# The Living Earth and Its Ethical Priority

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**Abstract**

"Living Earth" means that Earth is the carrier of the vitalizing essence or animating principle here capitalized as "Life" to differentiate it from "life" as traditionally associated with organic things alone. Planet Earth exhibits cyclic processes of organic construction known as "aliveness" and of inorganic/organic deconstruction named "deadness," and the various states or phases of these closely integrated processes have developed within and dependently on Earth's air/water/land ecosystems -- named "geoecosystems" because they are place-specific. Thus Earth, the Ecosphere, and its sectoral geoecosystems -- resembling mega-terrariums and mega-aquariums with all their organic/inorganic contents -- have from the beginning of time been the evolutionary source and purveyors of "Life." While metaphorical language has equated "life" only with organisms, ecological knowledge by revealing the importance of context shows that Earth is synonymous with "Life" in its larger sense. When the miraculous quality "Life" is located in Earth and its geoecosystems, a realistic foundation is established for a new kind of extra-human ethics: Ecological Ethics or Ecospheric Ethics. The axiom that creative Earth is primary and organisms secondary does not devalue people as such, but it moves the focus of their responsible actions from the narrow social level to the more encompassing ecological level.

**Introduction**

My thesis is that ecological understanding negates the traditional view of Earth as merely a "life-support system," as no more than a passive ark serving to keep afloat its organic cargo including humanity. The sun-warmed Ecosphere exhibits many evolved inorganic/organic processes that in endless cycles link its improbable air, water, rocks, sediments, and organisms. By integrating these diverse components, Earth shows itself to be a higher level of organization than organisms, just as organisms are a higher level than their organs, and as organs surpass in organization the tissues and cells they comprise (Rowe 1961). So far as is known in the solar system and beyond, Earth, the Ecosphere, is the only celestial body that exhibits the closely related organic/inorganic cyclic processes that have been named "living" and "dying." As such, Earth exceeds all its parts -- inorganic and organic, including the human species -- in creative importance.

First was the Earth, and from it over long time came organisms. All of them, including humans, are Earthlings: born on and from Earth, made of Earth’s surface dust (itself derived from ancient star-dust), evolved and sustained by its ecosystems of which they are dependent parts. These truths

support the hypothesis that Earth and its ecosystems are the essential Life-giving **source** and not merely the **support** of organic life-forms. Conceiving the relationship of organism-to-Earth as that of part-to-Whole, inverts the traditional value system that identifies people as more important than their Earth context. The identification of Earth and its sectional ecosystems as possessing intrinsic value that exceeds its organic/inorganic components (the whole being greater than its parts), elevates the status of the former as moral objects and points toward an ecological morality: an Ecospheric Ethic that transcends while including the human species.

Morality and ethical action involve choices, with fundamental values providing the standard. Comprehension of Earth as the generative source of Life and the carrier of Primary Values shifts ethical emphasis from people-centeredness (homocentrism) to Earth-centeredness (ecocentrism). Thus to protect and perpetuate the creativity of Earth's ecosystems, ecocentric people will reject many of the traditional cultural norms and practices of homocentric society. They will replace the concept of the autonomous individual with the ecological individual, enlarge the idea of "communal society" to the "ecosystem society," reclassify "progress" as whatever is conducive to sustainable participation in Earth's ecosystems, and redirect science and technology to the same end. In action they will limit both their population numbers and the per capita energy-use multiplier that makes the "ecological footprint" in high-tech nations so large and damaging. By placing limits on the consumption of Earth's components, waste products and pollution will also be decreased. Situating the primary ethical standard outside the human race -- asking "Is it good for Earth?" -- will facilitate solution of such human dilemmas as global versus regional trade, appropriate technology, population numbers, and abortion. The latter topic appropriately raises the question of life's source -- in fused sex cells and/or in their ambience -- the human mother and Mother Earth.

**What is Life?**

"Life" is a much-used word in our language, but what it signifies nobody knows. No scholar-philosopher has yet been able to define "life," and Wendell Berry's "Life is a Miracle" (2000) may be as close to the truth as humans will ever get. The word "life" is a cover for human ignorance, a term for an ambience whose absence has been named "death." The best we can do when asked the question, "What is Life?" is to point to growing, reproducing, evolving organisms. Thus the words "organism" and "life" have been linked as synonyms. Ignorance of the importance of ecological relationships has made the equivalence plausible.

From ancient times to the present, thinkers have rarely considered the Earth-context as all-important for the organisms within it. The improbability and indispensability of the matrix that surrounds organisms was not known. Today the logic of ecology suggests that "Life," though undefinable except as an organizing potential, is a particular characteristic of Earth and its spatial segments, each an "ecosystem." The latter term is often misunderstood as naming a community of organisms plus the tag-on of a vague environment. Yet what surrounds and interpenetrates communities is vital to their being.

**What is an Ecosystem?**

Ecosystems are best defined as inclusive, three-dimensional, geographic places. This accords with the definition proposed by a Committee of the Ecological Society of America. An ecosystem, said the Committee, is "a **spatially explicit unit of the Earth** that includes all the organisms, along with all components of the abiotic environment within its boundaries" (Christensen *et al.* 1996). The largest spatially explicit unit is Earth itself, the Ecosphere. It can be divided into sectoral landscape ecosystems and waterscape ecosystems at scales that suit human purposes. These "geoecosystems" --

home to humans and all other organisms -- are volumetric chunks of Earth-space that can be mapped, and studied structurally and functionally (Rowe and Barnes 1994, Rowe 1997). They are real, place-specific entities, not abstract concepts.

The geographic definition of ecosystem as geoecosystem draws attention to all Earth's components: landform, soil, water, and air as well as organisms. Thus the importance of the functionally inseparable inorganic and organic is taken into account in cycles of "livingness" and "deadness." The geoecosystem is neither centered on organisms ***per se*** nor centered on the air-soil-water matrix surrounding organisms, but rather on that portion of Earth wherein the organic and inorganic interact and are integrated.

The "geoecosystem" concept is especially important in a philosophical sense because it fills a vital gap between the concepts "Earth" and "organisms." Each geoecosystem -- continental, regional or local -- is a complete sector of Earth containing inter-related inorganic and organic contents: air, water, land, organisms. Like giant terrariums or aquariums, each is participating in Earth's functions and processes that are accompaniments of living and dying and living again, in eternal evolutionary cycles.

Arne Naess (1990) has written: "In the Deep Ecology Movement we are biocentric or ecocentric. For us it is the ecosphere, the whole planet, Gaia, that is the basic unit, and every living being has an intrinsic value." Interpretation of this passage is assisted by the geoecosystem concept that bridges the scale change from "the whole planet, Gaia" to "every living being." Geoecosystems, along with their Earth summation, provide a logical referent for the adjective "ecocentric," distinguishing it from "biocentric" whose referent has always been organisms. But organisms are not stand-alone objects. Fundamentally they are dependent on ecosystems to maintain their aliveness.

**Thinking Fundamentally**

The British ecologist Tansley (1935) coined the word "ecosystem" and justified it in these words: "Though the organisms may claim our primary interest, when we are trying to think fundamentally we cannot separate them from their special environment with which they form one physical system." As he noted, the ecological unity of organism/environment is not apparent at first sight. By "thinking ecologically," organisms are perceived realistically as interdependent in function with their context of air, water, soil, and surrounding organisms.

The logic of Tansley's insight that any living organism and its immediate environment comprises functionally a more complete system than either one alone, leads to the conclusion that every chunk of Earth space -- air over land/water with organisms sandwiched at or near the interface -- carries the Life potential, expressed not only in its organisms but also in their matrix. The improbable composition of air, of water, of rocks, soils and sediments, shows them to be integral parts of the marvel of Life rather than "dead environment." Yet we have assigned most of the living space we occupy to the inanimate, the abiotic, characterizing it as inert and lacking in vitality. A dependence on seeing, rather than on touching and feeling, is at least partly responsible for the peculiar way we have conceived our relationship to Earth.

Humans interpret the world around them primarily by the sense of sight, and sight is not tuned to reveal ecological relationships. Sight inside the unseen atmosphere operates on the "figure-against-background" principle, picking out objects while ignoring their equally important contexts. Language follows sight, assigning names (nouns) to the sight-created fragments, falsely confirming their stand-alone existence. Sight leads people to believe that the organic can be disconnected from the inorganic, that living fish can be separated from water, living rooted plants separated from soil,

living human bodies separated from air. "Thinking fundamentally" requires thinking relationally, thinking ecologically. It means learning to perceive the world more comprehensively than sight and language at first suggest.

Learning to perceive organisms as situated in the context of Earth places, as parts of geoecosystems, gives meaning to their origins, evolution, maintenance -- to their "aliveness." What it means to be human has roots in the geoecosystems within which people have lived and evolved. Upright posture, two-legged locomotion, bifocal vision, and only a few strategic patches of fur, point to an ancestry in warm African savanna-ecosystems. The savanna pattern is repeated nostalgically in green-carpeted homes with floral decorations, and in urban parks dotted with trees where people go for re-creation. More recent human history, living in the geoecosystems of different continents and islands of Earth, has elicited the minor racial differences exhibited within the species ***Homo sapiens sapiens*****.** Humans have been shaped by Earth's geoecosystems and the

concept points to the high importance of geographic parts of Earth that contain organisms and are their "houses" (Gk. ***oikos*** = eco = house).

Terminology is clarified when the prefix "eco" is attached only to what "houses" organisms; that is, to the Ecosphere and its subsidiary geoecosystems at all scales from the continental and oceanic to the regional and local. "Ecocentrism" means a central focus on Earth's geoecosystems with all their inorganic/organic contents. In contrast, "biocentrism" focuses on the class "organisms," on biodiversity. From an ecological viewpoint, biocentric perceptions are abstract and non-functional because they omit the Earth matrix. Biocentrism takes for granted the possession of "life" by organisms only, which ecocentrism denies. Further, "biocentrism" slips easily into "homocentrism" (a less gendered term than "anthropocentrism"), because humans are taught to believe that they are by far the most important members of the "bios." Also dangerously unecological in emphasis, and still narrower than biocentrism and homocentrism, are "ethnocentrism," and "egocentrism."

**Earth and its Ecosystems -- the Context that Gives Life**

Before ecology taught the importance of context, organisms seemed to exist as things-in-themselves, and the mysterious qualitative essence "life" was attributed only to them. Still today, both in the languages of the arts and the sciences, the words "organism" and "life" are used interchangeably. For example, Edward O. Wilson's book titled ***The Future of Life*** means the future of organisms, of biodiversity. Similarly the question asked by scientists, "Is there life on Mars?" really means, "Are there organisms like us, or like our cells or organelles, on Mars?" This equation of "life" with "organism" has been called The Biological Fallacy (Rowe 1992).

Although most scientists who search for extra-terrestrial "life" hope to find organic bodies, they occasionally adopt an ecological viewpoint and associate things other than organisms with the presence of "life." Perhaps there is life on Mars, they say, because the presence of water has been detected there, and experience on Earth shows that water is essential for the generation of organisms. Here the idea is implicit, though unrecognized, that water is an essential external/internal part (source) of "life" on Earth. James Lovelock (1980) accurately predicted no "life" on Mars because its atmosphere, unlike Earth's, is inactive. Here again the idea is implicit that "life" on Earth is inspired by its peculiar atmosphere that contains reactive gases. Were this logic extended, as it should be, to Earth's lithosphere with its surface soils and sediments, the conclusion would be that they too are a necessary generating source of the "life" expressed in organisms. Agreement that animated organisms could not have come into existence and evolved without Earth's matrix of air-water-sediments negates the "dead world" hypothesis.

Early human cultures – similar to today's surviving vernacular cultures that are "primitive" only in the sense of being "the first" – attributed life to Mother Earth and her solid-liquid-gaseous components warmed by sunlight. The **soil** underfoot was perceived as giving birth at springtime, renewing a profusion of plants and animals. Humus gave rise to humans, and both words are from the same Sanskrit root. The soil produced new life when fertilized by rain and irrigation, and so **liquid water** is prominent as a life-giving substance in many ancient myths. Various sprites and nymphs represented the life of sacred springs, waterfalls, streams, and lakes. The unseen **air** was also animated and gave life through breathing, through re/spiration from whose root such words as "spirit," "psyche," "animated," and "animal" have been derived.

Ecology, the science of context, shows that the concept of organisms as being alive in a dead matrix of Earth's sediments, water, and air, is insupportable. A logical step is to attribute Life to the fundamental organic/inorganic geoecosystems that in sum the Earth comprises. Thus ancient wisdom is recovered.

**Obstacles to the Earth/Life Thesis Presented by Language and Culture**

After the Earth Day celebrations in 1970 optimism ran high that the rest of the century would usher in the Age of Ecology, making central the health of this unique, cloud-girdled, blue-green Planet. Not so. A sharper public consciousness did emerge, with greater understanding of such environmental problems as acid rain, stratospheric ozone depletion, rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, climate change, desertification, water pollution, extinction of plant and animal species, and so forth. But national political systems resisted and still resist addressing the obvious causes**:** burgeoning human populations, continued growth of economic systems by increasing their through-put of living and non-living materials, polluting technologies such as those based on the internal combustion engine, and the tremendous waste and destructiveness of warfare (Cairns 2000).

Ecological warnings over the last four decades have had negligible political effects. They seem to have stirred only the emotions and activities of a minority of environmental Greens. Western civilization continues on its self-destructive path, treating Earth as a dead stack of "natural resources" and "raw materials." Ecological ignorance is rampant, partly because of the inertia of language and of cultural dogmas.

As to language, note for example the lowly status that the uncapitalized word "earth" communicates. All the other planets are capitalized -- Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, etc. -- but rarely the one on whose supportive surface, under a warming blanket of atmosphere, humans are born, live, and die. Uncapitalized "earth" is also a synonym for "dirt" and "soil" -- another sign of the low esteem in which this planet is held. Contrasted with heaven, uncapitalized "earth" is a place of sin, suffering and woe. Again, while granting that science-fiction humanoids from Mars would aptly be named Martians, Earth-humans seldom refer to themselves as Earthlings. Such examples suggest that language has been designed to conceal the source and support of ***Homo sapiens sapiens***. As earlier noted, language follows sight-that-separates. Every noun potentially subverts ecological wisdom.

Ingrained cultural dogmas further separate people from their life-giving context. The old idea that man-made "culture" has lifted humans to a plane higher than "Nature" makes of Earth a lower brutish adversary. In reality, culture and Nature are inextricably merged in human society. Culture is social learning founded on and evolved from survival in Earth's ecosystems. Cultures that persist over long time periods are those that incorporate in their belief systems and rituals an ecological knowledge of and sensitivity to their particular land/water-organism environments. Misunderstanding of this point is ecological ignorance -- especially dangerous when wedded, as

today, with tremendous technologic power that can be used to destroy or reconstruct land-and-water ecosystems.

**Earth = Life**

In summary, two arguments are here made in favor of changing the current conception *o*rganism = life to the more ancient conception that Mother Earth = Life. One is ecological and the other metaphorical (Rowe 2001).

The ecological argument is that all organisms are made from Earth's skin of air, water, soil and sediments, where they have been conceived, where they grow, reproduce, and have evolved from the beginning of time. But this enveloping creative environment is not readily apparent to those immersed in it. "We don't know who discovered water, but we're pretty sure it wasn't a fish," and similarly humans immersed in the bottom layer of the transparent atmosphere are largely unaware of what surrounds them.

Enveloped in a living system, people could not perceive the relatedness of everything, at least not until recently when satellite photos (an outside view, sight-from-without) showed all parts of the Ecosphere – atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, biosphere – connected in a living planetary "cell." The outer vision is supported by internal evidence. Meteorologists attempting to model Earth's climate have found the task impossible without also taking into account the interactive oceans and continents, the marine and land vegetations. The global environment is holistic, all of a piece, and cannot be understood reductively as a pack of separate parts.

Analogous to the outside/inside view of Earth is examination of a cell under a microscope, followed by an imaginary view from within. Looked at the from the outside the cell is seen as a unit whose parts are the watery cytoplasm, the vacuoles, inclusions such as starch grains, the nucleus and various other organelles. Seeing the whole, the viewer accepts at once that all the constituents are related components of a living cell. Now suppose the viewer is reduced to micro-size and placed inside the same cell with a pair of binoculars. Looking out and around s/he will apparently see the same cell components but now as separate things. The slow flowing cytoplasm, the vacuoles and starch grains, will appear "dead" while the more active, dividing organelles will be identified as "alive." From the outside all the components participate in and express the life of the cell. From the inside only certain parts appear to be animated. Just so, people immersed in Earth's surface -- deep-air animals -- have mis-classified most of what lies around them as "dead."

The argument that Earth is the appropriate metaphor for Life begins with the assertion that language is largely based on the facts of bodily existence on Earth (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The various things that are separated by sight – supported by the other senses of hearing, smelling, tasting and touching – are named in relation to body-knowledge in the here-and-now as suggested by the numerous words that incorporate ("put in bodily form") ideas from the three-dimensional world: up and down, back and front, in and out, ahead and behind, over and under. Words of simple physical derivation are then used as metaphors for feelings, emotions, and other immaterial concepts. For example, a person's mental state may be described as "be/wildered" (literally, lost in the wilderness) or lacking "com/prehension" (literally, together grasping or catching on) or without "under/standing" (literally, standing under). By a similar process, body parts are often used as metaphors: brain for mind, heart for courage, sanguine (blood) for optimism. Our pre-ecological ancestors confirmed "organism" as the material metaphor for "life."

To the question, "What better metaphor is available?" the answer, in the light of present ecological knowledge, is "Earth." The latter is justified as "better" by recognition that the organizing quality

responsible for the improbable atmosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, and biota, is expressed only on this Planet. The equation of Earth with Life points up the importance of air, water, soil and sediments -- and not just organisms -- as the purveyors of Life. Earth is alive, lending its animation to all components.

An argument can be made for recognizing Earth's context – the Solar System, the Galaxy, the Universe – as a still more inclusive Life-metaphor. It is true that many of Earth's vital properties derive from its particular placement relative to the satellite Moon, to the other Planets, to the Sun, to the Galaxy. But the fact of Life for humans is here on Earth's surface, the home of all organisms so far as is known. Of all the planets only Earth displays the many inorganic/organic interrelationships of the mysterious quality that counters entropy: that is, "livingness." To identify the locus of Life right here, in what surrounds us where we exist, is the most useful extension of the concept. At one stroke it expands the primary ethical emphasis, transferring it from humans to the Earth home, as Ecospheric Ethics.

**Ecospheric Ethics**

Many are first attracted to valuing Earth through their interests in the scenic wonders of their native country and in the marvelously fascinating plants and animals that inhabit its land and water geoecosystems. The thought of Nature's miraculous forms under attack is repellent. It seems obvious that sublime landscapes and wild creatures should be preserved for ethical and aesthetic reasons, beyond the crass ones of utility. The so-called Environmental Movement too is prompted in large part by Nature's beauty perceived as under threat. An in-born aesthetic sense encourages care for Earth and organisms other than our own species, prompting action on their behalf. The outcome of this wonder and appreciation of the non-human is something relatively new: viz. moral concern expressed as ethical actions that extend beyond the human race.

The first thought is the need for **Endangered-Species Legislation**, expressing a "Bio-Ethic" focused on plants and animals. But common sense and ecology show that organisms are not self-sufficient. Without the vital support of Earth's inorganic/organic matrix they simply would not be. In itself the slogan "Save Biodiversity" is unrealistic; something more is needed.

Aldo Leopold (1949) took the next step by proposing a "**Land Ethic**," to protect soils, water, and organisms by making moral objects of the land that supports and shelters them. Think of the land as a community, he said, to which we belong rather than as a commodity that belongs to us. Utility to humanity was central in Leopold's thinking, but he was on the right track in recommending a high regard for the "land community" and all its organisms. "It is inconceivable to me," he wrote, "that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value," adding, "I mean value in the philosophical sense." Leopold recognized that the land community has its own intrinsic value.

Still more inclusive is an ethic that embraces Earth (**Ecospheric Ethic**) and its geoecosystems (**Ecosystem Ethic**). Such an **Ecological Ethic** place highest value on Earth and its geographic places with all their contents: the matrix elements of land, water, and atmosphere, as well as their contained communities of organisms of which ***Homo sapiens sapiens*** is one. Geoecosystems are the fundamental "living units" on the face of the Earth – source, support, and home to humanity. To make Earth a moral object does not denigrate its organic and human contents. The latter, of undoubted importance, now are realistically placed in their correct ecological perspective. It follows that the greatest need today, expressing the intrinsic value of Earth's ecosystems as well as guiding human consciousness toward awareness of that fact, is **Endangered Ecosystem Legislation**, the

logical legal expression of **Ecological Ethics** and the only guarantor of air-water-soil-biota protection. By what conceptual means can the enlarged ecological consciousness be fostered?

**Ethics by Inclusion**

Ethical systems express human values, which is to say that only what is valued will be treated ethically, as moral objects. When only people matter, then ethical concerns are limited to the human race. Everything else is only valued if it serves humanity. As ecological awareness grows, things other-than-human are perceived as valuable, initially because of utility. With greater sensitivity and empathy, sentient organisms are recognized as valuable in and for themselves. Then legislation may be passed, as already done in some countries, to prevent cruelty to animals or to protect rare plants. Beyond organisms, affection and ethical concern may be extended to special places, to the landscapes of home remembered from childhood, or to majestic old-growth forests, to coral reefs with their dazzling tropical fish. This sequence illustrates "ethics by extension" as the individual's moral sense grows from the egocentric to the homocentric to the biocentric to the ecocentric.

The weakness of ethics-by-extension is that its starting point – the person, family, society – gets most attention, while its outer reaches get the least. The ethical sense, extended beyond society to the nation and humanity as a whole, "plays out" before it reaches Earth's non-human organic/inorganic realities. Just as light intensity varies as the square of the distance from its source, so the ethical impulse fades outward from its human-centered beginnings. This is clearly evident in the left-leaning political platforms of Social-Democratic political parties. Their environmental concerns are no more than a greenwash on the two fundamental issues that absorb most of their ethical interests: liberty of the individual (egocentric) and a degree of communality (ethnocentric/homocentric).

Given the importance of Earth and its health, a better approach is first to emphasize the intrinsic values of Earth's geoecosystems, and then turn to their valuable organic and inorganic contents. This suggests an ethics-by-inclusion that initially identifies the Life-source/support as the highest moral object. By this logic, Earth is most worthy of ethical concern, then its geoecosystems, then their organic/inorganic constituents of which humanity is one precious species. Such an inversion of traditional ethics is ecologically realistic. Further it teaches the human race humility – a virtue so far in short supply. To the charge that placing Earth first violates the meaning of "ethics" as moral behavior between sentient creatures, the answer is that ethical actions emanate from human values and the latter need not be limited to the homocentric and the biocentric. When Earth is highly appreciated, ethics will be ecocentric, home-centered, an Ecological Ethics.

The fear is sometimes expressed that placing primary value on the Earth whole (and the geographic ecosystems it comprises) ahead of its inorganic and organic parts, will potentially subvert individual and social values. This is true, but only for those errant human values that are at odds with sustainable living on the Planet. An organic analogy may clarify the point. The cells of each tissue and organ in the human body have their freedoms to "be themselves" in growth and development, but at the same time they are constrained to act in healthy ways by responsibilities to the larger body of which they are parts. If their "rights" do not contribute constructively to the body, disaster both for the body and themselves will surely follow. This is the teaching of viruses and rampant cancer cells that kill their hosts. Human activities that contribute to the sustainability of Earth's ecosystems must constrain and rule over those traditional "rights and freedoms" of the individual that would do otherwise -- such as the socially approved private-property "right" to destroy soil and contaminate water.

**Conclusion**

This non-prescriptive article sets the stage for further discussions of Ecocentric Ethics (Ecospheric Ethics, Ecosystem Ethics). It is not my intention to detail the implications of ethics centered on a valued Earth and its geoecosystems, beyond noting that whereas a biocentric view of the world places humanity in the context of communities of separate organisms whose comparative "rights" must be argued, the ecocentric view places humanity within Earth's ecosystems where the values of constituents are gauged according to their contributions to ecological, long-term sustainability. Such an outward focus need not affect inter-personal ethics. But by establishing a standard outside the human race for judging the "good" of social thoughts and actions, the Earth-focus shakes up the entire panoply of cultural-communal values, immediately calling into question the prevalent philosophy of unlimited material growth in all its manifestations: economic, industrial, and reproductive.

Today, aided by satellite and aerial photography, we can more truly view the whole Earth and its sectoral geographic ecosystems as the locus of "Life." This god's-eye-view brought back to Earth's surface -- now perceived as comprising vital, animated ecosystems of which organisms are parts -- is to my mind ecology's chief contribution to modern thought. It illuminates the most effective direction for conservation and preservation efforts.

The creative cradle of Life on Earth, geoecosystems, continue to determine the birth, development and death of all organic/inorganic forms on this planet, including ***Homo sapiens sapiens.*** This knowledge prompts a realistic perspective on our own living within Earth's regional ecosystems. And thinking of our own inevitable dying/recycling into other organic/inorganic forms, this happy thought from old Martin Luther who doubtless was unaware of its appropriateness for an Earth-based Ecological Ethics**:**

*Media morte in vita sumus* -- "In the midst of death we are surrounded by Life!"

**Key Words:** Life, Earth, Ecosphere, Ecosystem, Ecological Ethics, Ecospheric Ethics, Metaphorical Language.

**Citations**

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Other Ecocentric Texts