

Comprehensive Exam Reading List

Ecological Intentionality, Creaturely Form, and *The Ecology of the Cross*

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Program: Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion, CIIS

Comprehensive Exam Advisor: Prof. Jack Bagby

Working Dissertation Direction: Ecological intentionality and local action in the context of Edith Stein's *The Science of the Cross*

Working Question

My working question is whether **ecological intentionality** can be developed as a cruciform phenomenology of creaturely relation with potential impacts to local settings. I am beginning with Edith Stein's account of empathy as the givenness of another center of experience, deepening that account through her metaphysics of finite being, form, potency, and participation, and then expanding it through Aristotle, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Ruyer, Deleuze, and Guattari toward a more-than-human account of life, perception, dynamism, and transformative relation under the sign of *The Science of the Cross*.

Rather than whether human beings should act ethically toward the more-than-human world, the deeper question is perceptual with an opening to direct action in terms of what kind of world becomes visible when creaturely life is understood as internally formed, dynamically unfolding, relationally given, and capable of being encountered through disciplined attention, empathy, and participation?

Core Book List

1. Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*.
2. Bergson, Henri. *Freedom Lectures*.
3. Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Chapters 1, 2, and 5.
4. Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?*
5. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*. Course 1, Parts 1 and 2; Course 2.

6. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*.
 7. Ruyer, Raymond. *Neofinalism*.
 8. Stein, Edith. *Finite and Eternal Being*.
 9. Stein, Edith. *On the Problem of Empathy*.
 10. Stein, Edith. *Potency and Act*.
 11. Stein, Edith. *The Science of the Cross*.
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Article and Chapter Additions

15. Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Books V and IX.
16. Aristotle. *De Anima*. Selected readings.
17. Al-Saji, Alia. "A Past Which Has Never Been Present: Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal."
18. Abram, David. "Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth."
19. Bagby, John. *Aristotle's Theory of Dynamics*. Dissertation.
20. Bogue, Ronald. "The Force That Is but Does Not Act: Ruyer, Leibniz and Deleuze."
21. Borden Sharkey, Sarah. "Is Edith Stein's *Finite and Eternal Being* a Kind of 'Phenomenological Metaphysics'?" *Symposium* 25, no. 2 (2021): 48–66.
22. Brown, Charles S., and Ted Toadvine. Introduction to *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
23. de Beistegui, Miguel. "Merleau-Ponty and Bergson."
24. Jani, A. "Edith Stein on Phenomenology, Christianity, and Mysticism." *Religions* 16, no. 3 (2025).
25. Lebech, Mette. "Beginning to Read Stein's *Finite and Eternal Being*."
26. Marder, Michael. "Plant Intelligence and Attention." *Plant Signaling & Behavior* 8, no. 5 (2013).
27. Marder, Michael. "Plant Intentionality and the Phenomenological Framework of Plant Intelligence." *Plant Signaling & Behavior* 7, no. 11 (2012): 1365–1372.

28. Prášek, Petr. "Ecology, Eco-Phenomenology, and the Immanent Ethics of Nature." *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2023): 342–366.
 29. "Raymond Ruyer: Organic Consciousness." In *Organism-Oriented Ontology*.
 30. Smith. "Raymond Ruyer and the Metaphysics of Absolute Forms."
 31. Svenaeus, Fredrik. "Edith Stein's Phenomenology of Sensual and Emotional Empathy." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17 (2018): 741–760.
 32. Toadvine, Ted. "Ecophenomenology after the End of Nature." In *Transforming Politics with Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Jérôme Melançon, 2021.
 33. Toadvine, Ted. "Limits of the Flesh: The Role of Reflection in David Abram's Ecophenomenology." *Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2005): 155–170.
 34. Vainio, Olli-Pekka. "Dark Light: The Mystical Theology of St. Edith Stein." *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016).
 35. Wharne, Simon. "Empathy in Phenomenological Research: Employing Edith Stein's Account of Empathy as a Practical and Ethical Guide." *Methods in Psychology* 5 (2021).
 36. Zahavi, Dan. "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality." *Topoi* 33 (2014): 129–142.
 37. John of the Cross. Selections from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* or *The Dark Night*.
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Reading List

The final shape of the list is organized around the development of ecological intentionality as a phenomenological, metaphysical, and theological account of creaturely relation with the possibility of direct local action in the Piedmont of the Carolinas.

The Aristotelian material provides the grounding vocabulary of being, potency, act, soul, life, and dynamism. Bergson and Ruyer extend this into questions of duration, memory, form, finality, and organismic life. Merleau-Ponty provides the phenomenological account of embodiment, perception, nature, and flesh. Deleuze and Guattari add a conceptual vocabulary for difference, becoming, immanence, and the creation of concepts. Stein remains the central theological and phenomenological figure, especially through empathy, finite being, potency, act, and the cruciform transformation of perception in *The Science of the Cross*.

The article and chapter additions help clarify the major transitions in the project from empathy to ecological intentionality, from phenomenology to metaphysics, from human intersubjectivity to more-than-human life, from organism to form, and from ecological perception to cruciform transformation.

The center remains:

- Stein on empathy, finite being, potency, act, and the Cross
- Aristotle on being, soul, potency, act, and dynamis
- Bergson and Ruyer on duration, form, finality, and organismic life
- Merleau-Ponty on embodied perception, nature, and flesh
- Deleuze and Guattari on difference, becoming, and concept creation
- Ecophenomenology as the bridge into religion and ecology
- Plant and organismic intentionality as the more-than-human testing ground

The goal is to develop a more focused philosophical and theological account of creaturely perception with practical applications. The exam essay would likely argue that ecological intentionality names a form of perception prior to environmental ethics. Beginning with Stein's account of empathy, the essay would show that another being is not first given as an object to be mastered or categorized, but as a center of life whose interiority exceeds direct possession. Stein's later metaphysics then deepens this account by situating finite beings within form, potency, act, and participation. Aristotle, Bergson, Ruyer, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and Guattari then extend this account into questions of dynamism, duration, organism, difference, perception, and more-than-human life. Finally, *The Science of the Cross* gathers these strands into a cruciform account of ecological perception: to encounter creaturely life truthfully is not merely to appreciate interconnection, but to undergo a transformation of sight, desire, and self-possession.

Bibliography

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John of the Cross. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

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