religions simply as a subculture to be tolerated.”⁵⁹ He points out that the major part of his encyclical employs the neutral language of ethics and values with which he hopes that even those who hold such opinions about religion can agree. He stresses that his intention in *Laudato Si'* is to promote coalitions between people who can support integral ecology from a variety of starting points.

Conclusion: Everything is Interconnected

This paper seeks to acknowledge the five-year anniversary of the publication of *Laudato Si'* by reflecting on policy proposals by Edenhofer alongside its teachings. It explores how the issues raised in ecology are deeply interdisciplinary, requiring a method of proceeding that recognizes that “everything is interconnected.” I conclude with comments of two kinds: how the thought of Edenhofer and *Laudato Si'* serve as a corrective to each other; and how these two sources might be relevant to policy making in Ireland.

A first point is that I find the argument of Edenhofer in favour of carbon pricing to be persuasive. At the very least, it suggests that those who find the argument of *Laudato Si'* persuasive should consider that energetically supporting the notion of an appropriate carbon price is an important way of implementing the general principles stated in the encyclical. In fact, one can ask questions of why *Laudato Si'* did not commit itself to such proposals. The Noble Peace Prize winner for climate economics, William D. Nordhaus criticises *Laudato Si'* for avoiding this. In an article entitled “The Pope and the Market,” he suggests that the failure of the encyclical to do this implies that Pope Francis has not freed himself from the tendency of those practicing Catholic social teaching, to fail to understand how markets function. Many have defended *Laudato Si'* against this accusation, and I believe that Nordhaus is mistaken to interpret Pope Francis as opposed to carbon pricing. However, I also believe that *Laudato Si'* could have been strengthened with some more specific reference to the technical matters that are treated by Edenhofer. One can note that Edenhofer, without referring specifically to *Laudato Si'* also speaks often of the problem of those who express an ethical concern about the ecological crisis but fail to think-through the issue enough and commit themselves to the crucial issue of carbon pricing.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Laudato Si'*, 91.

⁵⁸ *Laudato Si'*, 236 (quoting Pope Benedict XVI.)

⁵⁹ *Laudato Si'*, 62.

⁶⁰ “In reading the encyclical, one senses the struggle of an ancient institution, immersed in its doctrine and history, slowly and incompletely adapting to modern science. Most commentaries have focused on the pope’s endorsement of climate science, but my focus here is primarily on the social sciences, particularly economics” William D. Nordhaus, “The Pope and Markets,” *New York Review of Books*, October 8 2015.

A second point concerns the ethical deliberations of both Edenhofer and the MCC. These seem to draw exclusively on thinkers who stand, broadly, within a liberal tradition of ethical reflection.⁶¹ It should be noted that some ecological ethicists consider the liberal rationalism of Enlightenment thought to have contributed to the kind of culture that has contributed to our ecological crisis. By contrast, such thinkers propose communitarian arguments that include an appeal to some version of natural law and an ethic of place.⁶² It would seem reasonable to explore such ethical arguments as these are likely to appeal to voters who have “populist” tendencies and tend to oppose environmental policies. It should also be noted that *Laudato Si'* lends itself at least as much as communitarian ethics as to ethical reasoning that stands within the liberal tradition.⁶³

A third point addresses the relevance of the above reflections to policy-making in Ireland. Here one point is clear. The Irish performance regarding carbon pricing has, so far, been inadequate, even if, as a matter of interest, it has been better than that of Germany. The carbon price currently set by the Irish government is €26, with plans to raise this price to €80 by 2030⁶⁴, the price proposed by “The Climate Change Advisory Council,”⁶⁵ which, as it happens, is advised by Edenhofer. In developing and implementing tax-based climate policies, consideration must also be given to the possible appropriateness of a land value tax for Ireland. The analysis of Edenhofer on this issue suggests that it warrants further exploration—even though adopting it would require major changes in Irish cultural attitudes to house ownership.⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that news reports about negotiations on forming a coalition government suggest that the Green Party is arguing in favour of an increase of carbon taxes. Also notable are reports that other parties are offering the a counter-argument that in the time of economic recovery from the effects of the Coronavirus, it will be difficult to accept the economic sacrifices involved from such tax increases. Perhaps here one recalls the statement of Pope Francis, “political realism may call for transitional measures.”⁶⁷

A fourth point regards the question of the ethical orientation of Irish culture, especially on issues of ethics and economics. Reflection on such issues is not lacking among Irish academics and in the media. Also, and for example, the McGill Summer

⁶¹ The theory of distributive justice of John Rawls stands within the liberal philosophical tradition. Similarly, Henry Shue is a “rights based thinker.” See his seminal work, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and US Foreign Policy* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.)

⁶² See, Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, Kindle Edition).

⁶³ See, Gerard Whelan SJ, “Communitarian Solutions to the Ecological Crisis: Michael Northcott, Bernard Lonergan, and Robert Doran in Dialogue” in Ogonnaya and Briola, *Everything is Interconnected*, 97-116.

⁶⁴ Government of Ireland, Climate Action Plan, 42(2019)
<https://www.dcae.gov.ie/documents/Climate%20Action%20Plan%202019.pdf>

⁶⁵ The Irish Climate Change Advisory Council:
<http://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/Climate%20Change%20Advisory%20Council%20Annual%20Review%202019.pdf>

⁶⁶ An argument for introducing a land value tax in Ireland is made by Dr. Frank Crowley, Cork University Business School, in “How a land value tax could solve many economic headaches”:
<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2017/1017/912913-how-a-land-value-tax-could-solve-many-economic-headaches/>

⁶⁷ *Laudato Si'*, 180.

School is an impressive example of a policy-focused exercise in cultural reflection.⁶⁸ On the other hand, some indications are less positive. Here I recall that Ireland is a small open economy that is highly dependent on the globalised economic system. Does this make it difficult for Irish culture to resist a related, cultural, influence of the “technocratic paradigm”? Other members of the European Union criticise Irish policies on corporate taxation as an example of an unethical alliance with big business. This criticism might be articulated as placing Ireland within what Edenhofer describes as a minimalist approach to the theory of distributive justice. Will its European partners regard Ireland as better behaved on questions of environment policy? However, one can recall that the temptation for small open economies to “freeload” on its larger neighbours is strong. Might the temptation to freeload in terms of carbon emissions increase as Ireland plans to return to economic growth after the crisis of the Coronavirus?

Finally, I raise the question of the possible contribution that religion can make to the promoting of a culture of integral ecology in Ireland. Like most Western societies, there is a decline in the influence of religion on both sides of the border. What is more, in the Republic, the influence of the Catholic church has declined in recent years with a rapidity not seen elsewhere. This raises questions of the possible remaining influence of the Catholic church on Irish culture. Such issues were addressed by the Taoiseach, Mr. Leo Varadkar, during a speech of welcome to Pope Francis during his visit to Ireland in 2018. Mr. Varadkar was generous in acknowledging past contributions of the Catholic church to Ireland, as well as mentioning current contributions in the care of the homeless. He then quoted an Irish bishop who acknowledged that the current decline of influence of the Catholic church is due, in part, to its own “dark history...a history of sorrow and shame.” Clearly, this dark history has reduced the credibility of the Catholic church, in the eyes of many in Ireland, to comment on any ethical issues. However, the Taoiseach next asserted:

The time has now come for us to build a new relationship between church and state in Ireland - a new covenant for the 21st Century ... Building on our intertwined history, and learning from our shared mistakes, it can be one in which religion is no longer at the centre of our society, but in which it still has an important place.⁶⁹

This leads me to my final reflection. To invoke the phrase of Mr. Varadkar, might reference to the ideas and values expressed in *Laudato Si'* form part of the “important place” that the Catholic church can still play in Irish culture?

⁶⁸ In 2019, the conference was held “Forty years of MacGill and the next forty years: How to face the challenges ahead?” <http://www.macgillsummerschool.com/>

⁶⁹ “Welcome Speech of An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, on the occasion of the Visit of Pope Francis.”

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<https://www.gov.ie/en/news/d9f784-speech-of-an-taoiseach-leo-varadkar-on-the-occasion-of-the-visit-of-/>