

Ecofascism

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The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature (London: Continuum, 2005).

Fascism is a totalitarian form of government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests and even their lives to the well-being and glory of the state. Acquiring mystical qualities usually reserved for divinities, the state and its leaders become the heroic manifestations of the people's sacred blood. A new social hierarchy is required to overcome the debilitating, blood-destroying effects of mass civilization. Militarism, expansionist nationalism, and racism usually follow from fascism's social Darwinism, according to which dynamic societies can and must win the inevitable struggle for survival against weaker states.

Following this definition, we may define "ecofascism" as a totalitarian government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests to the well-being and glory of the "land," understood as the splendid web of life, or the organic whole of nature, including peoples and their states. The land acquires mystical properties as the sacred source and absolute measure for all things. Polluting the land, either by toxins or by admitting the wrong kind of immigrants, not only threatens the state's stability and security, but is also affronts the sacred natural order itself. Even though the web of life supposedly admits of no hierarchies, ecofascism requires leaders who enforce "natural" principles against selfish (hence, unnatural) individuals and peoples. Militarism, expansionism, and possibly racism are required to defend the land—Fatherland, Mother Earth, Gaia—from those who disrespect the land, including both industrialized countries and overpopulated "developing" nations. Consistent with Darwinist principles, the

ecofascist state will succeed in the struggle for survival, because such a state is more adaptive to (respectful of) the environment, now glorified as the sacred web of life.

No ecofascism government has yet existed, but important aspects of it can be discerned in German National Socialism, one of whose central slogans was *Blut und Boden*, “[pure] blood and [pure] land.” Some portray Nazism as a political religion, according to which the state must protect the racially pure blood that manifests and sustains the creative power of nature. Many Nazis believed that blood purity was crucial for Germany’s sacred mission of saving noble northern European races from degenerate ones, such as the Jews. The Nazis explicitly contrasted their “religion of nature” with the otherworldliness of Christianity, itself a product of the “unnatural” Jews. Since races were closely tied to the land in which they arose, German land had to be protected both from industrial pollution and from the injurious presence of half-breeds. Only pure blood Germans could draw creative energy from the land that originally gave rise to the *Volk*. Divinity was purely immanent within Nature, respect for which was possible only for people with the blood of northern Europeans. Capitalism and communism, which not only reduced peoples to undifferentiated masses, but also destroyed the land with their industrial practices, were supposedly ideological offspring of the nature-despising, blood-polluting, semi-human Jews. These attitudes were not erased from Nazism, despite its post-1936 to the total industrial mobilization required for acquiring *Lebensraum* to the East and for liberating northern European countries from the institutions imposed by modernity, such as democracy, socialism, and capitalism.

Nazism’s perverted neo-paganism must be sharply contrasted with contemporary neo-paganism, which typically affirms the achievements of modernity, while disagreeing

with its total desacralization of nature. Nevertheless, the ecofascist aspect of National Socialism must be kept in mind by those environmentalists who call for worshipping nature and who also engage in a totalizing critique of modernity. At present, hints of ecofascism may be discerned in Germany and France, where right-wing fanatics demand a halt to immigration practices that allow Africans and Asians to pollute German or French soil and blood. In the future, the possibility of some kind of ecofascism could grow if environmental problems lead to international tensions, e.g., disputes over water rights or immigration, that national leaders use as excuse to whip up nationalist and/or ethnic passions, build up military forces, suppress internal opposition, and enforce draconian laws compelling people to behave in ways consistent with the well-being and purity of “nature.”

Further Reading

Biehl, Janet and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*. Edinburgh ; San Francisco : AK Press, 1995.

Zimmerman, Michael E. “Ecofascism: A Threat to American Environmentalism?” in *The Ecological Community* , ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1997), 229-254.

Zimmerman, Michael E. “Possible Political Problems of Earth-Based Religiosity,” *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays on Deep Ecology*, ed. Eric Katz, Andrew J. Light, and David Rothenberg. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000.