

Myth and Ritual for the Age of Ecological Catastrophe

EFSRE Conference VII (proposed theme)

Despite the authentic longing of many current ecological thinkers for analytical description that restores agency to the non-human and the human to the natural or gaian, much of this thinking remains, essentially, *outside*. While invoking pre-modern conceptions and indigenous cosmologies, they avoid and remain seemingly fearful of the fact that nearly all of these pre-modern and indigenous cosmologies construed existence as including transcendent, metaphysical or spiritual aspects, granted not just agency but often personhood to most more-than-human entities, animated the creators and inhabitants of the cosmos as personalities with cares, wills, purpose and complexity, considered the cosmos the fruit of intentionality, and related the history, reality and future of the cosmos and its parts through constructive narrative (myth) rather than dissective analysis. Religious or spiritual ritual might be construed as the cultural culmination of this often monistic emic logic.

This conference will explore the many questions that arise from the apparent continuing philosophical-scientific indigestibility of mythology and ritual. What does or would gaia-logical mythology or ritual look like? Are they, could they be more pedagogically effective with non-experts? Is myth, with its associations with the archaic (despite the work of Cassirer and Barthes), even a fitting genre for today? Must gaian myth or rituals be atheological (i.e., is theology, as some argue, inherently not deep-ecological)? Do ecotheologies written out of specific continuing pre-modern cultural-religious traditions that are not entirely or comfortably gaian satisfactorily bridge the spaces between emic and etic genres/approaches and satisfy calls for new gaia-ologies? How do or might "old" and "new" cultural material relate to one another? Must scholars-scientists, environmentalists or artists use only material from "their own" heritages in producing gaia-ologies? Are there bases for and modes of considering or evaluating the skill or fruitfulness of gaia-ologies or gaian rituals? (Is Disney truly producing dark green thought?) What artists, artistic works or modalities stand as exemplary? How have religious or spiritual environmentalists created gaian myths or rituals? How might they?