

# TOWARDS AN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC OF 'FITTINGNESS'

## CALL FOR PAPERS

LEUVEN,  
8-9 MAY 2020

ILSE

In the face of an intensifying environmental crisis, the data supplied by the natural sciences has proven ineffective for leveraging significant change in human behavior required to mitigate its impact. In contrast, the aesthetic valuation of nature has proven a powerful ally in the environmental movement. However, its use has also been somewhat problematic, in that it can be inadvertently exclusionary; its focus is frequently limited to that which is aesthetically appealing. This conference seeks to address these problems by fostering interdisciplinary engagement organized around a promising, though undertheorized notion for seeing and responding to the environment: that of 'fittingness'.

The term presents an intriguing avenue for further exploration, for a number of reasons. First, while utilized in scholarly discourse, its familiarity makes it easily accessible for a popular audience. Second, it contains both aesthetic and moral meanings within its domain, while still being relatively plastic, lending itself to the sort of rich interdisciplinary thinking required for environmental ethics in a plural society.

Productive partnership may thus be fostered here between, for instance, aesthetics, theology, the natural sciences, and the social sciences that could result in an ethic that is both more inclusive, robust and compelling than one informed strictly by scientific data.

Most of us make myriads of decisions informed by intuitive judgements of fittingness on a daily basis. This is a helpful dynamic to recognize as we seek to connect ethical theorizing to personal and corporate practice and policy. However, that same familiarity can also lead one to overlook important complexities substantive enough to have merited examination by notable thinkers through the ages: Cicero and Aquinas and Bentham, or, more recently, among moral philosophers who have put it to use with regard to, for instance, questions of justice and punishment.

With few exceptions however, the concept has rarely received more than a passing nod by those whose work is concerned with environmental ethics. There is much room, then, for further exploration and development of the concept in this particular arena. For instance, the term is helpful for highlighting a manner of relating – neighborliness. Indeed, a whole cluster of relational and moral terms is associated with the idea (decorum, appropriateness, etc.) that could be of great benefit for reframing our relationship to the world around us.

*The very idea of 'fitting in', for instance, a local context, implies the element of self-limit, enabling one to recognize not just "the other," but the needs of the other as well. 'Fittingness' may thus serve as a powerful antidote to the destructive forms of anthropocentrism frequently connected to discussions of human flourishing and environmental ethics.*

### Possible Topics to address:

- How might the notion of 'fittingness', as understood within the natural sciences, interact with the aesthetic and moral dimensions of the term? Is there a way of finding congruence?
- How is 'fittingness' for the environment determined? How do we understand what is fitting for an environment that is complex and variable?
- What are the pitfalls of the notion that ought to be either avoided or mitigated against?
- For those working within fields of moral philosophy, how might the term be beneficially employed when considered for the realm of environmental ethics?
- Is it possible to make aesthetic judgements of 'fittingness' that are also fitting as judged by the natural sciences?
- Might one find support for the notion of 'fittingness' within Christian scriptures, theology or other religious texts?
- What connections are there between notions of fittingness and the good life?
- What are the implications of the notion of fittingness for business, economics or politics?

## Conference

On May 8-9, 2020, the Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE), part of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium) will organize an international academic conference, addressing this theme. The conference encourages presentations from various theological and interdisciplinary perspectives. This exchange will be facilitated by keynote lectures that present distinct perspectives on these questions.

## Keynote Speakers



**PROF. DR. MICHAEL NORTHCOTT** is emeritus Professor of Ethics at the University of Edinburgh and Professor of Religion and Ecology at the Indonesian Consortium of Religious Studies at Universitas Gadjah Mada Graduate School in Yogyakarta (Indonesia). He is also guest professor of Systematic Theology at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium). His research, which focuses on environmental ethics, enjoys wide recognition. Among his many publications on the topic are the books *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (SPCK, 2014) and *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (Bloomsbury, 2015).



**PROF. DR. JOHAN DE TAVERNIER** is Professor of Theological Ethics, as well as Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). Furthermore, he is Director of Ethics@Arenberg (Science, Engineering and Technology Group, Catholic University of Leuven). Environmental ethics is one of his research foci; in particular, he specializes in food ethics and animal ethics. He also published on *Laudato Si'* and the rights of future generations.



**PROF. DR. EMILY BRADY** is Professor of Philosophy at the Texas A&M University (USA). Additionally, she holds the Susanne M. and Melbern G. Glasscock Director's Chair in the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research. She has done extensive research in environmental philosophy, focusing particular attention on aesthetics and environmental ethics. Among her publications in this area are the books *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003) and (with Isis Brook and Jonathan Prior) *Between Nature and Culture: The Aesthetics of Modified Environments* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

*A promising avenue for reframing both our manner of seeing and our manner of responding to the environment is via the notion of fittingness.*

## Date & Location

The conference will be held on **May 8-9, 2020**, at the Leuven Center for Christian Studies, part of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit.

The address is: Sint-Jansbergsesteenweg 95, 3001 Leuven, Belgium. Registration information is available on the ILSE website: <https://www.etf-ilse.org>.

## Abstracts and Deadline

Scholars are invited to submit an abstract for a paper. Abstracts should be maximum 500 words, and fall within the theme of the conference as described above. Each abstract will be assessed blindly by two experts. Abstracts are to be submitted by email to Ms. Leslie Herrmann, at [info@etf-ilse.org](mailto:info@etf-ilse.org).

Please attach two separate Word documents to your email:

- **Document 1:** Your paper proposal, include key bibliographic sources consulted (max. 5). In this document, all references identifying the author should be removed.
- **Document 2:** Your last name, first name, email address, institutional address, the title of your abstract, as well as a short CV (maximum 1 page).

**Deadline:** March 15, 2020.

You can expect to receive a response by March 20, 2020 at the latest.

## Publication

From this conference, we will edit a scholarly volume, consisting of peer-reviewed papers.