

*Sustainability Ethics: 5 Questions* ed. Ryne Raffaella, Wade Robinson, and Evan Selinger. United States: Automatic Press, 2010.

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In *Sustainability Ethics: 5 Questions*, editors Ryne Raffaella, Wade Robinson, and Evan Selinger offer a collection of thought provoking interviews by some of the leading thinkers working in sustainability ethics. Scholars, such as J. Baird Callicott and Bryan Norton, were asked 5 specific questions designed to give them the opportunity to express their particular definition of sustainability ethics and outline the aim, scope, and future trajectory of this field. The editors noted in their preface that while sustainability has become a prominent topic and popular buzzword in the past two decades, there is little consensus on its meaning. This ambiguity has led to seemingly insurmountable disagreement and the claim that sustainability is a “contested concept” (iv). In addition, according to the editors, such disagreement is ultimately rooted in preconceived value judgments. Thus, the editors of this volume aspired to better clarify the meaning of sustainability and sustainability ethics and to outline directions for future inquiry.

Some readers will be most interested in Brad Allenby's treatment of sustainability ethics which revolves around the conception of an anthropocentric earth where the Five Horsemen of technology pose unique problems which will be difficult to address with current conceptions of sustainability (Allenby 4, 17). In addition, other readers with a more practical bent may be interested in Donald Brown's treatment of sustainability as a guide to action or in Judith Lazar's essay where she calls for progress in the absence of agreement (Brown, 53; Lazar. 122). A reader may also find Paul Thompson's Douglass/Thompson approach to sustainability helpful when trying to navigate the many definitions of this contested concept (Thompson 250). Finally, David Orr's call for precaution and humility when trying to define sustainability offers a seed of wisdom that will hopefully take root in future dialog (Orr 183).

One problem that I found in this work is the lack of diverse voices and positions in its pages. While there was mention of other cultures and communities, such as in the essay by Richard Bawden, the discussion was largely framed from within the Western tradition (Bawden, 26-27). Sustainability ethics is a field that is inherently both interdisciplinary and international. For this reason, any collection on this topic should be inclusive of positions grounded in non-western traditions and coming out of diverse standpoints. While this particular book failed to do this, it did promote discussion between people coming from different fields and working out of different Western theoretical frameworks.

Arguably, one of the goals of the editors of this work was to begin a conversation around sustainability and sustainability ethics. Overall, I feel that they fulfilled this goal and that these interviews are a valuable addition to the literature. In a world where “wicked problems” such as global warming and food shortages are threatening the continuation of ecosystems and human life as we know it, hopefully the conversation started on this topic will continue. One thing is clear, however: *Sustainability Ethics: 5 Questions* has helped to launch and enrich this discussion by offering a collection of thought provoking essays by some of the leading thinkers working in this field.

References

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