

One Earth: Social and Environmental Justice

Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson, 1999.
 Australian Conservation Foundation.
 29 pp. 5 Parts.
 ISBN 0 85802 132 3.
 RRP No Cost.

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Is it fair that some people live in a clean and healthy environment, while others live under oppressive, hazardous or ugly conditions? Is it fair that some reap the benefits of development, but fail to bear the cost of air, noise or water pollution resulting from the services they exploit?

One Earth: Social and Environmental Justice by Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson explores the connection between environmental responsibility and social justice by discussing the concepts of environmental and ecological justice. It is the second document in the Tela series published by the Australian Conservation Foundation. The Tela papers explore the relationships between the environment, society, the economy and the 21st century. Changes that are needed by the economy and society to achieve ecologically sustainability are examined. The series is aimed at decision makers, opinion leaders, educators and for general readership to spark debate on key environmental issues.

According to Low and Gleeson environmental justice is the fair distribution of "good" (safe, attractive) and "bad" (hazardous, ugly) environments among people. It means the fair distribution of resources between people, ensuring that their basic needs are met. Ecological justice is the relationship between humans and the natural world and the connections they have with the environment.

Perhaps the most pertinent issue presented is that we cannot reasonably expect to make it a

righteous, morally correct world simply by addressing environmental justice. The point is raised that it is anthropocentric to only consider the distribution of good and bad environments between people. What about other organisms? Don't they have rights to a healthy environment? In discussing this anthropocentric view the authors state that "*public and private choices are today made within too narrow a band of the ethical spectrum*" meaning that we need to expand our minds and have a greater sense of public morality to gain a complete account of our relationship with the environment. The critical question asked by the authors is whether we have to choose between "*individualism with its potential for freedom and choice*" or an "*ecologically enlarged conception of the self in which we feel connected with and in some sense accountable to the whole of the natural world*".

A final theme of the paper discusses the need to increase public awareness about the environmental wealth our planet provides. By reducing greed and increasing personal ethic we begin to achieve environmental and ecological justice. There are three levels on which this enlargement can take place: The first involves the need to be inclusive of the natural world. The second suggests that the principles of justice need to be well defined. The third focuses on political justice in a global society.

All organisms live in an unfair environment. However, most people seem unwilling, or are unaware of the need to change their habits to correct this unfairness. *One Earth: Social and Environmental Justice* is a must read for everyone to expand their minds on the lack of justice in this world.

The Tela papers are being distributed free to universities and are available on line at www.acfonline.org.au/publications/tela/intro/htm

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