

Ecology and Ethics

Volume 6

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This series is devoted to continuing research at the interfaces of ecology and ethics (embedded in the multiple fields of philosophy and ecology) to broaden our conceptual and practical frameworks in this transdisciplinary field. Confronted with global environmental change, the academic community still labors under a tradition of strong disciplinary dissociation that hinders the integration of ecological understanding and ethical values to comprehensively address the complexities of current socio-ecological problems. During the 1990s and 2000s, a transdisciplinary integration of ecology with social disciplines, especially economics, has been institutionalized via interdisciplinary societies, research programs, and mainstream journals. Work at this interface has produced novel techniques and protocols for assessing monetary values of biodiversity and ecosystem services, as illustrated by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. At the beginning of the 2010s, however, an equivalent integration between ecology and philosophy still remains elusive. This series undertakes the task to develop crucial theoretical and practical linkages between ecology and ethics through interdisciplinary, international, collaborative teamwork. It aims to establish a new forum and research platform to work on this vital, but until now insufficiently researched intersection between the descriptive and normative domains. The scope of this series is to facilitate the exploration of sustainable and just ways of co-inhabitation among diverse humans, and among humans and other-than-human co-inhabitants with whom we share our heterogeneous planet. It will address topics integrating the multiple fields of philosophy and ecology such as biocultural homogenization, Planetary or Earth Stewardship.

Luca Valera

Editor

Pantheism and Ecology

Cosmological, Philosophical, and Theological
Perspectives

 Springer

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Foreword

Pantheism and Ecology: Cosmological, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives is the sixth book of the Ecology and Ethics series. It complements the former volumes by introducing a new, and essential, thematic realm: eco-theology. Due to the secularization of global society, religious faith is often left out of public debates in general, and the discussion of environmental issues in particular. Although the theological dimension was not absent in our preceding books, Italian philosopher Luca Valera addresses it in a novel and systematic way in this new volume. Previously, in our series, the first volume integrated ecological sciences and environmental philosophy; the second incorporated the former disciplines into Earth Stewardship; the third presented a conceptual and practical framework to reorient ongoing biocultural homogenization drivers toward biocultural conservation processes; the fourth volume focused on the work of two European women with Mahatma Gandhi and documented their international collaborations to illustrate the value of intercultural dialogue and grassroots actions; and the fifth volume exposed how formal education can often catalyze biocultural homogenization and introduced the field environmental philosophy methodological approach to counteract this trend. Now, in this sixth volume, Valera addresses ontological and ethical dimensions by integrating some key concepts of the previous five volumes into multifaceted theological perspectives with a focus on the relationships between ecology and pantheism and panentheism.

A root interest is how God or the Divine is present in nature. This concern has weighed on the thought of philosopher theologians since deep in Judeo-Christian history and, philosophically, even earlier. They have sought to understand the very structure of nature and, therefore, how humanity is related to it. The introduction of the theological into the ecological discourse opens a new ontological horizon, since religious faith affirms that there is an intentionality in the universe; therefore, also in biophysical entities on our planet. Religious faith – Jewish and Christian and others in their own way – affirms that the cosmos, the planet Earth, and its living beings are the creation of God, who cores them with intentionality, and for pantheists and panentheists, imbues divinity into the very structure of the Earth and its living beings.

This ontological turn has crucial ethical implications. If we accept the divine character of creatures of the biophysical entities with which we cohabit on our

planet, then we must formulate a new ethical question: Are we (or are we not) respecting the intention and substance with which the cosmos (including our planet and its biodiversity) was created? The acceptance of God's imminent participation in the cosmos gives a new foundation to affirm the intrinsic value of the natural world and to respect and defend its biocultural diversity. It also (re)dimensions the role of humanity from that of a special creation apart from evolutionary processes to one of kinship with and participation in the rest of creation. As Uruguayan theologian Guillermo Kerber (this volume) states in his chapter:

An ecotheology of creation, based on the new cosmology, emphasizes that human beings are not above but within creation. The world does not belong to humans, it belongs to God, its creator. But the world is given to humans as a garden to cultivate and tend, and they thus have a relationship of responsibility towards it. In my view, this calls for an ethics of care expanded to the whole creation understood as our common home, as the subtitle of Pope Francis' encyclical evokes. Human beings can only be human and fulfil themselves as they bring the world to fulfilment by becoming involved in it by way of work and by care for it. By contrast with a destructive, dominating involvement in the Anthropocene era, a pantheistic perspective directs to maintaining the balance of creation taking care (i.e., doing justice) to the most vulnerable species (including humans) and environments.

Kerber's eco-theological perspective, undergirded by pantheistic or panentheistic concepts, resonates with a core concept of the biocultural ethic: *co-inhabitants*, which includes diverse human and other-than-human beings (Rozzi 2018). Throughout Valera's volume, the notion of creatures resonates with the concept of co-inhabitants. A particularly relevant historical figure is St. Francis of Assisi for whom the creationist belief implies a view of kinship and universal fraternity among all creatures (including humans and other beings belonging to the animal, vegetable, mineral, or other kingdoms). The idea of a divine immanence leads to ethical implications that are compatible with the biocultural concepts that cross the Ecology and Ethics series.

The concept of creatures as co-inhabitants assumes a continuity and a unity of life that is compatible with both a pantheistic or panentheistic religious worldview and an evolutionary scientific worldview. This convergence leads to a second central concept of the biocultural ethic that applies to both worldviews: *life habits* (Rozzi 2018). We co-inhabit the Earth and the cosmos with a vast diversity of human and other-than-human modes of being, each with its own life habits. From a religious and a scientific viewpoint, we can regard the diversity of forms and their unique life habits as a co-evolving process among creatures as co-inhabitants. German philosopher Konrad Ott (this volume) undertakes in his chapter this dynamic and evolutionary view to affirm that:

[A] fertile earth brings forth the spheres of the plants which, according to the Hebrew thought, are not living beings yet. Plants cover the dry land and prevent it from becoming a desert. A productive earth and its plants constitute *habitats* for living beings. Three realms (spheres) of life come into being: waters, air, and dry land (emphasis added).

Thus, the understanding of coevolved life habits leads to the notion of cogenerated *habitats*, a third core concept of the biocultural ethic. Indeed, the biocultural ethic is grounded in the conservation of habitats as the condition of possibility for the

well-being of the communities of co-inhabitants, and the continuity of complex interrelationships between biological and cultural diversity (Rozzi 2023).

We illustrate the compatibility of the religious and theological concepts with biocultural and scientific ones to stress two complementary values of Valera's volume. First, *Pantheism and Ecology* has essential continuities with concepts examined in other books of the Ecology and Ethics series. Second, *Pantheism and Ecology* challenges and fractures a still prevailing and distorted assessment of the Hebrew land tradition, what Aldo Leopold (1949, p. viii) called the "Abrahamic concept of land" because "we regard it as a commodity belonging to us" and of the Christian religion as "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen," inherited from Lynn White's (1967) influential work "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." Noteworthy, White (1967, p. 1206) ended his article by alluding to St. Francis who dispossessed humanity "from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures."

By taking up pantheism and panentheism, Luca Valera invites the reader of this book to explore and to think again ancient theological and philosophical traditions for their relevance for (re)understanding the rich diversity of values of nature. In his words, "to walk the path that leads from interest or respect for nature (i.e., the ethical issue), to the very idea of nature underlying it (i.e., the cosmological question)" (Valera this volume). Walking this path will help readers to comprehend root ethical causes of our global social-environmental crisis and (re)visualize connections between humans and the biosphere that inspire life habits grounded in social-environmental justice and the appreciation of life in its scintillating diversity.

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Preface

The focal problem of this book is the relationship between pantheism and ecology. As several papers and books have pointed out over the years of research in environmental philosophy and eco-theology, this relationship is fundamental to the perspectives of both ecology and pantheism. Indeed, pantheism offers a consistent cosmological and theological framework for ecology (considered simultaneously as a worldview, philosophy, and political activism). On the other side, ecology can be regarded as one of the most current, vivid, and politically relevant expressions of pantheism. Notwithstanding this latent interrelationship, until now it has not been deeply or seriously examined. For these reasons, it is interesting to propose a book discussing this issue, which is certainly relevant to both environmental philosophy and contemporary theological (and eco-theological) discourse.

The reason for the genesis of this book has been, first and foremost, an interest in Spinoza's cosmology, inherited from the research and insights of the father of deep ecology, Arne Næss. Such cosmology has been overlooked and misinterpreted hastily for too long, and perhaps its importance and relevance have been underestimated. Indeed, I believe many contemporary issues with both practical and metaphysical connotations – such as the ecological approach – can be reconsidered in light of the Spinozian theoretical background.

In this regard, this book simultaneously deals with three lines of research: the line that questioned the cosmology of ecology, overcoming a narrowly defined “applied” environmental ethics, in order to reconsider an environmental philosophy *tout court*; the line that has taken up and reconsidered Spinoza's philosophy, clarifying controversial issues, such as the relationship between the whole and the parts; finally, the line that has explored the issue of pantheism and its differences with pantheism or traditional theism, as well as its permeation into different cultures and religious traditions.

Pantheism is not the only theological – or cosmological – alternative to theoretically ground ecology, evidently. Other schools of thought, philosophies, theologies, or religious traditions have attempted to offer robust ecological and cosmological frameworks and tried to offer convincing answers to the current ecological crisis as well. Part I of this book precisely discusses in-depth and critically analyzes such

perspectives, particularly considering some of the main protagonists in the history of philosophy and theology. Accordingly, in Part I, following the brief history of the relationship between the whole and its parts (Chap. 1), the different co-authors of this book analyze thinkers and traditions that have critically considered or challenged pantheistic cosmology, such as Stoicism (Chap. 2); Neoplatonism and Medieval Patristics (Chap. 3); Renaissance Thinkers and Artists (Chap. 4); Spinoza (Chap. 5); Schleiermacher (Chap. 6); Rumi and Tagore (Chap. 7); Jonas (Chaps. 8 and 9); Teilhard de Chardin (Chap. 10); and Næss (Chap. 11). In this sense, Part I offers a historiographical and theoretical substantive contribution to the reflection on pantheism, beginning to introduce some elements of its connection with the ecological question (they will be deepened in Parts II and III). Thus, through this first part of the book, the reader is provided with a comprehensive overview of the historical discussion regarding pantheistic cosmology. An international expert on the subject writes each chapter. It represents, thus, a novelty in the context of the international theological and philosophical debate.

Part II delves more directly into the relationship between pantheism and ecology. In this sense, it is not only to offer a historical perspective to the topic in this part but also a thematic reflection regarding some frontier aspects between ecology and pantheism. Even in this part, several leading authors in the current contemporary debate about ecological thought are considered, such as Panikkar (Chap. 12); Tillich (Chap. 14); and Thoreau (Chap. 15); moreover, it delves into different religious or cultural traditions, such as the Native Americans tradition (Chap. 13); or the Biblical (Chap. 16) and the Christian one (Chap. 17). In addition, Part II addresses a number of metaphysical and theological issues central to the debate regarding the relationship between ecology and pantheism, such as the opposition between pantheism and theism (Chap. 18); the naturalist theology implicit in ecology (Chap. 19); the metaphysical implications of holism and reductionism (Chap. 20); the cosmology implicit in the Anthropocene narratives (Chap. 21); and the possibility of a systemic metaphysics as a consistent framework for a given cosmology (Chap. 22).

Finally, Part III deals more directly with the ethical and political concerns and consequences involved in pantheism in its current intersections with ecology. Some topics addressed in Part II are as follows: the question of boundaries and the possibility of their existence in a pantheistic or ecological cosmology (Chap. 23); the theoretical foundation of intrinsic values – a relevant issue in current environmental ethics (Chap. 24); the possibility of developing a biocultural ethics in dialogue with eco-theology (in particular, with Boff's perspective) (Chap. 25); the eco-feminist question, in relation to pantheism and panentheism (Chap. 26); the need to abandon modern reductionism for an ecological paradigm shift (Chap. 27); and, finally, the discussion of a current utopian project of applied ecology (Chap. 28).

In this sense, this book simultaneously addresses theoretical, historical, and practical issues starting from philosophical and theological viewpoints, with an evident openness to ecology as a field of application. It is also worth noticing that there is a significant presence of scholars from the Ibero-American sphere in the book, mainly due to two reasons. First, my interest in carrying out this text was also motivated by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation (“Supporting Constructive

Research on the Existence of God in Spanish-Speaking Latin America. Project number: 61559-13”) as well as my participation in a Chilean research group (Centro Cabo de Hornos – Cape Horn International Center, CHIC – project ANID N° FB210018), which both supported the present research. Second, this book is intended to address an audience that is not exclusively English-speaking, since – as far as I could perceive – there are emerging lines of thought in this area in Ibero-America that need to be emphasized.

Finally, I hope this book may offer insights for further study on the relationship between ecology, environmental ethics, and pantheism. Too often, in my opinion, the environmental philosophical discussion has been reduced to mere applied environmental ethics, or to a simplistic application of principles to compelling ecological dilemmas. In doing so, we have often overlooked the depth of such problems, which can find their meaning only in the light of a broader cosmological and metaphysical vision.

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