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BIODIVERSITY AND ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY: WONDER, VALUE AND PAYING ATTENTION TO ALL CREATURES*

Summary. This article develops the case for considering specific ecological emotions and virtues that I argue are relevant in acknowledging intrinsic value in diverse creatures and in enhancing moral education for ecological responsibility. The darker side of creaturely life cannot be avoided, but unlike mundane forms of beauty, a theological aesthetic allows for such ambiguity. I show that while wonder is ethically ambiguous, *curiositas* in Augustine and *studiositas* in Aquinas illuminate Simone Weil's discussion on the importance of religiously inspired forms of paying attention. When schooled by practical wisdom, love, and justice, non-possessive *studiositas* and attention are, I suggest, likely to be particularly important in fostering ecological virtues and ecological education as well as engendering a deeper sense of ecological responsibility.

Resumen. Este artículo desarrolla la cuestión que nos permite considerar las emociones y virtudes ecológicas específicas que, en mi opinión, son relevantes para reconocer el valor intrínseco de diversas criaturas y mejorar la educación moral hacia una responsabilidad ecológica. El lado más oscuro de la vida creatural no puede ser excluido, sin embargo, contrariamente, en las formas mundanas de belleza, una estética teológica permite tal ambigüedad. En mi articulo muestro que si bien la maravilla es éticamente ambigua, la *curiositas* en san Agustín y la *studiositas* en santo Tomas de Aquino iluminan la discusión de Simone Weil acerca de la importancia de centrarse en las actitudes inspiradas en la religión. Pienso que cuando se educa en la sabiduría práctica, el amor y la justicia, la *studiositas* no posesiva y el cuidado de las cosas, probablemente estas actitudes sean particularmente importantes para fomentar las virtudes y la educación ecológica, así como para generar un sentido más profundo de responsabilidad ecológica.

If "beauty makes humankind good,"[1] what is the relationship between the human ability to experience wonder and awe in response to

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* This article draws on aspects of the following chapter. C. Deane-Drummond, *The good, the bad and the ugly: wonder, awe and paying attention to nature,* in *Aesth/ethics in environmental change,* edited by S. Bergmann and I. Blindow, Berlin 2013, p. 71-84.

[1] I take this from the sub-title of the *Nature and environment in the educational covenant: beauty makes mankind good,* a seminar held at the Pontifical University

the biodiversity present in the natural world and fostering and educating towards greater ecological responsibility? What, in other words, is the relationship, if any, between the human capacity for wonder and ecologically good acts? The gap between knowledge and practical action in dealing with ecological issues requires an analysis of motivation to act aright. Does the human connectivity with the natural world mythologized in trinitarian language in ancient Celtic traditions give any clues? Drawing on the work of Simone Weil, and filled out further through reference to the works of Augustine and Aquinas, I will explore how paying attention understood in religious terms serves to deepen both individual and collective commitment to ecological responsibility. *Studiositas* that is proper to particular ecological virtues fosters those virtues and therefore contributes to a positive ecological education. Theological dimensions of aesthetics are able to deal more successfully with ambiguity present in the valuation of creatures compared with mundane accounts of beauty or wonder, namely through interpreting Christologically those aspects of the natural world that are perceived as either bad or ugly. The ambivalence of human valuation of the natural world has been brought to the surface in a graphic way through the contemporary experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such experiences raise searching questions about how cultures arising in a Western context come to give aesthetic or other value to the natural world in a way that provides motivation for positive ecological activism.

Wonder and Environmental Responsibility

Biodiversity is easy to speak about, but by being a collective good it is much harder to appreciate in everyday experience. The public understanding of the importance of biodiversity has accelerated in recent years with highly visible public demonstrations in the variegated movement known as *extinction rebellion*. It is most marked in the public sphere by paying explicit attention to death, devastation and loss among the poorest and most vulnerable alongside the loss of species, rather than

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