

Ecozoic Studies

The Art and Skill of Living Well within Earth Community

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Ecozoic studies concern living artfully and skillfully within Earth Community.

The key question for CES for the five-year period that began in 2021 is “How are we—especially we of the Global North—to live well with Earth and all her beings so as to bring about a principled transition to an ecological age?”

To respond to this question, we (especially we of the Global North) need to learn to live artfully and skillfully within Earth Community.

What follows is a deeper look at some of the words in the phrases above.

Living well: In the question “How do we live well with Earth and all her beings?” instead of “live responsibly,” we of CES chose “live well.” We did not want to convey only a sense of duty or morality. We wanted to convey fulfillment, meaning, adventure, zest, purpose, and proficiency, as well as moral obligation. *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives a long list of definitions for “well” that fit our intended usage of the term:

well (adv.)

- In a good or proper manner: *behaved well.*
- Skillfully or proficiently: *dances well.*
- Satisfactorily or sufficiently: *slept well.*
- Successfully or effectively: *gets along well with people.*
- With reason or propriety; reasonably: *can't very well say no.*
- In a prudent or sensible manner: *You would do well to say nothing more.*
- In a close or familiar manner: *knew them well.*
- In a favorable or approving manner: *spoke well of them.*
- Thoroughly, completely: *well cooked; cooked well.*
- Perfectly, clearly: *I well understand your intentions.*
- To a suitable or appropriate degree: *This product will answer your needs equally well.*
- With care or attention: *listened well.*
- Entirely, fully: *well worth seeing.*

“Well” in our intended usage, however, needs to be understood in the context of the phrase “living well with Earth and all her beings.” So, we are thinking about “living well” in relation to Earth Community.

Many people in Latin America are guided by the understandings that Indigenous people give to *buen vivir* or living well. In their traditional knowledge they have found ways of living well that differ markedly from modernist conceptions that focus on having more goods, more status, more travel, and so on. It is, also, the task of people of the

Global North to find in their cultures and heritages conceptions of ecozoic ways of living that contrast with modernist conceptions.

Artfully. Dictionary definitions of artfully focus on skillful performance. Our intended usage includes this but even more focuses on performing in a way that manifests art, with art defined as follows by *The American Heritage Dictionary*: “The conscious use of the imagination in the production of objects intended to be contemplated or appreciated as beautiful, as in the arrangement of forms, sounds, or words.” We think aesthetics is an important part of living well. A guiding question is “Is it beautiful?”

Skillfully. As with artfully, our use of skillfully relates back to its root word skill. One of the meanings of “skill” is “a developed talent or ability.” When we take into account human-caused negative impacts on Earth’s life and life-support systems and how we are entangled in them, we realize how important the skill of living in life-supporting ways is, and how much work is needed to develop this skill. Our intended use of skillfully refers to developing, learning, and applying skills in living in mutually enhancing relations with other humans and with the larger community of life and life systems.

With Earth and all her beings. When we humans understand Earth as a living planet, we realize that we do not live *on* Earth. Rather, we live with Earth, in Earth, or within Earth, and we are Earth. We need to live courteously as members of this dynamic community of life on which each being and species depends.

Principled transition. One of the definitions of “principle” is “The collectivity of moral or ethical standards or judgments: *a decision based on principle rather than expediency.*” Reflecting on moral standards and making ethical judgments are essential aspects of ecozoic studies. We live in a highly complex world with many competing demands. Development of a moral frame, cultivation of moral imagination where logic does not yield answers, and commitment to a life of virtuous living are needed.

Ecological Age is a more familiar way to refer to the Ecozoic era. We imagine a transition from our current economic-industrial age, in which major social decisions are made primarily on the basis of economics and industrial development, to an ecological-cultural age in which major social decisions are made primarily on the basis of ecology and full human development.