

Book Review

A NEW ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth

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Holmes Rolston III. *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life*, 2nd ed. New York and London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. 282 pp. ISBN (13): 978-0-367-47799-8.

Abstract: In this second edition of *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth*, Holmes Rolston III presents a powerful account of environmental ethics, picking up from where he concluded his monumental work on this very topic in the first edition. The first edition examined humanity's insignificance in the cosmic scheme of things. The focus of the second edition is on the challenges confronting humanity and all its inhabitants, 'the Earthlings,' in the new millennium. The human species, a 'unique species of a unique planet,' also belongs to earthlings. Laced with lifelong research and richly gained experiences in the field, Rolston encourages the readers to choose whether or not humanity wishes to live on a green planet or the planet that has been ruined and charred beyond recognition. Without effective environmental ethics, humans will have no option but to live a 'denatured life' on a 'denatured planet,' having little hope for a bright future in the next millennium.

Keywords: Climate Change, Economics, Ethics, Sustainable Biosphere.

In this 2020 Edition, Rolston takes a critical view of the deteriorating environmental situation, offering perspectives for environmental ethics for the new millennium. The book promises the readers to find

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out who they are, where they are, and what they ought to do for sustainable life on Earth. The writer emphasises group knowledge, group agreement or disagreement, group action, social media, online consumer behaviour, etc., encompassing environmental ethics. An informative and ethical perspective on the effects of epistemic bubbles, echo chambers, and fake news regarding the attitudes of consumers and voters is furnished. The writer points critically at the absence of solidarity among the nation's citizens and the nation-states, leading to environmental deterioration. There is also a thorough and critical analysis of the Anthropocene Epoch and the possibilities of geo-engineering the planet into a synthetic environment.

Diving deep into the contents of the book, one finds Rolston's over-arching concern and empathy for the environmental problems and the commitment to *A New Environmental Ethics*. As the author says, "Environmental ethics spills over into almost everything that goes on in the world" (xii). The book has seven Chapters with detailed bibliography at the end of each chapter and an index at the end.

The first chapter, titled "The Environmental Turn" (1-34), looks at the problems facing life on Earth and the Philosophical interests in the topic. The world is awakening to the exigencies of the times, such as climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability. Saving and preserving biodiversity is necessary for the sustainability of the environment. Paying attention to the environmental turn in philosophy, Rolston briefly introduces the perspectives of environmental justice, eco-feminism, and animal welfare. He criticises President Trump for his environmental U-turn and offers brief introductions to the three pioneering authors who launched the environmental turn: Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and John Muir (22-26).

The second chapter deals with the environmental crisis as humanity enters into a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene when human life on Earth decides the life of the Earth itself. We need to accept that "Environmental quality is necessary for quality of human life" (35). Anthropocentric ethics obliged people to cooperate with other people, and the new environmental ethics demands that people consider other beings living on the common home, the Earth: "everything is connected to everything else" (39). 'Man' is no longer 'the measure of all' though only human beings are moral agents with moral responsibilities. Other beings are moral patients with moral rights but without moral duties. Environmental health is necessary for

all beings for survival and well-being. Rolston points out that the developed countries have greater responsibilities in protecting and promoting a clean environment as they benefit more from the resources of the Earth, which belong to all. Economics and politics governing life on Earth should be guided by ethics rather than profit and power, knowing that "People and their Earth have entwined destinies" (42). Humans are part of nature with unique capacities for political life and building cultures and civilisations.

The third and fourth chapters attempt to describe the value of animals and plants and extend ethical concerns to the animal and plant worlds, respectively. "Discovering in nature their animal roots, those who argue for animal rights, welfare, liberation, etc. propose ethics based on sentience. "Animals are value-able, able to value things in their world, their own lives intrinsically and their resources instrumentally" (74). However, this is not enough: "If one really seeks a biologically based ethic, a sentient animal welfare ethic still leaves most of the world valueless" (105). Environmental ethics goes beyond sentience to consider insects, microbes, plants, species, eco-systems, etc. Biocentrism refers to an ethics of respect for life.

The fifth and sixth chapters emphasise values in species and eco-systems, moving from individualistic ethical concerns. Biologists have a systematic classifying scheme: kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. It is generally accepted that "There is increased intrinsic value as one goes up the ecosystemic pyramid, and so there is more point in saving advanced forms in more detail. Lower down, fauna and flora should be saved mostly for their instrumentality, and saved in specific detail only if this is critical for roles in eco-systems" (144). However, Earth's diversity includes geological and mineralogical diversity, diverse climates, myriads of different islands, mountains, bays, caves, and on and on. Humans threaten biodiversity and earth diversity extensively and globally with anthropocentric values, according to which nature is of value only if and so far as it supports human enterprises. We are to create and maintain eco-systems under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony (186).

Economics and politics need to consider ecological and environmental ethics in their policies and practices. "Environmental integrity and quality is as central as is production, growth, profit" (190). Sustainable development goals are to be entwined with a

sustainable environment. Unfortunately, "The trend of this twenty-first century, continuing from the twentieth, is an escalation of development that threatens the integrity and the health of eco-systems" (209). Rolston categorically interlinks the health of the planet with the health of humanity. Humans should not prioritise themselves over the environment but promote the planet's health as they do theirs. All-inclusive environmental ethics demand that the prosperity of the planet should not be compromised for the sake of the prosperity of the people in the current millennium. The destinies of people and the planet Earth are inextricably intertwined. Rolston observes that "Ecofeminists may add that women are better suited for such caring than these managerial men, dominated by the "dominion" view, and overly inclined to be aggressive managers" (210).

In the seventh and the concluding chapter, Rolston returns to the themes introduced in the introductory chapter and delineates the contours of an "Ethics on the Home Planet" (216-251). Rolston states, "The whole Earth is aesthetically stimulating, philosophically challenging, and ethically disturbing" (216). Maximising profits in a free-trade world indeed produce many benefits, but it threatens the well-being of people, species, and eco-systems. It is a matter of Earth ethics that the poor people and the poor nations bear disproportionately the burdens of environmental degradation. "Individual and national self-interest is at odds with collective global interests" (233). Though humans are the only wise species (*Homo sapiens*) who can reflect on the planet's future, they need to consider the well-being of other species and eco-systems. What they do affects all life on Earth. Therefore, sustainable development should match a sustainable biosphere; we need to live within the planetary boundaries: "The challenge of the last millennium has been to pass from the medieval to the modern world, building modern cultures and nations, an explosion of cultural development. The challenge of the next millennium is to contain those cultures within the carrying capacity of the larger community of life on our home planet" (245).

This ground-breaking book is a welcome addition to the works done in the field of environmental ethics. Students, teachers, and general readers could enrich their minds and transform their lives on Earth, embracing in their ethical vision all beings, the present and the future. The hope and awe that the book exudes are refreshingly enlightening and thought-provoking.