

King-Tak Ip, ed.

Environmental Ethics: Intercultural Perspectives.

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As the title suggests, this collection addresses the very topical subject matter of environmental ethics by bringing together a host of unique voices. In the editor's words, '[t]he essays collected here represent a joint effort in dealing with this problem [of global environmental conservation and protection]. All contributors to this volume agree that what we urgently need now is global awareness of the environmental crisis we are facing' (9). While a thread of consensus weaves throughout, what is more striking is the diverse and colorful tapestry of approaches these essays yield on a single theme. The first four essays articulate the ethical injunction to conserve and protect the natural environment in terms of various axiological and methodological commitments: normative, biocentric, aesthetic and empirical. In the final five essays, the thematic emphasis shifts ever so slightly. A plurality of perspectives on environmental conservation and protection emerges from different theological commitments, at times reflecting and at other times transcending individual—Christian/Western, Islamic/Middle Eastern, Buddhist/Eastern, and (in the final two essays) Daoist/Eastern—cultures.

The first two essays explore normativity and valuation in environmental philosophy. In 'The Normative Side of Nature', Robert Elliot details three ways in which nature makes ethical demands on the behavior and character of moral agents. These three ways correspond to the three dominant normative ethical theories: utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics. While utilitarians inquire into nature's moral value and 'exaggerate benefits for human beings', deontological treatments run up against the daunting issue of 'how to make sense of the claim that entities that lack consciousness or desires could have rights' (14, 18). As a third way, environmental virtue theories 'are more down to earth than consequentialism and rights-based theories', since virtues (e.g. frugality and generosity) capture the requisite normativity in human-nature relationships (20). In Chapter 2, Gerhold K. Becker evaluates the 'biocentric turn' in environmental philosophy, from a strongly anthropocentric (or instrumental) view to a weakly anthropocentric stance to an entirely non-anthropocentric (or intrinsic) account of nature's value. What does respect for nature require of human agents? In *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (1989), Paul Taylor augments the Kantian notion that beings deserve respect if they are autonomous, extending autonomy to all organisms that have biological aims, rather than rational capacity. In this way, moral status encompasses all living things—flora, fauna, ecosystems and biomes—not just human beings. Becker sums up his assessment of the discourse over environmental value by observing that we cannot transcend our human perspective or adopt a view from nowhere (38).

The next two essays reinterpret environmental ethics as an aesthetic ideal and a matter for empirical study, respectively. Ingmar Persson's contribution, 'Environmental Ethics: An Aesthetic Approach', advances the ambitious thesis that 'environmental ethics' is not, strictly speaking, a branch of ethics. Instead it is an aesthetic concern for the environment' (43). What motivates this radical reconceptualization of environmental ethics is the idea that beings have moral status in virtue of their capacity to possess desires (or conativism). Since ecosystems lack desires, they lack moral status, and so we preserve them not for moral reasons, but for purely aesthetic ones. In Persson's words, 'aesthetic value is a value that the environment has *for beholders of natural beauty*, especially human beings' (51). In Chapter 4, Yeuk-Sze Lo argues that it is possible to resolve deep moral disagreements environmental issues by recourse to 'systematic empirical methods' (56). In one of the most analytic of the collection's essays, Lo explains how a close study of personal dispositions under idealized conditions can reduce hard moral questions to more tractable empirical ones. With this metaethical analysis in place, environmental ethics can best be understood by appeal to artificial virtues, on par with Hume's account of justice, whereby sympathy and convention predispose humans to exercise 'modesty and thoughtfulness' in their relations with the environment (68).

Chapters 5 and 6 initiate the eco-theological portion of the book with two essays in the Abrahamic religious tradition, one from a Christian perspective and another from an Islamic perspective. Notably absent from the collection is an essay from a Jewish perspective. In 'Perils and Dangers: Climate Change and Theological Ethics', Michael S. Northcott addresses the threat of global climate change through a comparison of biogeochemistry and biblical stories. While the story of Genesis is about the natality of humans, it is also an account of how humans became integrally related to the Earth, both biologically and spiritually, through their shared fate and a covenant with God: 'The waters of baptism are the form in the church's life of the original cosmic covenant established between God and creation, a covenant which involved an intrinsic relationship between the human good, human sin, and the fruitfulness and order of the earth' (77). Northcott insists that if measures to reverse climate change are to be undertaken a shift must occur in environmental discourse, from talk of analyzing risks to talk of appreciating the perils and possibilities in our own spiritual relationship with mother Earth.

Anis Ahmad's 'Global Ethics, Environmentally Applied: An Islamic View' examines those principles of the Islamic faith that support a progressive vision of environmental justice. He notes that 'Islamic ethics and morality carry important ecological implications. It guides an individual, society, and state in how to relate itself economically with fellow humans, with the cosmos, and with the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos' (97). Ahmad is especially concerned with the unequal distribution of environmental harms between the global North and the global South. Under current conditions, global political elites and intellectuals deprive opportunities (justice, equity or fairness) for all by proclaiming that Western-style democracy and capitalism await us at the 'end of history' (Fukuyama) and that religious-political conflict can never cease

because of a perpetual ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington) (105). The lesson to be learned from an Islamic environmental ethics is that we should take a more holistic approach to resolving environmental crises, focusing on the intersection between human and non-human communities and accepting a plurality of values, not merely the value of market-based economic efficiency.

The final three contributions voice Eastern perspectives—particularly, those of Buddhists and Daoists—on environmental matters. Pragati Sahni’s ‘In Search of an Environmental Ethics in Early Buddhism’ tracks some of the scholarly obstacles to ascribing environmental concern to early Buddhist thought, specifically its lack of ‘explicit environmental ideas’ and its tendency to stray ‘from the physical world and its concerns’ (117-18). Nevertheless, he sees definite parallels between the writings of early Buddhists and contemporary deep ecologists as well as environmental virtue ethicists. The final two essays take Sahni’s concerns about the compatibility of environmental ethics and early Buddhism, and extend those concerns to Daoism. In ‘Ecosystem Sustainability: A Daoist Perspective’, Jonathan Chan contemplates whether Daoism provides a normative criterion to judge whether some human practices affecting the environment deserve moral approbation or disapprobation. As a corrective to the weak and formalistic definitions of sustainability found in the current literature, Daoism offers a strong and definitive account, whereby trade-offs between economic goods and natural goods would never be tolerated, and ‘future generations...[would] be endowed with a minimum, or even the same, level of natural capital stock’ as the current generation (138). Lastly, in ‘Healing and the Earth: Daoist Cultivation in Comparative Perspective’, Livia Kohn shows how Daoism’s appreciation of the close relationship between human health and the vitality of the Earth coincides with a Western (less mystical, more scientific) understanding of the human-environment nexus: ‘The living planet, like the body, is a completely harmonious and integrated system that functions ideally if treated properly and with care. It, too, has vastly different energetic patterns that all collaborate to make it work in its entirety and which are known to scientists as forms of geomagnetism’ (166). So, according to Chan and Kohn, what the Daoist can ultimately teach us is that exercising restraint in our dealings with the natural world is, first and foremost, an environmental virtue.

Overall, this collection makes an important contribution to the growing sub-field of philosophy known as environmental ethics. It could be faulted for not adequately recognizing the works of many currently dominant environmental philosophers and ethicists (e.g. Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, Andrew Light and Bryan Norton) or other eco-theological perspectives (e.g. Jewish environmental ethics). Still, the collection’s appeal lies in the wide array of cross-cultural viewpoints expressed by its several contributors—viewpoints that, for better or worse, have received little or no attention in the current literature. As a result, the essays expose the reader to perspectives that many journal editors and publishing houses have neglected in their haste to locate a broader audience for this growing sub-field. By transcending the orthodox view of environmental

ethics, the collection fills an important niche. Perhaps what would be in order is a follow-up collection, one that shares an even wider spectrum of previously unheard (and to some extent, marginalized) voices.

Shane Ralston

Pennsylvania State University-Hazleton