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# Reviews

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David W. Rutledge, *Humans and the Earth: Toward a Personal Ecology*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993. Pp xi + 210. \$39.95 ISBN 0-8204-2212-6.

What are the sources in Western culture of the abuse of the natural environment so evident in our time? David Rutledge claims in *Humans and the World* that the ecological crisis has emerged from a lengthy historical process, but that alienation of humans from themselves and their environment has been a special, and pathological, result of modernist/critical thought of the past 400 years. He attends especially to the roles religious belief and practice have played as the milieu in which modernism arose and as themselves supporting the separation of humans from their natural environment. He also proposes a remedy: in order to heal themselves and nature, humans should reappropriate an appreciation of themselves as embodied persons integrally a part of nature.

*Humans and the Earth* is a book that reflects the character of David Rutledge: thorough and thoughtful, fair and judicious. Rutledge is knowledgeably grounded in the vast literature of the ecological movement, and he provides a balanced, well documented account of many of its findings. One gains an accurate view of the scope of the book from the titles of its five chapters: "The Ecological Crisis in Post-Critical Perspective," "Attitudes to Nature in the West," "The De-Naturing of God and Humanity," "Revisioning Nature and Spirit," and "Revisioning Human Understanding."

Rutledge is, of course, far from alone in chronicling the destructive results of the dualisms associated with modernism. The dichotomies of modernism are many: matter/mind, fact/value, science/humanities, nature/history, body/spirit, determinism/freedom, etc. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor offers an insightful approach to these dichotomies. He carries out an historical examination of a particularly portentous and problem-

atic dualism: the increasing separation of an interior self from an exterior world. He finds Homer and subsequent Greek thinkers to write about a public world in which persons are engaged. Descartes and Locke, in contrast, describe the self in terms of interior cognitive functions which effectively make both attitudes of care and moral judgments merely subjective preferences. The self is thereby disengaged from the world (and, necessarily, from nature). Consequently, solipsism becomes a threat that both continental rationalism and British rationalism must seek to avoid. A feeling of alienation, a key issue in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is another byproduct of the inner/outer dualism.

Rutledge's account differs from Taylor's in that he concentrates more on religious and humanistic than on philosophical contributions to the alienation of humans from nature. Not that he neglects the impact of science and philosophy. After having noted the sacramental, fearful, contemptuous, unmindful, and romantic attitudes taken toward nature by some in the Western tradition, Rutledge claims that

Our ecological crisis is particularly indebted to three additional conceptions of the natural world that remain influential among us: (1) the *anthropocentrism* of the Greek and biblical traditions that assumes human superiority over nature; and (2) the *mechanism* of the scientific revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that affirms the complete passivity of nature; and (3) the *utilitarianism* of the technological revolution of the last two centuries, which applies the earlier notions to the use and control of the natural world for human benefit. (47-48)

The role of science and technology in dominating nature, as undergirded by economic incentives, is thus duly acknowledged. But believing that "religion is still a most pervasive way of shaping a society's deepest convictions"

(18), Rutledge spends much analytical energy in unweaving the strands of Judaism's and Christianity's influence in creating the ecological crisis.

Many analyses of Western religions' influence on the environment begin with Lynn White's famous 1967 article alleging that Genesis 1:28 ("fill the earth and subdue it;...have dominion") sponsored the exploitation of nature, enabling us to regard it as a resource for human use. Rutledge's take on the ensuing debate is that an "awareness of the complexity and mutual entanglements of ecological history" (65) has been a helpful legacy of the discussion.

More problematic than any particular biblical passage in Rutledge's view are a number of Christian convictions "that seem to make ecological thinking virtually impossible today — emphasis on a heavenly afterlife, a completely transcendent deity, the radically historical character of divine revelation, or a dualism of soul/body (or spirit/matter)" (66).

Christianity has tended to be centered on salvation history rather than on the immanence of God in the creation, on redemption through Christ from the sinfulness of this world rather than on God's incarnation in Christ and the availability of the Holy Spirit as signs of God's presence in the natural realm. Nomination, Calvinism, and Enlightenment thought have in common a view that separates God from nature. Creedalism, which emerged as the prevalent form of Protestant and Catholic orthodoxy (or neo-orthodoxy), may be seen as the equivalent in the theological realm of mind/body dualism in the philosophical realm.

Rutledge catalogs some biblical resources that can be utilized on behalf of Jewish and Christian ecological vision. His greatest interest, however, is in showing how a Polanyian perspective (or more precisely, a Poteatian perspective incorporating key aspects of Polanyi's thought) orients thinking and acting in a way which does not bear the wounds of dualism but rather is supportive of ecological vision.

I want to explore the possibility of a contempo-

rary use of faith meaning "reliance," which affirms the traditional understanding of faith as relying upon God, but also connects us with current understandings of how each person relies upon his or her body in order to have any commerce with the world, other people, or even God. (115)

A Polanyian emphasis on the embodied character of all knowing is developed by Rutledge to support an immanent faith as the primordial ground of the religious life. Affirmations of transcendence are seen as convictional statements rooted in embodied human experience. Rutledge refers to the rubrics of orality, temporality, embodiment and limitation as characteristics of all acts of knowing, including religious knowing. As fallible, finite human beings, we stand before God whose involvement in history and nature is known in mindbodily behavior rather than in purely mental terms. Knowing that our mindbodies are part of the created nature order, we can no longer imperiously subject nature to the abusive treatment modernism has encouraged.

What is one to make of Rutledge's Polanyi-influenced ecological vision? I offer four observations.

First, I question whether the revisioning of humans as mindbodies rather than as souls or minds housed in a body would do as much to support ecologically sensitive decision making as Rutledge apparently believes. Just as humans treat inanimate nature as a resource, so people treat other people as resources all the time, as our existence in a world marked by market strategies, downsizing, and similar bottom line considerations demonstrates. Climbing over others to reach "success," combating others to the point of war, manipulating others to satisfy our "needs" — the list of the ways in which humans exploit humans could be extended indefinitely. Moreover, people treat their own bodies with disdain on a daily basis, as smoking and other sorts of abuse illustrate. A recent poll indicated that an astonishing number of people would take massive doses of steroids or other drugs which would likely end their lives within five

years if the practice would allow the person to be an Olympic champion. People mistreat their minds just as much as their bodies, as an examination of the inconsequential or even toxic check out line magazines and typical videos will reveal.

These considerations suggest to me that egocentric satisfaction of desires is the greatest contributor to ecological degradation, not the mind/body spirit. Remedies for this malady would include a type of personal transformation not necessarily distinct from the Christian emphasis on redemption that Rutledge seeks to replace from centrality with an immanent God revealed in nature. Let me put my concern in the form of a rhetorical question: is not a greater contributor to the ecological crisis human sin rather than a faulty metaphysics?

Rutledge claims he will deal with the ecological crisis through the help of the humanities as well as by relying on a post-critical perspective. My second observation is linked to a third point concerning how the humanities contribute to ecological vision. An army of humanists has tackled dualistic thinking without having made any consistent or marked change in the way nature is treated. The romantic poets of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century are one notable example. John Dewey's *Experience and Nature* and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* are just two of the influential works of this century predicated upon replacing a subject-object dichotomy; post-modern thinkers have revealed reason's role in the domination of others and of nature. All this worrying about dualisms and domination has helped support some efforts toward conservation, recycling, and the like, but the cumulative effect of the humanities has not seemed to alter our consumerism with its attendant exploitation of nature, wasting of resources, and creation of pollution. Does this not suggest, once again, that to solve the ecological crisis primary attention is best directed toward the redirection of human desire and its satisfaction? The complicity of our economic systems, capitalist or communist, in creating the crisis should not be overlooked, inasmuch as they are mechanisms of desire satisfaction with an insidious inertia of their own.

Third, I wonder whether the four characteristics of the humanistic perspective Rutledge discusses actually advance the cause of ecological vision. Indeed, some of the characteristics seem to me to work against the Polanyian embodied thinking he later advocates. The four characteristics he extols as providing an alternative to "the science of ecology and the public reporting of it in the media" (11) are as follows: (1) an emphasis on language as central to human understanding and to comprehension of nature, (2) an employment of narration in interpreting nature, (3) an interpretation of texts (written documents or other readable patterns) as the fundamental business of the humanities, and (4) through this interpretation a location of the network of values contribution to environmental problems. But since all communication, humanistic or scientific, relies on language and the interpretation of texts (as understood in the broad metaphorical way Rutledge adduces), his emphasis on language does not seem significant or helpful. Moreover, for the most part Rutledge's treatment of the ecological crisis is more analytical than it is narrative in style, unless one uses "narrative" in an extremely broad sense that would include scientific discourse as well as Rutledge's analysis within its purview. In brief, his summary of his humanistic approach is misleading with respect to how Rutledge actually proceeds.

My major concern with these four characteristics, however, is that they seem largely mentalistic in character. Rutledge claims he is attacking a modernist assumption in our intellectual tradition, namely, the view that "thought or meaning is primary, and language is the secondary reality which serves to dress up thought so that it can go outside the mind" (12). At the present time, however, a sort of 'panlinguagism' is the orthodox view. The view Rutledge critiques is close to the view Polanyi would affirm: "We can know more than we can tell." We dwell in embodied inarticulate skills that link us to the evolutionary course of nature. To privilege language, narrative, texts, and values (as known through analysis) is to favor thought over action, abstract reflection over embodied involvement in nature. Hence there is, at the very least, some tension between the humanistic ap-

proach Rutledge claims he is using and the Polanyian perspective he advocates later in his work.

Despite my concern with these issues, I affirm, fourthly, the general thrust of Rutledge's book. Understanding knowledge as the product of an embodied mind, though it will not solve the ecological crisis, better supports ecological vision than any of the modernist dualisms he list. His historical and analytical work is generally astute and helpful. *Humans and the Earth* would be reliable, thought provoking selection for a course in environmental ethics or religion and ecology.

Walter Gulick  
MSU-Billings

## WWW Polanyi Resources

**The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following : (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi.**

## Electronic Discussion Group

**The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 E-MAIL: [apczynski@sbu.edu](mailto:apczynski@sbu.edu) PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.**