

# Approaches to Environmental Issues in Argentina from the Perspective of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy

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## **In the beginning**

We did not have a detailed study of the way in which reflections of environmental ethics and philosophy have been introduced into the region. In principle, the knowledge seems to have arrived with the translation of *A Philosophy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the central chapter of a book by the Polish eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski.<sup>1</sup>

From there, I approached the dictation of the first courses on the subject, such as 'Eco-philosophy' in 1981, and 'Eco-philosophy: the issue of 'life' in the philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries' in 1985, both at the University of Morón. I maintained an interchange with Skolimowski, about his confrontation with the American thinker George Sessions in "The Dogma of Anti-Anthropocentrism and Ecophilosophy" (Environmental Ethics, 1984; Vol 6: 167-74). This exchange with the Polish philosopher brought me closer to the novel proposals of the Deep Ecology movement.

From the beginning, in Argentina it remained difficult to access the bibliography of philosophy and environmental ethics that was taking place and multiplying in certain regions of America and Europe. This difficulty still persists, and for this reason the subject has not been sufficiently extended into local academic mediums. Within the framework of these limitations, which can be considered precursors to the problem of spreading environmental awareness from the philosophical perspective in Argentina, I wrote some of my first works.<sup>2</sup>

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# Translated by Charmayne Staloff and Ricardo Rozzi.

<sup>1</sup> From the work *Eco-philosophy. Designing new tactics for living*, Marion Boyars, Boston, London. The chapter mentioned appeared in the journal *Mutantia*, number 2, 1980:83-97 (edited by the Argentinean writer and environmentalist Miguel Grinberg).

<sup>2</sup> In particular, the article "La eco-filosofía como actitud" (Environmental Philosophy as an Attitude) *Mutantia* 15-16, Buenos Aires, 1983, and the chapters: "Aproximación a la eco-filosofía" (Approaches to Eco-philosophy) in the collection *El Pensamiento en los Umbrales del siglo XXI (Thinking at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)* Buenos Aires, Edit. Catálogo, 1994; the chapter 'Problems of Eco-philosophy' in the collection *La Filosofía en los laberintos del presente (Philosophy in the labyrinths of the present)* Buenos Aires, Edit. Biblos, 1995; my article "On Gods, Thinkers and Ecologists" Buenos Aires, Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1995; and the articles "Ética y Biodiversidad" (Ethics and Biodiversity) *Gerencia Ambiental* 19, Buenos Aires, 1995; "El Hombre y su lugar en la biosfera" (Man and his place in the biosphere) *El Arca* 14, Fundación Banco Mercantil, Buenos Aires, 1995; "Singularidad del Conflicto Ambiental" (The Singularity of the Environmental Conflict) *Empresa y Medio Ambiente*, Buenos Aires, April 1997.

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**The diversity of approaches**

In order to exemplify the diversity of approaches to environmental philosophy in Argentina, I will mention the work of some of its more outstanding centers of diffusion. At the risk of excessive simplification, we can group local work into three main thematic areas:

I) In the first place, the work on environmental ethics and its relationship with the possibility of sustainable development. In this area, an interdisciplinary group of philosophers and ecologists from the University of Salta's Institute of Ecology and Human Environment (Instituto de Ecología y Ambiente Humano) has developed a rich research program on the Humanity – Nature bond. The themes dealt with the most revolve around environmental ethics, epistemology of ecology, and the study of the sustainability of natural and human systems in the country, among others. This interdisciplinary group has collectively produced approximately twenty articles, including: "Constituye el modelo de la sustentabilidad una alternativa" ("Constituting the model of an alternative sustainability") (2006), and "El ambiente como bien público: conceptos y problemáticas" ("The Environment for the Public Good: Concepts and Problems") (2007) (ref: Raquel Cornejo rcornejo@unsa.edu.ar)

In this first area we can also place the works of Maria Teresa la Valle, Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires, on environmental ethics. Professor La Valle has particular interest in the Argentine farming systems and their impact on the health, food, and the natural capital of the country. At the present time, her work is centered on farming systems and the effects of economic globalization on the option of political determinations of sustainable agriculture. Within that context, she studies the standards of international economics of agricultural trade, analyzing it from the perspective of international justice. More simply, she works on the concept of property of the Earth and the rights that are implied - as well as those that are not implied – concerning the use of the Earth. Professor Valle has published works on the theme of the environment, has given many lectures, and regularly participates in round tables and international congresses. (ref: mtlavalle@hotmail.com)

II) A second tendency is grounded in the historical roots of contemporary environmental thought, centered in ancient and medieval philosophy, with special attention paid to Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Saint Augustine.<sup>3</sup> Diverse works approach subjects such as the metaphysics of the soul and the cosmos and the doctrine of contemplation in relation to eco-philosophy, up to an analysis of the paradigm of ecophilosophy in contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> The products of investigation can be considered: "Proyección del Paradigma Plotiniano del Alma Universal en la Ecología Contemporánea" (Projection of the Plotinian Paradigm of the Universal Soul in Contemporary Ecology) (2000-2002). "La Experiencia de lo Sagrado: enfoque interdisciplinario" (The Experience of the Asylum: An Interdisciplinary Approach) (2003-2005). "La Experiencia mística: líneas actuales de investigación" (The Mystical Experience: Present Lines of Investigation) (2006-2007)

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thought.<sup>4</sup> These books have been accompanied by the production of a series of articles and presentations, related to themes such as the question of contemplation in eco-philosophy, the vision of Aristotle and Plotinus; the projection of the Plotinian paradigm of the universal soul in contemporary ecology, and Doctrina of Providence in Plotinus and its use in eco-philosophy. (ref: Patricia Ciner, [patriciaciner@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:patriciaciner@yahoo.com.ar))

III) Thirdly, I would group investigations on gestalt ontology, ecosophy, weak anthropocentrism, biocentrism, thick ethical concepts, deep ecology, etc. The department of Philosophy at Del Salvador University at San Miguel, Buenos Aires, supervises a variety of investigations in eco-philosophy. One example is my doctoral work on the thought of Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and characterization of the different versions of the Deep Ecology movement from the philosophical influences of the ontology of Baruch Spinoza and the classical pragmatism of William James. From this investigation, I produced diverse publications, both national and foreign.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Shown by the book by Ciner, P.; Adárvez M.; Flores, O.; Poblete, M. *Ecofilosofía. Una tradición antigua y nueva a la vez, (Eco-philosophy: An Old and New Tradition at Once)* 2004, published by a research team at the Institute of Philosophy, of the Faculty of Philosophy, Humanities and Arts, of the National University of San Juan. Also in 2004 they published the book: Ciner, P.; Castro, J.; Poblete, M., and others: *La Experiencia de lo Sagrado: enfoque interdisciplinario*, (The Experience of the Asylum: An Interdisciplinary Approach) at the same university.

<sup>5</sup> I cite my articles: “Las ideas de *naturaleza* en la Ecología Profunda y sus implicancias prácticas” (The ideas of *nature* in the Deep Ecology and its practical implications), *Ludus Vitalis, Revista de Filosofía de las Ciencias de la Vida*, vol. 10 number 17, 1st semester 2002, México;  
“Los cambios conceptuales sobre conservación y su influencia en la gestión de Reservas de Biosfera” (The Conceptual Shifts on Conservation and their Influence on the Management of Biosphere Reserves) in *Boletín Electrónico de Reservas de la Biosfera, de América Latina y Caribe* Number 2, Programa del Hombre y la Biosfera (Program on Man and the Biosphere), MAB-UNESCO, September 2001, [www.unesco.org.uy/mab/boletín\\_mab.kineo.com.ar/files/002/bugallo.pdf](http://www.unesco.org.uy/mab/boletín_mab.kineo.com.ar/files/002/bugallo.pdf)

“Cómo se replantean las metas de la modernidad, a la luz de la problemática ambiental contemporánea” (How the goals of modernity are reframed in light of the contemporary environmental problem), 2004, I Primer Seminario Internacional sobre Pensamiento Ambiental, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Manizales, [www.manizales.unal.edu.co/modules/unrev\\_ideasAmb/documentos/IAEdicion1Alicia1.pdf](http://www.manizales.unal.edu.co/modules/unrev_ideasAmb/documentos/IAEdicion1Alicia1.pdf)

“Modalidades de cambio de paradigma cultural en la filosofía ambiental; pernetarianismo, ecologismo posmoderno y ecología profunda” (Modalities of cultural paradigm shift in environmental philosophy), 2004, I Primer Seminario Internacional sobre Pensamiento Ambiental, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Manizales, [www.manizales.unal.edu.co/modules/unrev\\_ideasAmb/documentos/IAEdicion1Alicia2.pdf](http://www.manizales.unal.edu.co/modules/unrev_ideasAmb/documentos/IAEdicion1Alicia2.pdf)

“Ecología profunda y biocentrismo, ante el advenimiento de la era pos-natural” (Deep Ecology and biocentrism, before the coming of the post-natural era), *Revista Cuadernos del Sur/Filosofía* Number 34, 2005, Universidad Nacional del Sur, Departamento de Humanidades, (National University of the South, Department of Humanities), Bahía Blanca, pp. 141-162;

‘Algunos aspectos distintivos de la filosofía ambiental, en lo que hace a su relación con la ciencia’ (Some Distinct Aspects of Environmental Philosophy and their Relation to Science), 2006, II Encuentro

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At Del Salvador University, they also advance the doctoral work of Ricardo Pobierzym on the profound relations between the thought of Martin Heidegger and the ecophilosophical proposals such as those of Arne Naess, and the mission of ecosophy before the end of nature (ref: rpobierzym@yahoo.com.ar).

The recent book from independent researcher Andrea Speranza, *Deep Ecology and autorrealización*, 2006, Buenos Aires, Edit. Biblos, has been very useful in contributing an analysis of *Ecosophy T* by Arne Naess with an ample bibliography.

Already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ties between local thinkers occupied with environmental philosophy and/or environmentalists, has tightened, and joint participation is more and more frequents in round tables, work days and seminars. Also, joint work between philosophers and environmentalists of other countries is motivating reflection, as can be seen by the production of the forthcoming book *Ideas in Ecological Philosophy*. This is a volume of critical content, characterized by diverse approaches and subjects, in which philosophers, ecologists and environmentalists from Mexico, Chile, and Spain, in addition to the Argentineans (Monjeau, Bugallo, Speranza, Pobierzym, Toledo, Erlwein, Lara, Pradenas, among others) participate.

Hopefully, greater diffusion of these works will allow us to share and deepen the reflections on the diverse subjects of investigation, as well as to present and to exchange critical publications and contributions. It is desirable, at the same time, to bring up to date ways towards that necessary political turn in environmental philosophy, that will allow the environmental thinker to project beyond the academy and the closed dialogue among peers.

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Latinoamericano de Filosofía y Medio Ambiente, II Seminario Internacional sobre Pensamiento Ambiental, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Manizales,  
[www.manizales.unal.edu.co/modules/unrev\\_ideasAmb/documentos/1Aedicion3.pdf](http://www.manizales.unal.edu.co/modules/unrev_ideasAmb/documentos/1Aedicion3.pdf)

“Espacio interdisciplinar para las ciencias y la ecofilosofía” (Interdisciplinary space for the sciences and philosophy) *Ludus Vitalis, Revista de Filosofía de las Ciencias de la Vida*, vol. 14 number 26, 1st semester 2006, pp. 207-210, México;

‘Conflictos ambientales y filosofía’ (Environmental Conflicts and Philosophy) in *Revista Gestión y Ambiente*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Antioquia, Vol. 9 Number 2, August 2006, pp.5-12;0

“Vínculos significativos entre filosofía ambiental y ciencias” (Significant bonds between environmental philosophy and science), en *Revista Gestión y Ambiente*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Antioquia, Vol. 10 Number 1, May 2007;

“Por una ética del consumo ambientalmente responsable” (Towards an ethics of environmentally responsible consumption), in *Revista CIAS*, Centro de Investigación y Acción Social, número dedicado a ‘La ecología social’ (Social Ecology), Year 56, Number 564-565, May-June 2007, pp. 159-169.