

# Ecology and Ethics

## Volume 3

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## **Ecology and Ethics**

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.

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# From Biocultural Homogenization to Biocultural Conservation

 Springer

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# Foreword

The challenging issue of global biocultural homogenization is comprehensively presented and discussed in this important book – and its arrival is none too soon! Biocultural homogenization, as defined by Rozzi et al. in the first chapter of the book, “entails the interwoven losses of native biological and cultural diversity at local, regional, and global scales.” This issue of biocultural homogenization is neither widely understood nor is its importance adequately appreciated even while it is occurring at an accelerating rate. This book will be an important aid in increasing recognition of the issue and its importance.

Homogenization is one outcome of an ever-increasing emphasis on the goal of economic efficiency, albeit it is a goal that is generally very narrowly defined. This goal of efficiency drives societies to move toward approaches focused upon production of singular outcomes, such as of food or fiber, without regard to the consequences to nature or to local cultures. Furthermore, these days the efforts toward economically efficient production of commodities are organized so as to primarily benefit global capital markets. This leads to such outcomes as the replacement (indeed, destruction) of family farms by corporate enterprises, all in the guise of economic efficiency. Of course, in turn this leads to practices which frequently have very negative effects on native biological diversity and local cultures.

This homogenization in pursuit of efficiency represents incredible threats to native biological and cultural diversity, if we truly care about such things. Homogenization is about simplification and standardization in many forms whereas nature and culture are about complexity and diversity. Approaches that incorporate complexity and diversity are not as efficient in the pursuit of many singular goals, such as production of food and fiber. However, approaches that conserve complexity and diversity are approaches that achieve multiple rather than singular objectives with their activities, reduce risks from both natural and social upheavals, and increase future societal options.

I would venture that there are powerful, fundamentally maleficent forces that specifically do not value diversity and do not wish to see it conserved. Do global capital markets really see value in diversity, other than a diversity of portfolios? Do global corporations see value in local solutions, local markets? Is there a wide

appreciation that the pursuit of efficiency, of homogenization, can lead to dysfunctional outcomes for global societies? For example, is there real concern in the United States for improving the opportunities and conditions of the diversity represented by rural America? I worry a great deal about the answers to such questions as these.

Forests are the ecosystems that I am most familiar with, and they offer great examples of some of the challenges that are faced as we attempt to deal with the issue of biocultural homogenization. There has been a global movement toward the creation and management of plantations of exotic tree species in pursuit of efficient production of wood fiber, much of this in the southern hemisphere. In the last several decades, this movement has been driven by global capital markets that invest in wood production as yet another means of seeking high returns on capital. The emphasis on capital return has put an economic cap on the already highly agronomic approaches associated with plantation forestry. The collective consequences have been what I call fiber farms, which involve practices that ignore other services and goods that are provided by forest ecosystems as well as the stability of local communities and viability of other forest landownerships. The only environmental constraints on such practices are those that are imposed by legal authorities present in the regions where such plantations are grown. Usually the harvested wood goes to the global market that is willing to pay the most for it and not to a local wood processing facility, which might result in greater economic benefits for local communities. Forest landowners who wish to manage for a diversity of values are challenged because they must find markets and compete in a global wood products economy dominated by the fiber farms.

This highly simplified, homogenized approach to wood production finds support in many quarters, including a globalized economy and history, and there are many similarities here between forestry and agriculture and fisheries. I have already talked about how a capital-dominated global economy favors homogenization and the marginalization of other forest values, except where governmental authorities insist otherwise. The dominant focus of the forestry profession on wood production as the most important use of forestland has been largely congruent with the emphasis on homogenization and efficiency in pursuit of a singular outcome.<sup>1</sup> Local communities and governments are advised that the homogenized approach is in their best economic interest and sometimes told that this is the only real way to do sustainable forestry. (The same is presented regarding corporate agriculture and fish farms.) Forestry as a profession has failed to even conceive, let alone demonstrate to society, credible alternatives to intensive plantation management based on clearcutting and even-aged management.<sup>2</sup> The foresters have been abetted by the community of academic conservation biologists who argue that native biodiversity can only be conserved in preserves – areas that are set aside from human societies (as if such a

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<sup>1</sup>Franklin, J. F., K. N. Johnson, and D. L. Johnson 2018. *Ecological forest management*. 646 p. Long Grove, IL, USA: Waveland Press.

<sup>2</sup>Bennett, Brett. 2015. *Plantations and protected areas. A global history of forest management*. 201 p. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.

thing was possible in the twenty-first century!). Biodiversity will not be preserved primarily by separating it from humankind but, rather, must be a part of conserved bioculture.

This book is an important contribution to the dialogue and hard work that is ultimately required to conserve as much as we can of diverse bioculture. The future of native biodiversity and local human societies are linked and face the same array of challenges. Many ideas, concepts, and examples are laid down in this volume that can move this important work forward. We are talking here about nothing less than the future of humankind – is it to be a homogenized future or one that nurtures diversity and the richness and resilience that it brings?

Let us all get on with it!

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