

Editor's Introduction

Environmental Hermeneutics: In Memory of W. S. K. "Scott" Cameron

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On May 25, 2016 W.S.K. "Scott" Cameron died peacefully at his home in Pasadena, California, surrounded by his family. He was 54 years old. Scott grew up on the shores of Lake of the Woods, in Kenora, Ontario. He loved the outdoors, and spent much time camping with his family and sailing with his brothers Ian and Reed, with whom he competed in, and won, many regattas. In 1984 he graduated from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario with a B.A., First Class honors, in Philosophy, and he returned to study and receive his M.A. in Philosophy in 1988, in the course of which he received the Halkett Fellowship, the Queen's Graduate Award, and the Queen's Honour Matriculation Award.

In 1989 he moved to New York with his wife Margie to study at Fordham University, supported by a Presidential Scholarship. He wrote his dissertation, *Tradition and Transcendence in the Critical Theories of Gadamer and Habermas*, under the direction of Merold Westphal and in 1994 he moved to Los Angeles to take a position as a visiting professor at Loyola Marymount University. A year later, he was put on the tenure track, and he taught and wrote at LMU until his death, having been promoted to Full Professor in 2009.

Although he was not present at the first meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP) in 1997, Scott became a member very early on, having found his way over to IAEP from SPEP. He soon became deeply committed to and involved in the IAEP community. He served as the Secretary from 2003 to 2005, and then as Co-President from 2005 to 2009. He was also the Book Review Editor for *Environmental Philosophy* from 2003 through 2007, as well as the Co-Editor from 2005 until his death.

Like many environmental philosophers, Scott's scholarship was not rooted in academic training that was explicitly environmental. His philosophical scholarship was deeply engaged with hermeneutics—especially the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer—and by critical theory, which together framed his work in graduate school. His thinking was also deeply motivated by a sincere and nuanced Christian faith—joyful and vibrant rather than ossified or sepulchral, open and ecumenical rather than closed and uncompromising, quietly lived rather than loudly crusading.

There were, and still are, relatively few graduate programs that possess broad and deep strength in environmental philosophy. So Scott found his way to environmental philosophy in a manner that would be familiar to many scholars of his generation: by applying the philosophical training and education he received at Fordham to longstanding interests rooted in his childhood and adolescent experience of the natural world—in Scott's case his experience of the woods and lakes in and around Kenora. His publications and presentations, many of the latter with IAEP, touched on a variety of topics, among them the nature/culture binary (an issue taken up by two of the contributors to this memorial volume), various hermeneutic interpretations of the concept of “nature,” ecological restoration, individual and collective responsibility, and the prospects for environmental hermeneutics.

Scott was also a very accomplished teacher, and widely admired for the time and effort he spent with students, especially in attempting to improve their wordcraft. Scott was an exacting professor, and students were often shocked at the volume of critical comments they received on their papers in his classes. But as that shock turned to a grudging acceptance of the high standards in his courses, it generally took on an air of respect and, ultimately, gratitude. Scott's efforts went a long way toward developing a number of very fine writers.

I came to know Scott when I moved back to Los Angeles to take a position at LMU in the fall of 2001. In an open and supportive department, Scott stood out as exceptionally welcoming, hospitable, and caring. Over the years he would become a good friend, but it is important to note that he was also a good stranger, by which I mean that his kindness and generosity were not directed only to his friends, but toward everyone he encountered. He was universally admired in our department as representing the best of us: a careful, clear thinker, a dedicated teacher, and a generous colleague. My family and I always looked forward to our meetings with the Camerons—whether at departmental barbeques, faculty socials, Christmas parties, or our far-too-infrequent outings together in and around L.A.

In February of 2006, in a bolt from the blue, Scott was diagnosed with advanced, metastatic colon cancer. He was given a 4 percent chance of living another five years, but buoyed by his positive outlook, his family and friends, and his faith, Scott would live another ten years, during the vast majority of

which he remained an active and engaged teacher, scholar, and colleague. I was fortunate to visit with Scott at his home in the last weeks of his life. His wife Margie, his daughters Madeleine and Audrey, sons Liam and Luke, and a rotating supporting cast of his childhood family, extended family, friends, colleagues, and members of the Pasadena Mennonite Church community were all present during his final weeks. I think that people felt acutely the looming loss to themselves. I know I did. But the house was full of music (during my visit Madeleine at the piano, singing with the voice of an angel) and love. It was, of course, a heart-wrenching experience, but it was also profoundly moving and beautiful. Scott died on May 25, 2016. He lived a life that was full, rich, and diverse—if all too short. He was an excellent philosopher, a dedicated husband and father, a generous colleague, and a fine friend. We should all hope to do as well.

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The essays in this issue were a response to a call for papers that would either engage Scott's published work directly, or take up one or more of the issues or themes that framed his work (environmental hermeneutics, ecological restoration, philosophy of religion, etc.); and the authors selected for this volume each responded in different ways.¹

In the first essay, "Beyond Biosecurity," Chandler Rogers takes up issues related to domesticity and wildness in the context of biopower and biosecurity. How are we to negotiate the encounter between human beings and large predators whose habitat and territory is increasingly encroached on by human population growth and development? On some accounts, the proper course of action is to police these boundaries because, when they are crossed, the cougars "become killable" as threats to a human "safe space." But Rogers argues that such positions are based on a misunderstanding of biopower and biosecurity, that they misunderstand the connection between overcoming our fear of death and resisting abuses of power, and that the encounter with one's own mortality—in, for example, the existence of large predators—can serve as a check on human domination of more-than-human nature. And so he argues in defense of an ethics of encounter, not as a form of "predatorial suicide," but as the basis for a willingness to enter an area where the categories "domestic" and "wild" shift into a domain of common origin.

Crina Gschwandtner's "Can We Learn to Hear Ethical Calls?" takes up a concern, voiced by Scott and many others, that the "call of the other" that forms the basis of ethics in Emmanuel Lévinas and many of those he influenced is a call that most people (including Lévinas himself) seem not to hear from

1. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Ms. Joyce Fehlau, who helped with the editing and formatting of these essays, as well as to Dr. Ted Toadvine, Editor-in-Chief of *Environmental Philosophy*, for his openness to publishing this memorial issue.

more-than-human nature. How, in this context, can we hear the call of the other? Gschwandtner rehearses the call of the other as it appears in Lévinas: its primordially, its disruptive character, the way in which it precedes and constitutes the responsible self, and so forth, emphasizing that it is “not alterity as such that constitutes the ethical relation, but the other’s vulnerability and need.” However, despite the fact that many of the characteristics of the call of the other seem to be present in the case of environmental destruction, Lévinas’s work does not itself extend to animal others, much less to nature itself. It is not clear how non-human nature “expresses” itself to us, though philosophers including Christian Diehm, John Llewelyn, and Ed Casey have made attempts to explain this in terms of suffering or distress. But does this go far enough? Gschwandtner suggests the call of nature is one we need to hear at the point of vulnerability, before the crisis reaches the point of obvious suffering or distress. This, she argues, will require a hermeneutic that disposes us to hear the call and to respond. Some such hermeneutics can be found in certain religious frameworks, which emphasize human finitude and fragility, as well as an orientation toward compassion. And to be effective alternative hermeneutics must, at least, retain a “religious” character in the sense that they must “operate in the way religions used to function”—at a gut level, and with obligating force.

In “Urban Mobility—Urban Discovery,” Jonathan Maskit reflects upon the ways in which various modes of urban transportation shape the experience of the urban environment, and argues that the ways in which we move through the urban space fundamentally alter our experience, especially aesthetic experience, of that space. Beginning with a phenomenological aesthetics of mobility rooted in the social, somatic, temporal, and affective character of experience, Maskit lays the groundwork for a broader argument about an “aesthetics of sustainability” that argues a less-resource-intensive mode of living is both “ecologically more sustainable and more humanly fulfilling.” To build this foundation, he develops a typology of forms of urban mobility based on distinctions between private versus public, and low-speed versus high-speed. He considers various forms of transportation in terms of these distinctions, and notes the ways in which some hinder our aesthetic experience of the environment and others help to foster it. The essay concludes by considering topics that will need to be developed in a longer and more complete account of the aesthetics of urban mobility.

Brook Muller continues the consideration of urban environments in his essay, “Blue Architectures.” In dialogue with the treatment of water, urban landscapes, and wild landscapes in some of Scott’s work, Muller gives an account of “decentralized and ecologically responsive approaches to water and wastewater systems in architectural projects in dense urban environments.” These “blue architectures” reframe our ways of understanding in terms of “degrees of concentration” and, in so doing, reshape our mode of living in areas exhibiting various forms of interaction and negotiation between the “city” and “nature.”

These proximate conditions and relationships—the ways in which we work with different hydrologic concentrations—have far-reaching effects, and support the integrity or lack of integrity in broader ecological systems, reframing the connection between urban landscapes and the wider environment in which they are situated.

One of Scott's longest running philosophical exchanges was with Steven Vogel, who Scott counted as a friend and colleague, and whose work he took to be a compelling model of clarity and rigor. Their discussions and debates took place over numerous meetings of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy, during overlapping tenures on the Executive Committee of that organization, and eventually in various publications. The next two essays in this volume address issues central to this debate.

David Utsler takes up these issues in his essay "Is Nature Natural?," attempting to "redeem the concept of nature." He begins by rehearsing some of the published work by both Cameron and Vogel regarding the justification, wisdom, and feasibility (or lack thereof) of retaining "nature" as a concept; and the essay expands the dialogue to include critiques of the concept of nature from Slavoj Žižek and Timothy Morton. Like Cameron, Utsler accepts Vogel's argument that "humans *and* the products of human activity are all natural," that is, they are all "made from natural materials being beings who arose in nature and behave according to natural laws." But, with Cameron, Utsler seeks to retain a sense in which it makes sense to speak of things as "natural" to a greater or lesser degree. Utsler attempts to do so by relying on and developing the notion of practice: "We are simultaneously a part of nature and different from nature, and the relation between these two realities is revealed and understood by how we act—our practices," not by some ontological watermark. He concludes by briefly touching on political and linguistic reasons we might want to be concerned with redeeming the concept of nature.

However, as is clear in "Doing without Nature," while Cameron's respect and affection for Vogel is reciprocated, the arguments made by Scott and others have not convinced Steve Vogel that "nature"—as a term or a category—is worth redeeming. He begins by reviewing some of the central aspects of his work to which Scott was responding. Eschewing the anthropocentric bias that tends to operate in accounts of "nature," Vogel reiterates that humans transform nature, by nature, because they are nature. The goal should not be protecting the world from such presumptively alien transformation, but rather to get humans to actually take responsibility for their actions: "environmental questions are always political ones, to be answered not by nature but by *us*." Although, building on Gadamer's work, Scott attempted to argue that language mediated our experience of nature and that it pointed toward a nature beyond and independent of us, Vogel detects the odor of idealism in the hermeneutic approach. He adopts, in contrast, a materialist approach: "we come to understand the world

not primarily through describing it but rather by acting in it.” Such practices are not “interpretations” of the world; they are not propositional claims; they are not “true” or “false.” The question is not whether our practices “get nature right” but whether they are actions in which we can see ourselves and which “might produce a world that we could not only recognize as such but about which we might feel some pride.” Though Vogel recognizes the “resonance” of words like “nature,” he maintains that “we ought not to be redeeming such words so much as trying to live without them.”

In the final essay in this collection, “In Defense of the Human Difference,” Sean McGrath makes the case for an “ecological humanism” that seeks to circumvent the tension between mainstream environmental views that insist that human beings are merely animals, no more special than any other animal evolved on our shared planet, and, at the same time, that human beings are uniquely accountable for contemporary environmental crises. The “flattened ontologies” of Timothy Morton and others lead us toward the conclusion that there is nothing particularly special about the arrangement of things—climate stability, for example—in a manner that is conducive to the flourishing of human beings, or of any other animals for that matter. McGrath points out that on such accounts, it’s not at all clear why cockroaches ought not inherit the Earth, or why that inheritance would be a loss compared to the state of affairs that preceded it. In response, he seeks to recover the significance of human consciousness and freedom, and of the unique human capacity for moral discernment. This “human difference” is the locus of our particular vocation, a special responsibility—rooted in both contemplation and action—to address and rectify contemporary environmental crises.