

Book Reviews

Light, Andrew and Avner de-Shalit, eds. 2003. *Moral and Political Reasoning in Environmental Practice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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What contributions might philosophers make to the practice of environmental politics and policies? That is the question the contributors to this book seek to answer, if not with complete success. Nonetheless, there are a number of illuminating and insightful chapters that draw on specific cases to illustrate the ways in which moral and political reasoning are fundamental to the things people do to protect the environment.

Contemporary debates almost always acknowledge the moral and ethical aspects of environmental practice and policy, even though most decision-making today seems to be determined by utilitarian calculations. The assumption that policy should be determined by the greatest good for the greatest number is one that is hardly ever questioned, even though cost-benefit calculations can almost always be manipulated. That there might be other, equally pressing ethical concerns is regarded almost with embarrassment in the policy-making realm—when it is not completely ignored. So, what are we to do?

Several authors suggest that reason, if not reasoned conversation, might provide ethical tools that can be directly applied to policy and practice. For example, the editors propose a form of participatory communicative deliberation as one means of raising ethical considerations. But whether reasoned conversation can resolve fundamental conflicts of interest between, say, those who favor protection of a particular species and those on whose land the species is found, is less than obvious (at least to this reviewer). Along similar lines, other contributors propose to “bring ethics back in,” as it were, through constitutional environmental rights, trusteeship, ecological utilization space, and even science-based assessment. What these chapters fail to discuss, however, are the ethics of privatization and private property, especially when they trump public property and well-being.

It is not until the final part of the book, in which specific case studies are offered, that the claims made in earlier chapters begin to acquire some substance. In one, Robert Hood draws parallels between biomedical ethics and environmental ethics; in another, Clare Palmer and Francis O’Gorman deconstruct

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rhetorical justifications of fox hunting and the actual human-animal power relations inherent in it.

Hood argues that biomedical ethics emerged to “cope with novel problems due to technological, economic, and social changes in medicine” (p. 246), just as environmental ethics has emerged to address similar problems arising in human-nature relationships. He recognizes, however, that the moral status of the environment has much less standing than does that of medical patients. While biomedical ethicists formulate general propositions, the specific application of ethical principles in making judgments is very case driven. Hood’s example focuses on the elimination of sea lampreys from the Great Lakes, a relatively easy one because the fish are (1) non-native; (2) predatory on native fish; and (3) susceptible to a species-specific poison that is non-toxic to mammals and has little effect on other fish, plants, birds, and other living things. It is more difficult to make such statements about, say, the elimination of *all* invasive or exotic species.

What Hood does not refer to at all is the role of property rights in making decisions. Biomedical ethics generally address the moral propriety of a specific procedure and how it affects individual dignity and standing. To treat kidneys as an item of commerce, for example, transforms the parts of the body into commodity fetishes. Hence, we purposely try to exclude property considerations from biomedical questions (without much success). By contrast, the central issue in environmental ethics is how to treat nature in terms *other* than property, whether public, private, or sovereign. We would not try to expropriate human organs, whereas we will consider doing so where real property is involved.

The chapter by Palmer and O’Gorman should be required reading for all courses on environmental politics, policy, and ethics, if only because it so clearly illustrates how “nature” is socially constructed. Supporters of the fox hunt often testify to the “bonding in and with wild nature” between humans, horses and dogs, in the pursuit of the verminous fox, driven to destroy “built nature” by killing ducks and chickens. But there are two juxtaposed ethical elements present in such arguments. On the one hand, hunting discourse proposes that “feelings of oneness with nature” are good and ethically proper (along the lines of Deep Ecology). On the other hand, there is something slightly perverse, if not downright unethical, about legions of well-bred men, women, horses and dogs trying to kill a small, terrified animal simply concerned with making a living.

Moreover, domination, which Palmer and O’Gorman regard as unethical, too, is present not only in the chase, but also in man’s animal “partners.” As they point out, “the fox, at least, has an ‘unruly body,’ not shaped by human desires. . . . The very constitutions of the dogs and horses . . . have been constructed by human beings in ways they could never resist” (p. 290). Although the reader comes away with the impression that the authors of this chapter are fiercely opposed to the hunt, it is not their intention to offer arguments pro or con. Rather, they point out that ethical discourses about hunting tend to ignore the extent to

which domination permeates the entire practice. The same could be said, it might be presumed, about a broad range of other discussions and applications of environmental ethics.

In the final analysis, those not well-versed in environmental philosophy, especially undergraduates, may find the first two parts of the book rough going. The half dozen or so case study-based chapters, however, are well worth reading and would be valuable in any course on environmental politics, policy, and ethics.

Evans, Peter, ed. 2002. *Livable Cities? Urban Struggles for Livelihood and Sustainability*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

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Exploring questions related to livability in cities in the developing world, *Livable Cities?* is a valuable contribution to research on sustainability and development. Given that cities in the developing world are the expected locus of both future economic and population growth, challenges related to the livability of such cities are central to both environmental politics and urban governance. The volume, which began as a working group of the Social Capital and Public Affairs Project, draws together scholars from a variety of fields to consider how cities can and must be made more livable.

Through case studies from six areas, the volume explores the issues of livability through two linked concepts, livelihood and ecological sustainability. In the book's introductory chapter, Peter Evans defines livelihood as jobs that offer a living wage in close proximity to affordable housing and accessible services and amenities. Sustainability is defined as having three components. First, livelihood needs must be met in ways that do not degrade or destroy the environment of the city. Second, cities must have a sustainable relationship with their hinterlands, something that is especially key in an increasingly globalized world where cities often have large ecological footprints. Finally, ecological sustainability involves some component of "intergenerational justice," (p. 2) by which Evans means meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to also meet their needs for livelihood in a sustainable way. Following a discussion of the volume's theoretical context, including discussion of the role concepts such as markets and agency in questions of livability, the book moves on to six case studies of efforts to envision and develop livable cities in the developing world using eight urban areas in three regions of the world.

The second chapter by Douglass, Ard-am and Kim, consider strategies to improve environmental conditions in slum communities located in Seoul, Korea and Bangkok, Thailand. After describing each of the communities and their social, cultural and political contexts, the authors consider how a variety of factors contribute to efforts to increase livability. In the case of the Walgoksa-dong