

Kirloskar-Steinbach & Diaconu, "Environmental Ethics: Cross-Cultural Explorations"

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Book Review

Kirloskar-Steinbach, Monika, and Madalina Diaconu, eds. *Environmental Ethics: Cross-Cultural Explorations*. Verlag Karl Alber, 2020.

Environmental Ethics: Cross-cultural Explorations is an English-German collection of eleven articles. Each article approaches questions of environmental ethics from diverse original perspectives, ranging from religious standpoints (such as Hava Tirosh-Samuelson's exploration of Jewish environmentalism and Ingeborg G. Gabriel insights on Christian environmental spirituality) to perspectives from Eastern Europe, East Asian, and Africa. This review is too short to give credit to each piece in depth and will therefore attempt to provide a concise overview and focus on a select few.

In a refreshing article, Sigurd Bergmann explores "Rituals as Environmental Skills" and their potential for environmentalism and environmental ethics, especially in urban spaces and regarding issues of spatial justice. While Bergmann discusses space, Ted Toadvine wrestles with time and climate apocalypticism. He suggests that "acknowledging that we are living the fantasy of our ancestors simultaneously opens a dialogue with our descendants, who pose to us the question of what kind of ancestors we ourselves will be, and what kind of world we will leave to those who follow" (128).

Silvia Donzelli critically reflects on three African-inspired perspectives: Wokineh Kelbessa's discussion of Oromos's environmental ethics grounded on the value of biodiversity, the minimizing of harm to other living beings, and the sustainable use of natural resources; the Nigerian Segun Ogungbemi approach on population growth; and Thaddeus Metz' Ubuntu-inspired theory. In conclusion, she insists on the need for a dialogue between the indigenous population, researchers, and international organizations.

Madelina Diaconu presents the situation of environmental philosophy activism in Romania, placed within the historical context at the crossroad of cultural influences from the former Soviet Union and more recent influences from Western Europe and North America. Her work is effectively complemented by Tatiana Mishatkina's piece on the specifics of the East-European Region regarding environmental ethics and security that gives us a panorama of environmental ethics questions in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. Her article also highlights the socio-political dynamics behind these questions between researchers and research institutions, NGOs, and international bodies (such as the UNESCO). International environmental agreements and their intercultural background are also discussed in Stefan Knauss's piece on "planetary integrity" in environmental law such as the Paris Agreement.

Voices from East Asia are also present. Cheng Xiangzhan shows how the idea of ecological civilization (*shengtai wenming*) appeared in the academic domain in mainland China and how it was borrowed by political discourse and eventually emphasized by Xi Jinping in the

2017 CPC Congress. Xiangzhan defines ecological civilization as “a civilization in harmony with nature” in which “[h]umans must respect nature, follow nature, and protect nature”, forming “a life community” (211). He finally describes how this political discourse converges now with ecological aesthetics.

Moving to Japan, Roman Paşca discusses the work of the Japanese philosopher Andô Shōeki on nature and the self-with-others. He also astutely underlines the subtleties of translating the Japanese *shizen* as nature, as the former had – and still has to some extent – connotations stemming from Buddhism and Daoism, that shape the concept quite differently from the Western word “nature”. In contrast with these philosophical insights, Dean Anthony Brink drew on Guattari and Deleuze’s work and cybernetics and wrote a harsh socio-political critique of Japanese conservation movement, focusing on the case study of the reintroduction of the Oriental Stork in Hyogo Prefecture.

This collective book brings us along in a journey across diverse geographical and cultural circles. Each piece is set into a specific context, and the reader is generally given some key socio-political, linguistic, and historical elements of this context. This enables the reader not only to follow the argument of each author, but most importantly to get a glimpse of the landscape of environmental ethics in each circle. This is probably the strongest point of this book, which gives an overview of the discussions that happen within some of the circles of environmental ethics research around the globe, as well as tools to foster cross-cultural understanding and dialogue. Moreover, to set discussions of environmental ethics within their socio-political contexts and to bridge them with other disciplines, as some pieces of this collection do, can contribute to increase their relevance and lever real-life impacts. Multilingual and cross-cultural initiatives like *Environmental Ethics: Cross-cultural Explorations* are much needed today, as we, human beings, must understand each other to develop common solutions to the unprecedented environmental crises we are facing, while being entangled in the global context of pluralism of worldviews. This book lays an encouraging stone for a more linguistically and socio-culturally inclusive dialogue in the field of environmental ethics at the global level. It paves the way for future cross-cultural and multilingual explorations of other contexts that remain unexplored in this book, such as environmental ethics in Central and South America, as well as South and South-East Asia.

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