



Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as Environmental Ideas (Suny Series in Environmental Philosophy and Ethics)

David MaCauley

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Explores the ancient and perennial notion of the four elements as environmental ideas.

Bachelard called them “the hormones of the imagination.” Hegel observed that, “through the four elements we have the elevation of sensuous ideas into thought.” Earth, air, fire, and water are explored as both philosophical ideas and environmental issues associated with their classical and perennial conceptions. David MacCauley embarks upon a wide-ranging discussion of their initial appearance in ancient Greek thought as mythic forces or scientific principles to their recent reemergence within contemporary continental philosophy as a means for understanding landscape and language, poetry and place, the body and the body politic. In so doing, he shows the importance of elemental thinking for comprehending and responding to ecological problems. In tracing changing views of the four elements through the history of ideas, MacCauley generates a new vocabulary for and a fresh vision of the environment while engaging the elemental world directly with reflections on their various manifestations.

“...MacCauley’s immense book *Elemental Philosophy*, is an homage to a different and seemingly unfamiliar sensibility in which earth, air, fire and water ... animate human thought and action. It is, at times, a beautiful, informative and transformative meditation on how to interpret and live with the natural world ... MacCauley lovingly infuses the text with elements beyond and between the four, and provides readers with an opportunity to look anew at the connections among the elements themselves and our own lives intertwined with them. These interstices are gems.” — *Essays in Philosophy*

“MacCauley enriches his text by including passages from appropriate poems ... [and] demonstrates a thorough knowledge of ancient philosophy.” — *Philosophy in Review*

“Stimulating and provocative ... An inspiring addition to the book is a series of ‘interstices’—shorter meditations on various manifestations of the elements, like stone, wood, ice, and cloud, among others.” — *CHOICE*


“Freighted with erudition yet buoyant with spirited wordplay, MacCauley’s intellectual history of the four elements is a delightful tour de force of environmental philosophy.” — *Seven Pillars House of Wisdom*

“The book is a multidisciplinary achievement which attests to the author’s thorough acquaintance with, inter alia, ancient Greek cosmology, contemporary environmental philosophy, and literary and artistic traditions.” — *Environmental Values*

“...a very serious book of philosophy. It’s also wonderfully comprehensive, impressively resourceful and superbly imaginative—yet down-to-earth—in bringing the loftiest philosophical thoughts about earth, air, fire, and water together with the excrement, breezes, stoves, and water fountains we live with.” — Carlin Romano, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

“A stunning piece of grounded philosophy. A perception-changing book that begins with elemental things and grows into a profound meditation on humans in nature.” — David W. Orr, author of *Down to the Wire: Confronting Climate Collapse*

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