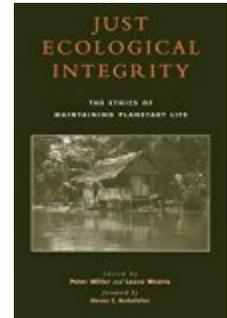


Peter Miller, Laura Westra. *Just Ecological Integrity: The Ethics of Maintaining Planetary Life.* Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. xxii + 326 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7425-1286-3.



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Theory and Practice of Environmental Justice

Sustainable development, as advocated by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, remains a major goal of most governments and environmental agencies. Its desirability has been echoed by subsequent UN conferences, notably that on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and more recently by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. As a concept, it has much merit but as a realistic goal it is elusive, even enigmatic, and prone to evangelism. In an environmental context, and to parody Oscar Wilde, most practices are sustainable but some are more sustainable than others; and there is a significant and often unquantifiable temporal element in sustainability because of the dynamic nature of both environment and the people that are supported by it. Moreover, what is sustainable in one region may cause degradation in others. Efforts to foster sustainable development, stimulated by the UN conferences, include the Earth Charter Commission, established in 1994, and the Global Ecological Integrity Project

begun in 1992. A collaborative conference held in 2000, with some additions, has resulted in *Just Ecological Integrity*.

The introduction details the histories and philosophies of these two projects. The Earth Charter (EC) has established and formulated ethical principles on which sustainable development may be founded; its mission is their dissemination to governments and policy makers worldwide. A major objective of the Global Ecological Integrity Project (GEIP) has been to define 'integrity' and related concepts in the many and disparate contexts of the environmental and human dimensions of sustainable development. This broad church brings together the human and environmental sciences and highlights the interdependence of ecology and economy. By default the focus of society until the mid twentieth century that dualism, or polarization of people and environment, should prevail, is rejected and replaced with mutualism. There is, however, a failure to recognize that the relationship between people and environment is not symbiotic; for humans the environment is essentially existential,[1] a charac-

teristic that is not reciprocated; the environment will persist long after its human burden has become extinct, as will life. This is the essence of the Gaia hypothesis;^[2] Gaia's harmony has resonances with 'integrity' yet Gaia is ignored in this book despite its provision of a valuable framework for understanding earth-surface processes affected or unaffected by human activity. Moreover, one of the most important ways in which society alters environment is through perturbation of biogeochemical cycles, especially the carbon, sulfur and nitrogen cycles. Indeed most technological achievements have facilitated this perturbation e.g. the development of agriculture, fossil fuel use, mechanization, artificial fertilizers, agrochemicals, and of course genetic modification of crops. An opportunity has been missed to invoke a comprehensive framework of environmental management based on biogeochemical cycles; a single chapter would have sufficed to set the fundamental scene for all the valuable material presented in *Just Environmental Integrity*.

The introduction, notwithstanding the comments above, includes a summary of the GEIP's deliberations which define the elements of 'integrity', notably, understanding, values, measurement, prescriptions and social measures. Thereafter, the ten chapters of Part One are divided into two: five describe and evaluate the Earth Charter, its role in sustainable development and as an ethical framework, its relationship with democracy and in the context of gender relations and ecofeminism. Shared and/or universal responsibility, respect, and indeed reverence not only for the environment as a source of sustenance and wealth are also explored. The additional five chapters provide sound introductions to humans/society-environment relationships and measurements/indicators of people-environment interactions. The material includes philosophical debates on human values and environmental preservation, the shift to a biocentric (akin to the mutualism of Gaia) rather than anthropocentric view of the world, and the emergence of environmental

ethics. The chapters on indicators provide a useful summary of recent approaches to the quantification of human impact; examples include the ecological footprint, a genuine progress indicator and a range of other economically-based indices.

Part Two comprises seven chapters detailing specific examples of human impact. Agriculture is the focus of three chapters which is encouraging at a time when it is often neglected in courses on geography or environment. Despite all the problems of overproduction, as in Europe, the political and economic ramifications of protectionism in Europe and the USA, and associated trade issues which disadvantage developing countries, it must be stressed that agriculture remains the most widespread cause of environmental transformation. Moreover, all other economic activities depend on it and for many nations it is the most significant means of wealth generation. Other impacts discussed in Part Two include gold mining in Romania and the problems caused by the spill of cyanide-contaminated water, the links between the global market system and environmental degradation, the rise in western-style global consumption and its disadvantages, and the mitigation of global warming within established agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change established in 1972. All are noteworthy environmental issues though the loss of biodiversity is given little attention despite the fact that, unlike most other environmental problems, it is irreversible; faunal and floral extinction is final and is directly related to most other human impacts such as agriculture, climatic change, acid rain, urbanization etc.

Justice, conflict and the preservation of nature are the topics of Part Three. Theories and definitions of environmental justice are examined in the context of eco-integrity, fairness and unfairness in the distribution of wealth and material goods, and the role of stakeholders in effecting and managing environmental justice. There is some reiteration of the ecological footprint, mea-

surements of which could provide one method for addressing environmental internationally and inter-regionally. The final five chapters provide case studies from a variety of environments to illustrate the principles and practice of implementing the Earth Charter. Injustice in Colombia due to the impact of drug and oil production is discussed; the reverberations are legion and relate to deforestation for crops for drug production, violence, lawlessness, oil spills, the problems of the landless poor. Quite a different case study focuses on the pros and cons, including possible risks from radiation, of constructing a cyclotron for medical purposes in Slovakia. Problems of and conservation in Poland's Bialowieza are considered as is the status of the Corcovado National Park and the Osa biological corridor in Costa Rica and the political context of their preservation. Why debt-for nature swaps in Costa Rica are not always as favourable as they may seem is another topic; as power is given over to the 'colonial' provider of debt relief, it is lost to those for whom the 'nature' is their subsistence.

There is much thought provoking material in this heavy weight book. The juxtaposition of theory and practice is welcome and each chapter has a reference list for those who wish to pursue individual topics further. I draw attention to the criticisms I gave at the opening of this review and to these I would add the fact that the lack of Asian and African contributors and case studies is striking. Herein lies an injustice and reflects lack of integrity, the very issues that are the objectives of this book! Perhaps a companion volume could redress the balance. The other irritation is the lack of an index. Nevertheless, the many contributors, mostly from the USA, have produced a work of note that should be consulted by all those interested in just environments. At \$24.95 (paper), this book is accessible to students and instructors.

Notes:

[1]. Mannion, A.M. The existentialities of biodiversity conservation. In *Archives of Nature Con-*

servation and Landscape Research. 2000. vol. 39, pp. 81-102.

[2]. Lovelock, J. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. See also Schneider, S.H and Boston, P.J., eds. *Scientists on Gaia*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.

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