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Book Reviews

Richard L. Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. xvi, 267. Paperback, £15.95, ISBN 0-521-00970-7.

This book presents a traditional theistic understanding of the relation between God and the world sandwiched between a rigorous discussion of philosophical ethics of nature and reflections on culture. The author's students had demanded 'Science without numbers, God without sacred texts, ethics without argument, community without constraint' (p. xii), and this book is about how to live with such contradictory tensions in modernity and keep them in balance. In particular he addresses the question of the place of humanity in the natural world and works through the complexities of debates about how to express that relationship. While he is respectful of science, he insists that attempts to ground an ethics of nature on ecological or evolutionary theories are misplaced. This book is not for the faint hearted. While lucid, it is also dense and somewhat compressed in style, reflecting the fact that this book was cut down from the first draft. I had the impression that each of the sections could have formed a separate volume, though keeping the sections together has the advantage of challenging those more familiar with the philosophical literature to include theological and cultural analysis and *vice versa*.

The first section entitled *The Ethics of Nature* begins, as one might expect, with careful reflection on different philosophical options for grounding the way we treat the natural world. He rejects the aesthetic option, arguing that preservation of beauty can never make the same kinds of moral demands as, for example, saving life. He argues for situating moral concern in the context of the moral community, including those who lack agency and are sentient and, more importantly, those who can relate to human beings. He then goes on to distinguish between what is due to humans and non-humans, arguing for some preference for the former. The balance between respect for non-human forms of life and awareness of human distinctiveness in an overall community of life is helpful. He then suggests that the marks of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world are those of decency, deference and necessity. Yet, drawing on the work of Holmes Rolston III, he also argues for a holistic approach to the natural world, one that takes seriously the idea that the natural world has purposefulness and hence rejecting the individualism that has often characterized human-centred approaches. He terms such purposefulness sentiotic—the fact that life is creative seemingly against entropic forces to the contrary.

At the heart of his moral theory it seems that it is respect for life understood in a holistic way and arising from the notion of autopoiesis that needs to be included in what he terms *humane holism*. It soon becomes obvious that such a sentiotic understanding of nature comes close to 'vitalism' that has been rigorously denied by science.

Yet this does not shake his confidence in this proposal. He argues that science cannot capture all that can be said about the natural world, as for example, in the case of consciousness, so this proves that there may notions that are beyond scientific description, but still important in our understanding of wild nature. I would agree with his suggestion that science need not justify an ethic, but the latter still needs to be consistent with science. It is also fair to say that science is an abstraction of reality, seen in one particular way. Hence to derive an ethic from an understanding of nature, even the idea of ecological interconnectedness represents what he terms a 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (p. 82). As one might expect, he warms to the land ethic of Leopold and the possibility of 'thinking like a mountain'. The difficulty in this proposal is that biological science does not appear to be *consistent* with the idea of vitalism that is implied by the concept of sentiosis.

Given that he has accepted the philosophical idea of telos, he then asks how this might be explained in terms of theism, in a shorter section of the book entitled 'The Wild God', perhaps reflecting his fascination with the wilderness as a context in which we can think about God's action in the world. However, he is strongly against pantheistic interpretations of the doctrine of creation—God is Other and transcendent, creating the world out of nothing. He argues that this view of God does not have to be married to a world-denying perspective on material reality. Rather the doctrine of immanence preserves a sense of closeness of God to the world. Drawing on classical writers such as Aquinas, along with more contemporary thinkers such as Moltmann and Pannenberg, the author develops a theistic understanding of religious belief, then marries this to an affirmation of the natural world as reflective of that theism. He cleverly avoids some of the problems associated with such an affirmation by suggesting that creation is ambiguous, that is not all aspects of creation manifest the glory of God to an equal extent. He is keen to include a more generative organic model of the God-world relation alongside the idea of God as fabricator of the world. Those less appealing aspects of creation are explained in terms of the free will defense that he is happy to extend to the non-human world; it is out of love that God allows creation to be itself. While popular, such an explication of all suffering in terms of freedom is not necessarily the only or the most convincing option. It also does not sit very well with his belief that natural evil is 'integral to its goodness' (p. 153), and as such is not sinful, since it is 'the constitutive reality of finitude', not freely chosen.

The final section of the book deals with cultural aspects, yet also seeks to integrate the first and second sections of the book. He stresses once more what sets humanity apart from the natural world, though now understood in terms of theistic naturalism, or *imago Dei*. His argument that an interest in what makes for human good is central to an ethics of nature is convincing and counters more romantic approaches to the natural world that refuse to consider human nature in any detail. I would have liked to have seen a little more filling out of his concepts of decency, deference and necessity. In what sense might these apply to a theistic understanding of human nature? His feel good, do well, do good and be content theses about human well being strikes me as somewhat discordant with aspects of Christian discipleship that seek to move beyond self-interest. Like Moltmann he sees our future as bound up with the fellowship of all creatures, though not as individuals, but as representative of different species. Towards the end of the book he considers more practical issues, such as vegetarianism and sport hunting, and tries to see all sides of the argument. He adopts a pragmatic approach that seeks to find ways of reaching agreement between groups of diverse opinions.

Overall, this book is a careful and scholarly account—though naming Arthur Peacocke as 'Christopher' in the text, index and bibliography is a somewhat unfortunate blunder given his prominence in science and religion debates! It is a book that is highly recommended for use in teaching environmental ethics, in that while challenging to read, it is clear and consistent in style.

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D. Brandt (ed.), *God's Stewards – The Role of Christians in Creation Care* (Monrovia, California: World Vision International, 2002). Paperback. ISBN 1-887983-42-2. $12.95

God's Stewards marks a significant step in environmental awareness amongst biblically conservative Christians. The progress is perhaps less in the stylistic diversity and uneven content, as in the fact that World Vision—the largest American-based Christian relief and development agency—chose to commission and publish this study in preparation for the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. As the introduction states, the purpose is ' a call to Christians, by Christians, to live out the Bible's insistence on faithful creation care' (p. 1).

The book consists of a foreword by Eugene Peterson, an introduction by the editor, World Vision's Don Brandt, and five diverse chapters, with the Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation as an Appendix. The contributors are varied. There are three British, two American (one Roman Catholic, the rest Protestant). There is a biological scientist, an ethicist, a theologian, a missiologist, and the international Director of A Rocha, the Christian conservation organisation.

In the Foreword, theologian and popular devotional author Eugene Peterson sets the tone by conveying—and mourning—the dualistic theology he and many evangelical Christians grew up amongst, which meant that, for many, the 'Christ people' and the 'nature people' (p. x) never met, and Christians were preoccupied with 'the geography of heaven and the temperature of hell'. He welcomes this book as part of the rediscovery of a more holistic Gospel.

In his discussion of 'Environmental Concern calls for Repentance and Holiness', Peter Harris, International Director of A Rocha accuses Western Christendom of 'sleeping with the enemy' and even 'practical atheism' (p. 8), in terms of cultural accommodation to prevailing anthropocentrism, materialism and individualism. Acknowledging many of the critics of Christian eco-praxis, Harris argues nevertheless that, 'authentic Christian belief—revealed in Scripture and known through Christ the Creator—gives the most compelling basis for a way of life that does justice to creation itself' (p. 11). He appeals passionately for a rediscovery of a theocentric (and thereby ecocentric) worldview, showing how an understanding of a relational God involved with all creation can overcome spirit /matter and private/public dualisms, and can provide a basis for living out Christ's lordship as good news for the whole cosmos—valuing marginalised peoples as well as the whole material creation.

Professor R. J. Berry, doyen of evangelical environmentalism, entitles his chapter 'One Lord, One World: The Evangelism of Environmental Care'. He makes common cause with Harris in seeing relationships—with God and with each other—as the key to a biblical view of creation (p. 20). Otherwise this is a wide-ranging chapter, containing much material Berry has used elsewhere. He begins by defending the Bible as

'non-scientific' not 'un-scientific' (p. 18), and containing important principles for understanding both environment and development. He sees Genesis 1.28 as propounding a biblical understanding of 'dominion' as servant-kingship, implying 'reliability and hence responsibility' (p. 20), and of stewardship as 'active management – not merely conscientious preservation' (p. 22). In defence of Christianity's intellectual robustness, he accuses Eastern religions and the New of failing to offer practical environmental solutions, and challenges concepts of natural equilibrium or balance (p. 27). With examples from Polynesia, Easter Island and the U.S.A., Berry illustrates that an understanding of the fall and of the hope of redemption is crucial. Only when humanity enters back into proper relationship with God can creation be set free. The chapter concludes with an appeal to Christians to find common cause with the environmental movement (pp. 28-29).

'Ecology and Christian Ethics', by Michael S. Northcott packs a massive amount into a few pages. Beginning by relating the devastation of logging in Indonesia to the choices made by Western consumers, he illustrates that we are all part of the crisis. He rejects as simplistic the notion that the ecological crisis can be blamed on Judaeo-Christian dominion teaching (although later admitting 'some limited validity' (p. 40) to Lynn White Jr's thesis), and sees gender-domination, renaissance humanism, and individualistic materialism as also responsible. Northcott then turns to analysing responses, summarising deep ecology and process theology, but favouring a rediscovery and re-reading of biblical theology. In constructing this, once again (as with Harris and Berry), the 'deep relationality of God, humans and the earth' (p. 38) is seen as central, here put in covenantal terms. The connections between false worship, human injustice and ecological destruction are drawn out both from scripture and from historical examples. Finally, Northcott offers several principles for Christian environmental ethics. These begin with a confession of human responsibility for the state of the earth, and of reliance on Christ's work as redemptive for both people and the wider creation. The principles move on to the centrality of worship in community and of practising the classical 'virtue ethics' in a local setting. The chapter ends with an affirmation that Christian ecological ethics are not about an 'impossible utopia' (p. 48), but about worshipping communities at a local level challenging the dominant values of consumer society.

The fourth contribution is by Anne M. Clifford, Associate Professor of Theology at Duquesne University and Catholic religious. In 'From Ecological Lament to a Sustainable Oikos', she discusses whether Christianity can provide a theology of sustainable *oikos* or 'our earthly home' (p. 52). As well as summarising some existing Church responses, Clifford tackles two serious objections to Christian environmentalism, that biblical faith is anthropocentric (per. Lynn White Jr *et al.*), and that a goal of 'eternal salvation' predicates against earthly—and ecological—concerns. In tackling the accusation of anthropocentrism, Clifford admits that interpretations of Gen. 1.26-28 by thinkers such as Francis Bacon legitimised the exploitation of nature, but argues that, seen in context, these passages support the view that 'humans have a moral responsibility to sustain the order of the world God created' (p. 59). Again, the second objection, of other-worldliness, is seen as a false (if frequent) interpretation of the biblical record, with the affirmation of continuity between God's creative and redemptive work, and specifically that the 'household of life with God' (p. 60) embraces all creatures in Christ. In her conclusion, Clifford argues that a biblical understanding of 'kinship solidarity' (p. 60) between humans and all creatures can actually inform and extend existing understandings of sustainability.

Don Brandt, of World Vision's contribution 'Stealing Creation's Blessings', is the final, and longest contribution to this book, and draws on the other contributors. Brandt is consciously in dialogue with those evangelical Christians who 'rail against environmentalism' (p. 66) and lists some of the arguments often used. He goes on to outline Calvin DeWitt's three-step process by which people first become aware of creation, second learn to appreciate it, and third become concerned for it as they realise they are part of creation. From this he turns to looking at the history of Christian attitudes, summarising Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant views in turn, and defending a biblical approach from feminist and liberal critiques. In his conclusion, Brandt affirms three principles—the theocentric (not anthropocentric) nature of the Bible, the identity of humanity as part of the created order, and finally the distinctive role of humans as 'worshipful stewards' (p. 74) of God's world.

In conclusion, *God's Stewards* is a useful marker in the development of (mainly) evangelical environmental thought. It adds little that is new, but contains useful summaries of writings by key thinkers and practitioners. However, it is uneven in quality and style, and it is difficult to see who it is targeted at. Most evangelicals who are opposed to environmental engagement will see much of it as too technical, and those who are convinced will find much of the material elsewhere.

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Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp.viii + 287. Paperback £16.99, ISBN 0 7486-1438 9. Hardback £49.99, ISBN 0-7486-1437 0.

The origins of much contemporary Western environmental concern, as Eugene Hargrove reminds us, may be seen in the development of the natural history sciences of ecology, biology and geology (Hargrove 1989: 40). These studies not only fascinated and inspired figures such as J.W. Goethe, Alexander von Humboldt, Louis Agassiz and Aldo Leopold but also featured a vital emphasis on direct observation, representation and aesthetic appreciation, especially in the pre-camera days when drawing skills were necessary to the investigator; consequently, to trace environmentalism's progress is to trace a process in which art, science, aesthetics and ethics have been deeply interconnected from the start. In this book, Emily Brady attempts to develop an integrated theory of the aesthetics of nature that can account for, express and help develop aesthetic appreciation whilst negotiating the boundaries between the various types of enquiry and value involved.

Structurally the book is organised straightforwardly, running through eight chapters dealing with the realm and intellectual background of nature aesthetics, the nature/culture distinction, influential contemporary accounts and a two chapter exposition of Brady's 'integrated aesthetic' before dipping back into practicalities by cashing out the theory's implications for public justification of aesthetic values and the interconnections between aesthetic and other modes of valuing nature, such as ethical or economic valuing. Expanding somewhat, Brady's view 'sits between… objective realism, which holds that aesthetic properties exist in objects independent of observers, and…subjective realism, which holds that aesthetic properties are entirely

dependent on the subjective states of the appreciator' (p. 19), and thus fits into the type of relational valuing framework that has been popular in environmental philosophy for some time. Sensibly rejecting both the casual reduction of nature aesthetic to landscape and the bias towards the visual which has coloured much Western aesthetic theory, Brady emphasises how nature 'as environment, is a three-dimensional dynamic space with multi-sensuous qualities' (p. 42), takes pains to 'reject the notion that what humans produce is necessarily natural' (p. 55) whilst avoiding simple dualism, and in doing so partly sets the bounds for differentiating nature aesthetics from artwork appreciation by tacitly emphasising sensory immersion. After picking her way through an overview of the contemporary theories—the views of Carlson, Hepburn, Saito, Berleant, Carroll and Godlovitch are all given critical evaluation—the author opts for a non-cognitivist stance, especially repudiating the fixation with scientific knowledge found in Carlson's model on the grounds that whilst 'we feed background beliefs into [aesthetic] appreciation, the experience is predominantly characterised by non-intellectual engagement with the world' (p. 96), and we are then led to her 'integrated aesthetic'.

Brady's integrated aesthetic theory is well thought through and highly sophisticated. Influenced primarily by the work of Kant, Hepburn and (to an extent that Brady is less clear about) Sibley, its starting point is the character of aesthetic value as a form of non-instrumental value. Whilst subject-object perceptual interaction is stressed, nonetheless acknowledgment 'of nature's otherness is implicit in appreciation' (p. 121) and this is mainly given voice through Brady's largest debt to Kant, the idea of disinterestedness. Though Brady rejects labelling her theory as neo-Kantian, largely due to her refusal to background the emotions and repudiation of Kant's belief that imagination is a necessary condition of aesthetic experience, a refashioned Kantian idea of disinterestedness is central to it, linking both to recognition of otherness and non-instrumental value via the claim that disinterested aesthetic appreciation 'does not require that we set aside who we are, it requires only that we set aside *what we want*' (p. 132, emphasis original). Disinterestedness in this sense is directed outwards and fully compatible with engagement with the object, indeed it connects to a type of respect and sympathy; if I understand Brady correctly, the disinterested aesthetic appreciator is both sensitively engaged with the object and captured by attention to it whilst at the same time set apart from any attempt to manipulate it, rather as someone may be captured by attention to a beautiful butterfly that settles upon her shoulder. With this clarifying notion in place, imagination and the affective capacities can be used to enrich aesthetic appreciation with disinterestedness playing a pivotal role, assisting the imagination in focus while restraining it from outright fantasy: 'it is the active detachment of disinterestedness that clears the ground for the free activity of imagination, but it is also what helps to keep it in check, preventing self-indulgent responses' (p. 159). Thus a level of objectivity can be given to aesthetic judgments, despite Brady's espousing the view that all such 'judgments are particular rather than general judgments, so our aesthetic descriptions and evaluations are not a matter of inference from general criteria' (p. 201), and she duly concludes with some interesting reflections on the role of aesthetics in conservation issues and a brief examination of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics.

Overall, the evaluation has to be very positive. Brady's ideas are skilfully interwoven and will certainly be required reading for natural aesthetics specialists, as well as being interesting to many environmental philosophers working on axiology more

generally. Critically speaking, there is much fine scholarship here but one is occasionally surprised at emphases; for instance, this pragmatist was delighted at John Dewey's recognition in the text but rather bemused at the manner of his presence, with Dewey popping up intermittently to argue for defence or prosecution like a lawyer on successive part-time contracts. Given the treatment that Brady gives to disinterestedness and the aesthetics/ethics relationship, it is also surprising that she appears unaware of the way in which her views might complement those of her Lancaster colleague John O'Neill, whose critique of the 'lust of the eyes' vice in the arts and sciences (O'Neill 1993: 162-65) would surely dovetail neatly with Brady's concern for non-instrumental appreciation. These quibbles, however, should not detract from a book that contributes significantly to nature aesthetics.

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