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Title

Paul Raskin Journey to Earthland: The Great Transition to Planetary Civilization 2016 Tellus Institute Boston, MA. USA (126+iv pages, ISBN 978-0-9978376-0-5)

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/23t6v1xt>

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Publication Date

2017-09-01

DOI

10.1016/j.ecolecon.2017.04.023

Peer reviewed



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Ecological Economics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolecon

Book Reviews

Journey to Earthland: The Great Transition to Planetary Civilization, Paul Raskin, , 2016Tellus Institute, Boston, MA, USA, 2016, (126 + iv pages, ISBN 978-0-9978376-0-5)

Dr. Paul Raskin has reflected for half a century on how humanity might work through its difficult predicaments. “Out of these reflections came *Journey*, at once essay, narrative, and manifesto, comingling the genres in seeking to persuade the critical intellect, stimulate the social imagination, and inspire collective action.”(p. iv) Raskin’s essay, narrative, manifesto came from more than mere reflections. As the founder and director of the Tellus Institute and associated initiatives, Dr. Raskin has overseen hundreds of projects seeking rational, informed solutions to human quandaries. In his professional lifetime, nuclear annihilation has been averted, civil rights have been expanded, many types of pollution have been brought under control, and an energy transition has been initiated. Indeed, it is the very unexpectedness of events during the past half century, from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the lessons of Fukushima, that keep favorable futures open. The scenario analyses developed at Tellus have played significant roles in helping scientists and society think about, for example, the energy transition. These successes, albeit always demanding constant attention and expansion, along with humanity’s luck so far, provide reasons for hope.

And yet, in spite of specific, year-to-year victories, humanity’s future is now more uncertain than ever before. Mitigating and adapting to climate change, and the broader challenge of sustainability with justice within and across nations are proving both more difficult and more pressing. Limits, boundaries, and turning points are being crossed. Against considerable odds, Raskin now implores us to leap toward a responsible, rational, resilient future. Despair and skepticism have no future.

To help avert the very real possibility of social and ecological calamity, Raskin urges us to think soberly. Looking at the long sweep of human history and major transitions of the past, he asserts that we are on the verge of a planetary change in consciousness that can bring us to a planetary civilization with new potential. *Journey to Earthland* elaborates how the rise of planetary consciousness could—and will, if we harness it well—identify paths forward that save people and the planet. Indeed, in the Anthropocene, the fate of planet and people are tightly bundled. The challenge is to dramatically change their mutually destructive feedbacks.

While Raskin foresees a planetary change in consciousness leading to a planetary sense of civilization, he insists that he is neither envisioning nor imploring moving toward a unitary civilization. Rather, Raskin envisions a transition to what he labels “Earthland”, a name he uses because having a name is a crucial first step to helping more people to come onboard. Raskin envisions a mix of regional societies, but three types stand out: Agoria, Ecodemia, and Arcadia. In Raskin’s words:

“In Ancient Athens, the agora served as both marketplace and the center for political life; thus commerce and consumption figure prominently in Agoria. The neologism Ecodemia is a portmanteau combining

the word roots of economy and democracy; thus economic democracy is a priority. Arcadia was the bucolic place of Greek myth; thus the local community and simpler lifestyles are particularly valued here.” [page].

The world where politics and economics are driven by neoliberal philosophy has been left behind. Raskin elaborates further on his core types, noting also that larger regions may reflect one type while containing the other types as parts within it. He does not get tangled up in the long-standing debate between bottom-up and top-down governance. Different regions will make different choices and yet be united in their concern for and ability to contribute to planetary sustainability, social justice, and shared global meaning.

Raskin writes with broad knowledge, steady hope, and no delusions. As he presents his narrative, he continuously identifies the counterpoints, the perhaps initially enticing alternatives that could lead further down the road to disaster. These exits to avoid also serve as road signs along the great transition he envisions. *Journey to Earthland* follows his 2002 *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*, which also argued that humanity and earth have emerged into a planetary phase that needs some brand new social operating rules to be a stable, resilient, and just civilization. The new essay also builds on dozens of shorter essays and commentaries on the by a strong phalanx of contributing authors. And thus it is incredibly rich and nuanced, fascinating, open to interpretation, and always readable.

Journey to Earthland is a thought-provoking treatise, perfect fodder for adult reading and discussion groups, and an excellent supplement to undergraduate and graduate courses taking a variety of approaches to sustainability as well as those directed toward the future of global and regional governance.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2017.04.023>
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Peter G. Brown, Peter Timmerman (Eds.), Ecological Economics for the Anthropocene, 2015, Columbia University Press, New York

The book describes an ambitious vision for reorienting ecological economics as we know it. Peter G. Brown (McGill University Montreal), Peter Timmerman (York University Toronto) and their team put forward a new ethical foundation for redirecting and reformulating ecological economics in response to the rapid decline of the richness of life processes on Earth. They believe that the original premise of ecological economics is valid; namely, that the human economy should be considered as embedded in and part of natural ecology. However, they also think that the harsh

reality of the Anthropocene—the significant worsening of the status of ecosystems due to Earth–Human interactions—calls for a radically new ethics, such as that advocated by philosophers like Hans Jonas and William Berry.

Hans Jonas' ontological imperative states that there "ought" to be a continuation of "is"; that is, "nothing should be done to threaten the continued flourishing of life on Earth" (p. 16). Thomas Berry says, "From here on, the primary judgment of all human institutions, professions, and programs and activities will be determined by the extent to which they inhabit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human–Earth relationship" (p. 66).

The authors of the book propose that the following ethical postulates are accepted as the foundations of ecological economics: (1) membership – humans are not masters but members of the community of life; (2) householding – the Earth and the living systems on and in it has intrinsic value, they are worthy of respect and care for their own right; and (3) entropic thrift – low entropy sources and capacities that undergird the possibility and flourishing of life must be used with care and shared fairly (p. 16).

Mainstream economics is in irresolvable conflict with these postulates as it is philosophically grounded on the principle of granting economic agents free will to appropriate and deplete the entirety of the capacity of living systems. It denies the intrinsic value of nature and considers the Earth and living systems merely "natural resources" usable for human purposes. Finally, it disregards the limitations of low-entropy sources and capacity in relation to economic activities. The authors emphasize that this approach is a clear recipe for humanity's own destruction.

The book suggests that the main goal of the human economy is no less than promoting the flourishing of life on Earth (including human, non-human, and future life). Accepting this perspective involves radically shifting away from the conventional approach to pursuing economic goals such as maximizing material welfare or happiness. The question arises how realistic is this claim in the context of today's globalized market-driven economy. The future will answer this question, but the authors of the book advance a position of hope that is characterized by the saying "be realistic: demand the (almost) impossible".

The book analyses the underlying philosophical, political, legal, and cultural issues relevant to the turnabout that is required in ecological economics. These book chapters contain novel and deep insights, especially *Justice Claims Underpinning Ecological Economics* by R. Janda and R. Lehun, *Following in Aldo Leopold's Footsteps* by Qi Feng Lin and J. M. Fyles, and *Ecological Political Economy and Liberty* by B. Jennings.

However, the fact that the book pays little attention to the complex problematic of markets, business and finance is a major shortcoming. The authors do not expound their opinion about the role of markets in their vision of an ecological economy that serves to promote the flourishing of all life forms. Today's markets are the dominant

coordinating form of economic activities worldwide and rely exclusively on the concept of the price mechanism. The authors of the book forcefully argue that 'price' is not the ideal indicator (or "metric") for evaluating economic activities and policies, and suggest that other non-monetary metrics (e.g. planetary boundary indicators) are employed. Also, the authors argue that to capture the complex, multifaceted reality of ecosystems multiple perspectives should be employed that require a rational-technical mode of thinking that is supplemented with input from the arts and humanities (p. 124). This implies that there exists no single, optimal "parametric" solution to socio-ecological decision problems. Can markets be "mindful" of multiple (monetary and non-monetary) signals? Do complex evaluations of economic options require the development of new (non-market based) institutional arrangements? The book is silent about this crucial issue. The otherwise excellent chapter *Ecological Macroeconomics* by P.A. Victor and T. Jackson does not touch on the issue at all.

Also, only a little space is allocated to addressing business and finance-related problems. The tragic reality of the Anthropocene has been mainly caused by the activities of mainstream business and finance. Accordingly, the ecological transformation of business and finance would seem to be the single most important issue of our time. R. Janda, F. Duguay and R. Lehun's chapter describes the benefit corporation as a potential form of ecologically conscious business. However, the problem goes much deeper. Not only is the present form of the corporation inappropriate for promoting pro-ecological and ethical business behavior, but unincorporated businesses create their own ecological and ethical "deficits" too. The underlying business models on which mainstream commercial and financial organizations are premised are fundamentally incompatible with the flourishing of life on Earth. Today's exclusively materialistic, one-dimensional and self-centered way of conducting economic activities should be questioned from the perspective of nature, future generations and society at large. If business and finance cannot find more appropriate (i.e. ecologically sound and ethically sensitive) models of doing business, it may lose its role in the economy of the future.

Peter G. Brown, Peter Timmerman and their contributors have developed a new and engaging vision and research program for ecological economics. Tones of work must still be done, but the ethical foundation they propose is robust. In fact, it is key to creating a more livable and peaceful future for humanity and the millions of other species on the Earth.

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