EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Leena Vilkka takes us on a critical journey through the forest of distinctions and theories that treat life and nature in terms of values. Such values have been variously proposed as intrinsic, inherent, instrumental, immediate, inherited, absolute, derivative, self-generated, objective, subjective, experiential, personal, biological, social, natural, or global. To this proliferation of ideas, Vilkka brings systematic order and sensitive appraisal. She defines the positions, charts their structures, contrasts their programs, weighs their insights, and corrects their shortcomings.

Throughout the philosophical expedition, Vilkka keeps her eye on the living matter that may evade the nets and snares of value-theory. What matters is life. Life has many biological forms, in addition to that form which has been our central concern as theorists and as animals, namely, humanity. Even the Earth might be thought of as a living organism.

Often the theories of values elaborated by human beings that are applied to life and to nature as a whole give priority to the human species. How could we do otherwise? Even theories that take the extra step of arguing for the rights of other living things may operate by extending a set of human values, as if by generosity, to those who are not human beings. The movement is from human rights to the rights of nature.

Vilkka calls for a change of perspective so that we can appreciate the rights of our species, along with the rights of others, as coming under the broader canopy of the value of life. Thus, the rights of nature may give justification to our human rights.

Vilkka is not asking us to forget our humanity. She helps us to discover a fuller sense of what is truly valuable in life on this threatened planet.

Robert Ginsberg
Executive Editor
Value Inquiry Book Series