

Ecology and Ethics

Volume 7

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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.

Matteo Andreozzi

Reimagining Ethics

Non-anthropocentric Perspectives
on Morality

 Springer

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ISSN 2198-9729

Ecology and Ethics

ISBN 978-3-031-94869-5

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-94870-1>

ISSN 2198-9737 (electronic)

ISBN 978-3-031-94870-1 (eBook)

The original submitted manuscript has been translated into English. The translation was done using artificial intelligence. A subsequent revision was performed by the author(s) to further refine the work and to ensure that the translation is appropriate concerning content and scientific correctness. It may, however, read stylistically different from a conventional translation.

Translation from the Italian language edition: “Le Sfide dell’Etica Ambientale. Possibilità e Validità delle Teorie Morali non-antropocentriche” by Matteo Andreozzi, © Matteo Andreozzi (for English), LED (for Italian) 2015. Published by LED - Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia e Diritto - Sezione Universitaria. All Rights Reserved.

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You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

Richard Buckminster Fuller [1895–1983]

Foreword

Around the world and over millennia, a plethora of cultures and civilizations have developed myriad ways of understanding and relating to nature and its many values (Callicott 1994). Humans are capable of enjoying, and caring for, the splendid diversity of life. As documented in previous volumes of our Ecology and Ethics book series (e.g., Rozzi et al. 2013, 2015, 2018, 2023; Mallik 2022; Valera 2023), the human species has coevolved with myriads of living beings on a vast diversity of ecosystems across the globe. However, in our current global society the life habits as well as policies, regulations, planning, and development processes that prevail across all levels of government tend to be narrowly anthropocentric, prioritizing only human interests based mostly on economic values and decision-making processes. This narrow anthropocentrism has also permeated mainstream Western ethics embedded in global society today.

In this context, this volume examines the new field of environmental ethics as a discipline of philosophy that is widely affirmed, and its theoretical foundations have been discussed and debated now through many years of reflection, mostly within academic circles in which there still are no universal agreements regarding its formal and material foundations. Yet, the numerous reflections, because of their different emphases and focuses, offer a rich milieu for re-imagining environmental ethics in creative and non-anthropocentric ways that could inspire and orient global society to cultivate more respectful ways of cohabiting with the vast and diverse forms of life with whom we share our planet. This is the task that Italian philosopher Matteo Andreozzi embraces in *Reimagining Ethics, Non-anthropocentric Perspectives on Morality*, the seventh book in the Ecology and Ethics series.

Notably, it brings a fresh and imaginative contribution to the discussion of moral patients, asking the question about the moral status of non-human entities without being anti-humanist. Andreozzi opens and develops his book continuously recalling and examining ancient roots as well as contemporary perspectives of Western sciences and philosophy about understanding and valuing the natural world and the place of humans in it. His approach is particularly valuable for two central reasons.

First, it helps readers to better appreciate the rich diversity, and complexity, of perspectives in Western sciences and philosophies. Hence, the book will prepare

students, scholars, and other readers to be better prepared to make distinctions among Western schools of thought whose focuses range from strong or narrow anthropocentric to weak or broader anthropocentric, and farther to bio- and eco-centric perspectives, which value the existences and interests of all forms of life and components of ecosystems.

Second, Andreozzi's narrative interweaves science and philosophy, particularly ethics. Linking ecological and evolutionary sciences with environmental ethics is a major task to overcome the puzzling dichotomy between facts and values that permeated the twentieth century (Callicott 1989, Rozzi 1999). The book explains complementary forms of knowledge and wisdom supported by concepts and methods of Western sciences and philosophies that are explained in detail based on fundamental thinkers and schools of thought that offer solid foundations for an informed twenty-first-century environmental ethics.

By interacting with traditional ethics and longstanding philosophical approaches to environmental ethics, Andreozzi proposes a novel framework for comprehending the formal and material basis for environmental philosophy. As the author explains,

[I]n order to frame in a moral perspective the entire spectrum of our relations with the non-human natural world, it is not only not at all necessary to overturn the most traditional ethical paradigms, but it is also indispensable to use their theoretical coordinates. (Andreozzi 2025, p. xi)

This plurality of moral theories characterizes environmental ethics, and each approach makes its own contribution. What is needed, Andreozzi argues, is to "smooth out" these differences and bring them into a coherent and broader moral framework for environmental philosophy. This requires "an analytical commitment, aimed at analyzing the issues, clarifying the terms and categories used, and correctly setting up the arguments." Likewise, "a hermeneutic effort is also needed, interested not so much in the answers, but in the questions to ask, their theoretical assumptions, and the expectations of meaning that are detected in them" (Andreozzi 2025, p. xi).

Considering these concerns and in view of outlining a non-anthropocentric ethic, each chapter explicitly or implicitly deals with the formal and material validity of relevant philosophical systems. Finally, Andreozzi concludes that only by reconciling traditional ethics with environmental ethics and its variety of proposals that a consensus regarding the formal and material foundations of environmental ethics can be achieved. When that happens, a new paradigm for environmental ethics can emerge.

Andreozzi's arguments are provocative and stimulating. They lead the reader through a long line of philosophical positions, test one's ability to pay close attention to fine lines of argument, and stretch one's imagination toward novel interpretations of metaphysical and normative concepts. Taking them together, they provide a stimulating intellectual exercise that forces clarity on the fundamental questions of environmental ethics: what entities are morally considerable, why, and how do we treat them. The answers given are hardly esoteric. They have everything to do with living on planet earth. The philosophical issues may be theoretical abstractions, but

they are required for practical effectiveness to address real-world concerns. This book does this very well.

To confront a sense of arrogant dominion over biological and cultural diversity that drives today a massive ecocide (Baquedano 2019), previous volumes in the Ecology and Ethics series have explained how humans and their non-human co-inhabitants “co-constitute” each other. Consequently, humans are continuously searching for appropriate behaviors on the habitats and landscapes we share with communities of co-inhabitants (Rozzi 2012; May 2015). This ethical search inevitably involves a human-centered endeavor—i.e., a degree of “anthropocentrism”—at the heart of environmental ethics. Hence, we need “imagination” for respectfully cohabiting in biological and cultural diversity. With his comprehensive book, Andreozzi offers the readers novel and informed philosophical foundations to forge a “re-imagined environmental ethics.” This book and its ethical proposals can orient humans amidst the complex challenges and marvelous opportunities offered to individuals and societies to peacefully and integrally fulfill their lives in the twenty-first century.

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Preface

Traditional ethics has long restricted its reflection to only human *persons*: individuals endowed (in fact or potentially) with capabilities such as reason, judgment, deliberation, decision, and will. This last notion, once restricted in Western Civilization to only white, adult, and fully developed males, has been increasingly extended over the centuries, to include various subjects previously discriminated against (e.g., women, children, ethnic minorities, differently-abled individuals, etc.). Nevertheless, rarely has the need been questioned to keep the moral community restricted to the human sphere alone. Within Western philosophy, the substantial coincidence between human beings and *moral patients* has historically prevented the expansion of moral interest beyond its general and yet vast attention directed towards human communities.

Nevertheless, several problems are challenging the previous view. Phenomena such as pollution, the depletion of resources, climate change, land consumption, and the exploitation of non-human animals are just some of the reasons that have stimulated an increasing number of philosophers to deal with obligations towards non-human nature. While it is simple, in general, to understand the need to change our behaviors in daily practices, the philosophical challenge of reevaluating our relationship with the environment from a moral perspective remains open.

Meeting this challenge is one of the most recent and active fields of investigation: environmental *ethics*. In an attempt to set limits to our actions *in* and *on* the natural world, extending the status of moral patient beyond the paradigmatic ideal of human beings, this discipline is characterized as one of the most controversial areas of philosophical and interdisciplinary studies. On the one hand, indeed, it has been welcomed into the philosophical debate as an excessively revolutionary reflection, if not also anti-humanist. At best, environmental ethics has been simply understood only as a form of ethics applied to nature: an ethics of management or, better said, of the use of the environment. On the other hand, the discipline does not present itself at all as a single well-defined moral theory: there is no agreement, even among the most authoritative experts in the field, regarding its formal and material foundations. Establishing unequivocally what the coordinates of these same foundations are is however considered indispensable to support the duty to respect the

environment in a way that can be said, in addition to being philosophically rigorous, also convincing.

This book represents an attempt to illustrate and critically discuss the conditions of *possibility*, *formal validity*, and *material validity* of the discipline, and at the same time, also the effort to reconcile both traditional ethics with environmental ethics and the various theoretical proposals present within this latter field of investigation. What I will try to show is that environmental ethics is characterized by numerous moral theories worthy of greater philosophical consideration. It also, in directing its attention to issues of extreme relevance for the global agenda, which will need to be addressed in a few decades, contains an invitation to research that is current and stimulating. This invitation has been accepted by me with great interest and with great personal passion. I hope that the critical reflections contained in this volume will arouse the same interest and the same passion for the issues raised by environmental ethics in other scholars: not only admirers but also detractors of the subject.

The three main objectives of my research are *to defend* the possibility of an environmental ethics that can legitimately be defined as a non-anthropocentric moral theory, *to show* the formal and material validity of some of the most significant moral systems present within the scope of this field of investigation, and to *advance* a theoretical synthesis that makes evident not only the need to give greater consideration to the entire discipline but also to revisit and further develop the philosophical debate initiated by it. In pursuing the first objective, my commitment is primarily aimed at showing how the profound contemporary reevaluation of the relationship between humanity and nature has made it possible to establish an ethic capable of extending the status of moral patient well beyond the paradigmatic ideal of human beings. About the second objective, my purpose is to provide an original classification of some of the main moral theories that, from this perspective, have been advanced over the last decades and to demonstrate their validity by reinserting them within rigorous theoretical coordinates. I develop the third and most delicate objective by looking at the challenges posed to and by environmental ethics through the adoption of a perspective external to the discipline itself. I intend to smooth out the divergences among the different theoretical proposals and to bring these closer to the speculative and practical interests of a broader moral reflection.

The thesis I support is that, even without totally abandoning the most accepted argumentative structures within the Western philosophical tradition, there are several opportunities to admit not only the possibility but also the *duty* to respect various types of natural entities. To defend this thesis, I will delve into the problem of possibility, formal validity, and material validity of environmental ethics by exploring them based on lines of research opened by three different types of moral questions. Through the first question, predominantly *metaethical*, the discipline asks itself which other entities, in addition to the paradigmatic ideal of human being, have moral status and on which moral values it is based. Through the second question, a *normative ethics* question, it instead asks how it is right to behave towards the moral patients that are identifiable based on the answers given to the first question. With the third question, finally, *environmental ethics* questions, this time from an

existentialist ethical perspective, what our ability or inability to find answers to the problems raised by the previous questions tells us about ourselves. In demonstrating the priority of metaethical issues and, within these, the problem related to the values intrinsic to the environment, I will try to illustrate how, in order to frame in a moral perspective the entire spectrum of our relations with the non-human natural world, it is not only not at all necessary to overturn the most traditional ethical paradigms, but it is also indispensable to use their theoretical coordinates. Although differently declined according to the different currents of thought existing within environmental ethics, it is precisely these coordinates that guarantee the possibility, the formal validity, and the material validity of the same non-anthropocentric ethical systems that I will examine.

Inserting itself in the complex debate that characterizes contemporary environmental ethics, this study could not fail to consider those that are absolute priorities within this kind of philosophical speculation. What is needed is first an analytical commitment, aimed at analyzing the issues, clarifying the terms and categories used, and correctly setting up the arguments. However, a hermeneutic effort is also needed, interested not so much in the answers, but in the questions to ask, their theoretical assumptions, and the expectations of meaning that are detected in them. Aware of both these priorities, I have therefore set up and tackled the central problems dealt with here following a style and a coherent structure both with analytical needs and with hermeneutic ones.

I divided my work into four chapters. The first and second frame environmental ethics as a field of philosophical investigation and explore its foundations. There, I introduce the discipline, describe its objectives, and analyze above all the questions related to the *possibility* of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. Focusing on the different types of moral patients identified, in the third chapter I address the *problem of formal and material validity* of the different environmental ethics. In this sense, I provide a systematic classification, a summary, and a critical analysis of the proposals advanced by some of the most representative authors of this field of investigation. In the fourth and final chapter I review, critically analyze, and further develop some concepts and arguments discussed in the previous chapters, trying to outline the margins of a *theoretical proposal* capable of reconciling both traditional ethics with environmental ethics and the different environmental ethics illustrated.

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Matteo Andreozzi

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of more than 15 years of academic research in the field of environmental ethics. During these years, my arguments have greatly benefited from various conversations with professors and scholars, both Italian and foreign.

I am particularly indebted to Paolo D'Alessandro, Guido Dalla Casa, Simone Mazzata, Carlo Baroncelli, Gabriele Cambiotti, Alessandro Zucchi, Enrico Giannetto, Matteo Ciastellardi, Piergiacomo Pagano, Massimo Filippi, Silvana Castiglione, Piero Giordanetti, Myriam Giargia, Gianfranco Mormino, Roberto Marchesini, Roberto Peverelli, Paolo Spinicci, Andrea Zhok, Franco Sarcinelli, Marco Celentano, Arianna Ferrari, Paolo Zecchinato, Santi Barbagallo, and Alessandro Poli. My gratitude also goes to the numerous Italian students and research doctors with whom I have had the opportunity to compare my positions, always receiving valuable comments. I particularly thank Alessandro Ferrante, Silvia Cova, Francesca Rebasti, Sara Fumagalli, Sofia Bonicalzi, Roberta Pasini, Giovanni Casartelli, Davide Bordini, Sonia Ghidoni, Eleonora Adorni, Davide Giavina, Michela Ferri, Raffaella Colombo, Andrea Marini, Davide Balzano, Costanza Brevini, Carlo Peroni, Silvia Riberti, Selva Varengo, Irene Berra, Ettore Brocca, Cristina Renoldi, Anna Gorga, Luca Servidati, Davide Menga, Ivano Alogna, Paolo Meola, Cristina Cattò, and Jacopo Frascaroli.

My thinking has been deeply influenced by the books of numerous authors, whom I feel the need to thank: the clarity of the precious work of systematization and philosophical analysis by scholars such as Luisella Battaglia, Sergio Bartolommei, Barbara de Mori, Paul Taylor, Leena Vilkkä, Andrew Kernohan, and Dale Jamieson has indeed been enlightening for me. For the attention paid to my studies, I also thank Joel MacClellan, Rod Bennison, Kim Stallwood, Warwick Fox, Carol J. Adams, Greta Gaard, William Grove-Fanning, Ralph R. Acampora, Matthew Calarco, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Holmes Rolston III, and the recently deceased David Richard Keller. During the research stay I spent at the Rachel Carson Center of the Ludwig—Maximilians-Universität Munich, I also benefited from the comments, criticisms, and encouragement of professors such as Christof Mauch, Markus Vogt, Bron Taylor, and Dennis Meadows. I thank these people for their valuable teachings and for their generosity and openness. I also wish to thank

all the scholars with whom I collaborated in Munich. In particular, I am mainly indebted for the comments and criticisms received from Yolanda López-Maldonado, Antonia Mehnert, Ewald Blocher, Shrabana Datta, Amir Zelinger, Stefan Esselborn, Nicole Heinzl, Guivon Zumbado, Sebastian Kistler, Lawrence Ibeh, and Jihee Kim. For the constant support received, I affectionately thank all the staff of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Milan and the Rachel Carson Center in Munich. A sincere thanks goes especially to Ugo Eccli, Maurizio Vitagliani, Luciano Ardia, Francesca Iglío, Chiara Ottolini, Elisabeth Zellmer, and Annka Liepold.

I would like to extend a special thanks to some people who, during the writing of this volume, followed me very closely. I am deeply indebted and grateful especially to Laura Boella. Her encouragement, her trust, and her continuous criticisms have allowed me to have academic experiences of fundamental importance for my training: I sincerely hope to be able to treasure all her teachings. I extend an affectionate thanks also to Serenella Iovino: in addition to introducing me to the study of environmental ethics, she has continuously supported me, believing in my abilities and intuitions. Having had the opportunity to constantly confront myself with established scholars of science and literature such as, respectively, Marco Ferraguti and Franco Brevini was then of crucial importance for my research. I therefore sincerely thank these two professors, both for their encouragement and for their suggestions. I also thank Valeria Passerini, responsible for the LED publishing house, for being passionate about my studies, for having constantly urged me to publish them, and for having read and commented on all my works.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Ricardo Rozzi, Luca Valera, Roy May, and Simone Theron, who discovered my work and appreciated its value. Their encouragement has been the driving force behind updating my research as well as writing it in English language, for an international audience. The editorial work conducted by Rozzi, May, and Valera was supported by the National Agency for Research and Development (ANID CHIC—ANID PIA/BASAL (PFB210018), Ministry of Sciences, Innovation, and Technology in Chile. Hence, this book is also a contribution to the Cape Horn International Center (CHIC), Puerto Williams, Chile. Their unwavering support and constant companionship throughout this journey have been invaluable. Without their enthusiasm and dedication, this achievement would not have been possible.

I thank all the people and institutions mentioned here for helping me strengthen my arguments and improve my critical thinking skills and philosophical writing. I sincerely hope to have been able to put into practice all their advice and to include in my work all their comments. If any possible merit eventually recognizable to this

research is half also theirs, any demerit related to typos and inaccuracies, both conceptual and substantial, is only mine.

On a personal level, I would like to thank my family, for always supporting me, and my beloved ones in general, for the patience and the constancy with which they have been able to stand by me in these years. It is to them that I dedicate with deep affection this book.

December 6, 2024

M. A. Milan

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