

Book Review

New Earth Politics: Essays from the Anthropocene. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. xiv + 442 pages. ISBN 9780262034364, \$68.00, hardback. ISBN 9780262529198, \$34.00 paperback. ISBN 9780262332118, \$24.00 Ebook. Simon Nicholson and Sikina Jinnah, Eds. 2016.

Nicholson and Jinnah's excellent volume is animated by a sense of crisis. Not so much the "environmental crisis" in the more conventional sense of the empirical and normative challenges of dealing with the range of environmental problems we are familiar with, but more the sense of a crisis of vocation, and thus of our conventional categories of analysis, for those of us in the academic world, provoked by what they term "New Earth Politics." This is a sense of a novel set of political dynamics and challenges created by what is more drily termed the Anthropocene.

In this context, the editors sought to bring together a large number of well-known scholars of global environmental politics in an effort to reflect seriously on the nature of our enterprise given these new conditions. The contributions are expressly essays, hence the subtitle, rather than research contributions. The authors were asked to reflect personally, even autobiographically, on how this novel condition affects their own work. Throughout the volume, we find thoughtful, often highly troubled and troubling, reflections about our varied practices as scholars and about how we might respond to the challenges thrown up by the Anthropocene condition. These reflections are beautifully encapsulated in Biermann's concluding chapter, which brings our attention back to the central questions of how we should think and act in the novel conditions we face, drawing on the more specific and focused reflections in the preceding chapters.

The volume is organized as a series of paired essays, with the authors of each chapter asked to coordinate in ways that sought to highlight differences, commonalities, and other connections between their contributions. Sometimes this takes on the sense of a dialog. This is the case for the opening two chapters by Conca on the one hand, emphasizing the depth of the crisis we currently face and of the transformative social change that is necessary, and Deudney and Mendenhall on the other, arguing that a deep "environmental civilization" is already widely established and poised to enable the transformations Conca suggests are needed. It is similarly the case for the chapters by Young and Falk on how scholars relate to the outside world, with Young focused on the science-policy interface and reflecting on his work in that regard, whereas Falk's engagement has been less as expert and more as an "engaged citizen," connected to and involved in social movements.

At other times, these pairings are framed more in terms of two aspects of a particular theme. On the question of teaching and pedagogy, Litfin's chapter, for me a highlight of the book, shows with wonderful clarity the dilemmas of teaching about topics that can provoke such deep emotional reactions from students, and to use

that emotional reaction to open up conversation and learning rather than provoke denial or despair. Following this, Maniates discusses the problematic question of “hope” in teaching—that students seek to respond to the way that the relentless degradation that is the condition of the “New Earth” can produce a sense of despondency, with what can be a trite or naïve invocation of hopefulness.

Running throughout the volume is the question of where action to address the crisis (both the “external” crisis of social–environmental degradation and the “inner” crisis of meaning for us as scholars) may best be focused. Social movements and political contestation versus institutionalized action is a recurrent theme, reflecting not only the debate between Young and Falk, but the chapters on social movements by Jacques and Assadourian contrasting heavily with those of O’Neill and Ivanova on international institutions, and the chapters by Wapner and Dauvergne at the end of the volume focused most clearly on the necessity of engaging in deep narrative reframing to reclaim sustainability from its corporate hegemony (Dauvergne) and reflect on the continued marginality of environmentalism in political discourse despite its apparent ubiquity (Wapner), as well as of course in the chapters on pedagogy by Litfin and Maniates.

The chapters that emphasize the locus of action in social movements and a politics of contestation articulate their arguments more explicitly in relation to the notion of the “New Earth” than do those focused on international institutions and geopolitics. Indeed, the chapters by O’Neill and Ivanova on international institutions and Gupta and Shapiro on geopolitics are arguably the ones where the “New Earth” framing for the book as a whole are least present. The former limit their (otherwise fascinating) contributions to assessments of the successes and weaknesses of global environmental institutions, in general in O’Neill’s cases and specifically regarding UNEP in Ivanova’s, largely without reference to this epochal claim. The obvious contrast in the book here is with Burns and Nicholson’s chapter on geoengineering, where the human capacity to intentionally act to affect climate poses radically novel governance challenges.

Similarly, the question of how we share what Gupta calls “ecospace” is crucial, but not dependent on accepting the Anthropocene proposition, and China’s rise, as analyzed by Shapiro, is similarly important for how we navigate the Anthropocene, but is not explicitly talked about in this way in the chapter. While these chapters are nevertheless full of interesting insight and material, it is telling to me that it is the most conventional “International Relations” bits of this book that found it hardest to deal with the Anthropocene provocation.

The other recurrent theme is that narratives matter. Dubash’s chapter on energy transformations shows wonderfully how the mixing of narratives of climate change, energy security, energy poverty, and local environmental sustainability can be deployed strategically to great effect. Dauvergne, perhaps in contrast, worries as to how this narrative’s flexibility enables cooptation by powerful forces. But while Dubash focuses on the political utility of specific narratives, and Dauvergne worries about this, others present the case for radically novel narratives. Perhaps strongest is Assadourian’s argument for a new “missionary religious force” for environmentalism: that environmentalists need to strategically mimic how the world’s great religions spread. Litfin argues that we need to work with the powerful “dark emotions—fear, anger, grief, despair and guilt” (p. 117), and thus to make them enable

new stories rather than be pedagogically and politically debilitating. Wapner similarly emphasizes the importance of new narratives in his reflections on being on the “margins,” connecting the volume nicely back to Conca’s opening volley focused on precisely how dangerous a situation we now find ourselves in.

This is a book primarily for scholars in the field, to provoke us to reflect on all of our scholarly practices. It will be excellent for Ph.D. students and new scholars to think through how they want to engage the world over the coming decades, as well as for established scholars to engage in a “reality check” as to how they need to reorient their work to be more adequate to the challenges we face. As such, it is a highly rewarding provocation.

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