

The Eco-Genesis of Ethics and Religion

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In the face of environmental crisis we urgently need agreement, across cultures and nations, on the moral significance of the biosphere. Environmental philosophers have tried to reason their way towards such moral accord by devising arguments for environmental ethics. But arguments crumple in the face of people's established moral convictions. Moral 'truth' is not a product of reason; rather it is hatched inside stories, the kind of primal stories that have been the province of myth and religion. Historically, such stories have been inescapably culturally specific and relative. Is it possible in the modern world to imagine a common story, one that could emanate in a global moral commitment to our increasingly stricken natural world? Could science for instance serve as such a universal story? This is doubtful. Science may be a universal form of knowledge but it is not a story because stories are inherently normative, and science is normatively neutral. Yet a universal story, one which can be seen to subtend all religions and all ethics, and is in fact the very ground of meaning per se, is currently coming into view. It is a story which has been backgrounded throughout the history of civilization but is coming to light again in face of the planetary crisis that is now in full swing. It is none other than the life-story of the Earth.

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