

Editorial: An Earth-Centered (Ecocentric) Manifesto

By [John A. Livingston](#)

Editor's Note: The authors of [A Manifesto for Earth](#) are pleased to have received this endorsement by John A Livingston which was published along with the Manifesto in 'Biodiversity' 5(1): 3-9 January/March 2004

The task of conceiving - much less articulating - an ethics to transcend the short-term human interest would to most of us seem daunting or downright intimidating. But Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe did conceive of it and have delivered it.

I used to be attracted to the Gaia hypothesis, which presented Earth as an organism. I liked the metaphor, but a figure of speech simply isn't good enough. Mosquin and Rowe are not being metaphoric. The Ecosphere in which we live is a web that envelops all organisms and ecosystems, that gave rise to life in the first place, and that sustains it now. Every organism and every ecosystem is a full participant. From this sensibility the authors propose an *ecocentric* ethics - a statement of moral principles intended to help us move away from human-centered and even organism-centered modes of being toward one governed by awareness of our participation in a total, all-subsuming and inter-relating, one-time-only event.

A Manifesto for Earth is addressed to just one species among the 25 million, more or less, that inhabit the Ecosphere. This might seem peculiar to a far distant, first-time observer. Shouldn't all species be given moral guidance? What is so special about this one? The observer is due for a sharp loss of innocence. Uniquely, the human species invented abstract ethical codification out of sheer necessity. Others didn't have to.

The human animal has been hugely successful -dexterous, adaptable, gifted in many ways, but most especially in cerebral affairs. Our technical ingenuity is matched only by the extraordinary power and creativity of our rationalizations for the things we do. Some of our more elegant constructions arise in time of war, when all manner of unspeakable acts require convoluted justification. But other rationalizations pale in comparison to ancient, profound, and unshakeable conviction that the human species has the right - and the implicit obligation - to freely take, consume, and even eliminate other species and their habitats anywhere they may be encountered, and for any human purpose whatsoever. The human privilege over the Ecosphere is blessed; it is absolute.

Our self-appointed proprietorship over, and freedom of action against, any and all species, communities and ecosystems presently imperil the Ecosphere. The inexorable diminution of ecosystem diversity calls for close scrutiny of our self-image, our posture in the world, and the undeniable responsibilities that flow from our present dominant position in it. Such a critical exercise would be of little avail however, without measures to cap human population increase. Our numbers

have more than trebled in my own lifetime! In their "action principles" Mosquin and Rowe present this as an ethical matter. Many of us, culturally conditioned as we all are, will have difficulty extending *ethical* concern beyond the human interest. Some hard thinking may be required. But causing more of us to pause and reflect is of course the whole point of the Manifesto. I wish it every success.

John A. Livingston, Salt Spring Island, B.C. February, 2004.

[Other Ecocentric Texts](#)