

Gregory E. Kaebnick

Humans in Nature: The World as We Find It and the World as We Create It

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xvi + 198 pp; Index

Bioethics is not „biomedical ethics,“ as the Georgetown tradition has been trying to impose to the rest of the world for the last 40 years. That was not meant by Fritz Jahr, the German theologian and teacher who, in 1926, was the first to conceive the term and the discipline of bioethics by expanding Kant’s Categorical Imperative onto all living beings; and that certainly was not meant either by Van Rensselear Potter who, in 1970, was the first to re-invent the term and to promote it in the USA.

It is well known that the New York Hastings Center, founded as early as 1969, has always followed the broader view of bioethics, opposing its narrowing down to biomedical issues. Gregory E. Kaebnick, a scholar at Hastings Center studying synthetic biology (that is, biotechnological interventions producing biological systems elaborating information, chemical materials, etc.), is the Editor of the *Hastings Center Report* journal, as well as of the influential book on *Synthetic Biology and Morality: Artificial Life and the Bounds of Nature* (co-edited by Thomas H. Murray; Cambridge, MA/London, UK: The MIT Press, 2013). In his latest book *Humans in Nature*, Kaebnick sticks to that correct tradition of the Hastings Center, and provides a study primarily on modern concerns about environment. The book is composed out of eight chapters. In „The Nature of ‘Nature’: What to Ask of a Concept,“ the author asks whether humans are compatible with nature and is „nature“ natural at all. In the „Perceptions of the Soul“, he quests the nature of morality, exploring particularly the categories of modesty, comprehensiveness and unity, fitness with a scientific world view and with everyday moral language, subjectivism and relativism, repugnance and reason. In the chapter entitled „The ‘Call of the Wild’: Ideals and Obligations,“ Kaebnick examines duties toward nature, the ideal of nature, and moral seriousness. In „Space for Nature,“ analysed

are intrinsic moral values in public policy, from the perspective of Rawlsian neutrality, minimal perfectionism, communitarianism, etc. „Nature Naturalized: Wilderness and Wildlife“ focuses on the concept of restoration, while „Nature on the Farm“ with genetically modified plants and animals. „Nature in the Factory“ tackles with Kaebnick’s „favorite“ topic – synthetic biology, while the final chapter, on „Nature in Us,“ with the most profound issues of humanism, transhumanism, the concept and value of human nature, the essential of species, and human nature as a source of moral guidance and a condition of morality.

While addressing the major bioethical and meta-bioethical questions, Kaebnick does provide strong arguments to confirm the reasons and legitimacy of our concern for the health and future of nature, but also much moderately concludes that those concerns are not simple and that they can be a matter of dispute. As it is known, Kaebnick, for instance, does not support the extreme views of The Friends of the Earth movement (invoking the sanctity of life, down to the level of the cell, incarnated in the DNA and thus strongly opposed to any kind of genetic manipulation). No wonder that some have proclaimed Kaebnick’s way „a middle one“ and of significant political utility.

What might surprise a little bit, however (although not necessarily influence the quality of discussion), is that neither Fritz Jahr, nor Van Rensselaer Potter and David Callahan are mentioned in the book, the first two being well known for the closeness of their interests and ideas to those advocated by Kaebnick.

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