

The International Journal of Ecopsychology (IJE)

Volume 1
Number 1 *Narratives on Coronavirus: The
Overwhelming Power of the Infinitesimally
Small*

Article 10

10-15-2020

Book Review: Giuseppe T. Cirella's (Ed.), Sustainable Human-Nature Relations: Environmental Scholarship, Economic Evaluation, Urban Strategies. (Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2020)

Editorial Board

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Recommended Citation

Board, Editorial (2020) "Book Review: Giuseppe T. Cirella's (Ed.), Sustainable Human-Nature Relations: Environmental Scholarship, Economic Evaluation, Urban Strategies. (Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2020)," *The International Journal of Ecopsychology (IJE)*: Vol. 1 : No. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/ije/vol1/iss1/10>

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Book Review

Giuseppe T. Cirella's (Ed.), Sustainable Human-Nature Relations: Environmental Scholarship, Economic Evaluation, Urban Strategies. (Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2020)

Giuseppe Cirella (Ed.) heads an ensemble of authors and works presenting and clarifying the complex interactions of most of the important issues of nature-relations from a sustainability and economics perspective. The contributions might be of particular interest to human ecologists and geographers. Important human-nature distinctions are found in the first and flagship chapter (Cirella et al, 2020). The authors list and compare *instrumental* and *intrinsic* relational modes (utilitarian and moral arguments), for example, to *relational* values. This contrast, although not new, sets the tone and is the crux for the pertinence of the latter modes of relation to projects of sustainability and nature aesthetics. Within “ecopsychology,” one of the first and still enduring moral arguments “for nature” was and continues to be about “the intrinsic right” of life forms. As a general framework and heuristic, the demi-mantra, “the intrinsic right,” has been of great value; however, when interpreted and/or applied in absolute terms it might lead to impractical and contradictory situations that neither benefit other life forms nor make humans any ‘happier’ (Conesa-Sevilla, 2006). As “ecopsychology” matured—the last ten years—more and more instances of Cirella’s description of *relational values* gain in prominence even when authors and practitioners do not necessarily provide terms to define this multiplicity of “relations.” In Cirella et al. (2020: 7):

The concept of relational values in regard to human-nature relations considers ethical principles that can promote environmental stewardship conjugated with the recognition of nature’s contributions, for human benefit. Relational values are defined as preferences, principles, and virtues associated with relationships, both interpersonal and jointed [*sic*] by policies and social norms. In the environmental sphere, these are connected with nature’s contributions to people and culturally specific understandings of what “leading a good life” means, as defined by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) framework.

Their integrative suggestion, it seems, leaves no mode of “interpreting nature” unturned, settling on a comprehensive and pragmatic view of human-nature relations:

Generally, recognizing human relational values (i.e., either involving human collective and primarily [*sic*] individual), in addition to instrumental and intrinsic value may indeed be considered another creative approach to solving the difficult short-term tradeoffs concerning nature conservation and human well-being (2020: 8).

If this were the realistic framework around which many discussions of human-nature relations begin, “eyes wide open,” a wider common ground and more gains could be got in terms of sound environmental policies and conservation. At least, there is a hope that it could be so.

In the same chapter ¹ Cirella *et al* share and address their acceptance and understanding of Lovelock's "Gaia Theory" in both its strong and weak versions. It is not clear why, in the context of a collection of works that focus on economics and sociology, they felt obligated to affirm the scientifically curious notion that, "...the Earth is a living organism and continues to evolve to achieve long-term stability" (p.10), unless, as a metaphor, it encompasses their wide-ranging definition of *relational values*. There are actual errors of fact when the authors revisit unsupportable claims about Darwin's Natural Selection, thus adding and perpetuating misconceptions: "*Gaian reasoning appears to fill the gaps left by Darwinism who believe that [sic] each species has been independently created and posits characteristics that fit the most favorable condition destined to live [sic]*" (p.11). Most biologists would be confounded by this assertion. The bit about "creation" would be a telltale sign that the authors are perhaps writing about Alfred Russel Wallace, not Darwin. As to the very strange idea that species "independently" are what they are ("created" no doubt) flies in the face of most of Darwin's work of situating evolution in the context of environmental forces, the interrelatedness between individuals and species, and of tying speciation to adaptations—to typically, changing and diverse environments. Their statement on the same page that, "*Gaian ideology explains that no species can grow independent [sic] of all others,*" is no contrast at all to the extent that it also applies to "Darwinism." Indeed, thus stated, "Gaia" comes across as another sort of "ideology."

On the whole, and granting that editing so many works from a diverse group of authors is challenging, many grammatical errors are found that sometimes distract from the mostly very interesting, craftily made, and useful presentations.



Cirella, G. T., Mwangi, S. W., Paczoski, A., and Abebe, S. T. (2020). "Human-nature relations: The unwanted filibuster." In G. T. Cirella's (Ed.), *Sustainable Human-Nature Relations: Environmental Scholarship, Economic Evaluation, Urban Strategies*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., pp. 3-22.

Conesa-Sevilla, J. (2006). The intrinsic value of the whole: Cognitive and utilitarian evaluative processes as they pertain to ecocentric, deep ecological, and ecopsychological "valuing." *The Trumpeter*, 22(2), 26-42.

¹ This review, short as it is, can only focus on its "flagship" chapter, but readers are encouraged to also read Benassi's and Naccarato's *Territorial Integration of Foreigners: Social Sustainability of Host Societies*, and Russo's and Cirella's *Urban Sustainability: Integrating Ecology in City Design and Planning* among others.