

Landing with the Firefly

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> Abstract • I reflect on the significance of our relationships with a natural place from the perspective of animal and environmental ethics. Connecting Candiottio's article with other environmental thinkers, I explore the importance of particularity and of problematizing anthropocentrism, and end by raising three questions about the broader application of one's love for a particular place.

Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

« 1 » The exponentially growing philosophical (and not only philosophical) preoccupation with questions relating to nature, in the past few decades, is easy to understand. Faced with human extinction, the question of how to think about that which determines it becomes unavoidable. As philosophers know, how we think about something drives, in various and complicated ways, how we act. So, many philosophers are quick to suggest ways – typically in the form of reasons – to value nature, in the hope that these reasons may save us.

« 2 » The re-thinking of what nature is, and who we are, and of our place within (or, better, with and as) nature, needs to be radical, as Mary Midgley (2000, 2001) claimed. First, because, as she stresses, empirical insights suggest a way of thinking about life on Earth with closer links to science. Second, because it is the traditional Western – individualistic, anthropocentric, instrumental – way of thinking, Midgley argues, that has not only brought about the environmental crisis, but also isolated us as individuals, from other living beings, other humans, other forms of life and of matter. The result is a desert, both a geographical and a moral one.

« 3 » The re-thinking is existential, ethical, political, as well as rooted in natural science (with the awareness that the goals and questions of natural sciences are human-dependent too). According to Bruno Latour (2018), we are now in a “new climatic regime,” where climate change organizes all political life, as well. In Latour's view, we need to abandon both the utopia of modern-

izing globalization and the nostalgic utopia of a traditional local community, and embrace a new way of being on Earth: that of becoming Terrestrials. Rather than being individuals living “on” the planet, or “in” a place, the Terrestrials participate in the creation of their dwelling place together with all the other agents and forces (various species of animals, forests, bacteria, mushrooms, soil...) – not necessarily in harmony, but nonetheless through mutual dependence.

« 4 » Latour's question for the third millennium is: Where can we *land*? Where can we find a home not *within*, but *with* a planet from which we have rendered ourselves and other beings homeless? Candiottio suggests one way in which we can land in the current context: by loving a place. Interestingly, like other responses to the climate crisis – those stressing valuing nature, or natural spaces, or those suggesting a closer integration of human and nature – the response tears us away from the driving force that originated it: concern for human existence and wellbeing. Climate change is worrying so many people now (and still not enough), primarily because it threatens human life. Yet, as Latour and Midgley emphasize, and as Candiottio's proposal shows, such anthropocentric concern is inadequate for the answer that it needs. It is not that in order to save ourselves we need to value nature. We need to value nature because it deserves to be valued. Otherwise, the project becomes paradoxical: can we find unconditional love in pursuit of our own salvation? Hardly. As soon as we shift the focus away from human concerns, saving ourselves becomes only part of the picture.

« 5 » One of the greatest difficulties of the environmental movement, as Latour notes, is that the apparently abstract nature of the problem makes it difficult to move people to action. Of course, the problem is not abstract, but except when it is manifested as floods, heatwaves, or the extinction of a species close to us, it is hard to see, feel, touch. As Candiottio notes, “one could not care for nature in general” (§8). “Nature” is too large and too vague a concept. However, tree, creek, village, are not. So, Candiottio's proposal to narrow down, to look at the particular, and at our individual relationship with that particular, makes both practical and philosophical sense. From a moral philosophical perspective, it inserts itself

within a movement away from a generality that some consider unhelpful, in the space of reasons (Dancy 2004) and in the space of objects (Murdoch 1970, 1992), towards individuality. We learn to love and value in our relationships, as feminist ethics of care highlights. So, why should we not learn to love and value the planet through our relationship with particular places?

« 6 » The give and take between the particular and the general is, in my view, the most intriguing as well as the most open aspect of the target article, which raises questions that can be important not only conceptually, but also for the practical application of the suggestion that it offers. Below I will select three points that strike me as the three most pressing ones in this respect.

« 7 » The move towards the particular is, as I said, important, but its objects are also difficult to define. What are the boundaries of a “place”? A place, in turn, is composite. If a forest is a place, do we love the forest, or a particular spot within it? And – more importantly for ethical purposes – how do we think of our relationship with all the countless living and non-living participants of that place? The question becomes more pressing when the other participants of the place are not in a position of harmony with us – the tree that may grow to block our view, the mosquitoes whose interests may compete with ours. One possible and well-known answer is Aldo Leopold's (1949) land ethic, which gives primacy to the biotic community (itself a concept with porous boundaries). However, such a view accepts the sacrifice of the individual for the whole, something that a love-based account may not be willing to do.

« 8 » Related to this question is one about the possibility of generalizing from loving a place, however we define it, to loving the Earth, especially if we wish to avoid falling back into a general, abstract object that ill fits the concept of love as presented in the target article, which is Candiottio's aim, also. The answer offered in the article appeals to panpsychist metaphysics and its claim that “[Earth is] localized in places” (§11), so that “by loving one of its instantiations, one loves the Earth itself” (§29). However, it is possible that metaphysics cannot change a person's psychology, which is a necessary factor if loving a place is to have positive environmental consequences.

Without it, it remains possible that love of a particular place may remain narrow and give rise to moral difficulties (Aaltola 2021). This is, indeed, only a possibility, and one rebuttal to the worry may be that loving a place does, indeed, open one's eyes to the value of other places, and of the whole to which they belong. This is, partly, a question for empirical psychology.

« 9 » Finally, the account of love presented in the target article relies on the possibility of communication and reciprocity, something which – like love – looks very different depending on who or what we are engaging with – a creek, a mountain, a cat, a human being. However, this is still too general. Better say: a creek in southern Australia, the mountain forest in the Alps, the stray cat encountered in Greece, the five-year-old daughter of my friend. This is important, because the difficulties, both practical and philosophical, in understanding love depend on these differences. Candiotto asks a question about communicating with the “other-than human.” In light of the particularity that is required by love as described here, I worry about this framing of the question – but agree with the answer. This is the one point where I would depart, in word but not in spirit, from the target article, in pressing for specificity, especially in order to avoid the anthropocentrism that Candiotto, too, rejects. Dividing the human and the non-human into two groups has the worrying implication that communication with all humans is straightforward, and all that is not human (creeks, cats, clams, rocks) is all of a piece. I do not think the author intends this, but its consequences are significant enough to be flagged. Often, human communication breaks down radically. Often, communication with non-human animals we know well is straightforward (on this, see Haraway 2008), and radically different from communication with creeks. The last one is, to me, particularly intriguing, precisely because it is, to someone like me, not fully known.

« 10 » Reflecting on our relationships with natural places, as Candiotto suggests, is worthwhile and perhaps insufficiently practiced, so her article's shift of focus to place and particularity, which may disclose possibilities and meanings so far unforeseen, is very welcome. Also moving toward the particular, Latour ends *Down to Earth* (2018)

with a personal note, introducing himself and telling the reader where he would like to land, in his native Europe. So, I think of one of the places I love, by the Mediterranean, where I miss the greater number of fishes that used to swim under me many years ago, and the fireflies, now rare, dotting the unilluminated paths in the June evenings, smelling of pine and juniper. If I could still choose, I would like to land with the firefly.

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What Needs to Change for Us to Love a Place?

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> Abstract • Candiotto elaborates a down-to-earth enactive epistemology and applies it to environmental ethics. I comment on the timeliness of her intervention and the challenges for an enactive account of place. I concur with her exhortation to a participatory loving of place by becoming native, but notice that the conditions for enacting it are inaccessible for most. Some healing is needed first.

Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

« 1 » Laura Candiotto's situated account of loving nature by paying attention to a place and learning to inhabit it is a major contribution to the effort of building bridges between enactive and environmental thinking. It neatly converges with a recent intervention by Konrad Werner and Magdalena Kielkiewicz-Werner (2022), who initiate a conversation between enaction and environmental ethics and, like Candiotto, also make substantial use of the idea of participatory sense-making and Hanne De Jaegher's (2021) dialectics of loving and knowing.

« 2 » Both works underscore the contributions of the enactive approach in terms of conceptualizing intrinsic value in naturalistic, yet relational and situated terms. They also draw attention to the practical-political-ethical implications of adopting a participatory stance and an engaged (and committed) attitude of letting-be towards our shared environment, an attitude Candiotto beautifully renders as *enactive listening* (§32). These intersecting contributions are an indication that enactive ideas are reaching a stage of maturity that permits dialogues concerning pressing questions in ethics and politics. In turn, we can expect these dialogues to enrich and extend enactive thinking.

« 3 » Many people, particularly in the humanities and social sciences as well as in various fields of practice, such as different