

BOOK REVIEW

Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and The Politics of Swarming

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William Connolly (2017). *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and The Politics of Swarming*, Duke University Press, 240 pp., \$25.95 paperback (ISBN 978-0822363415).

This review examines the major concepts and contributions of William Connolly's *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and The Politics of Swarming*. This book explores Connolly's understanding of human impacts on the earth, the interdependence of all species, and how to improve social movements concerning environmental issues. After clarifying the book's main arguments, this review discusses the effectiveness of Connolly's writing and whether the issues are presented in a manner that allows for a deeper understanding of environmental politics in the 21st century.

Keywords: Social Movements; Environmental Conservation; Environmental Impacts; Anthropocene; Species Dependency

In his most recent work, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and The Politics of Swarming*, William Connolly discusses environmental politics, human engagement with the environment, entanglements, and interdependencies of species, and how to improve environmental movements. The title alludes to the three distinct yet interconnected topics explored in the book: the planetary, entangled humanism, and the politics of swarming. Connolly presents the concept of the planetary as all aspects of nature that impact our lives. Temporal force fields, climate patterns, drought zones, and ocean currents or conveyor zones, and species evolution all affect every form of life. Even hurricanes present a weather system that is self-organizing but can be affected by other forces. Connolly argues that each of these forces has a greater impact on life beyond what is visible in the physical world.

Connolly goes on to suggest that entangled humanism is heavily predicated on capitalism and human species-centric thought. Although Connolly presents strong arguments that capitalism leads to a mindset of human dominance over nature, he falters on the human species-centric discussion towards entanglement. According to Connolly, there are four historical explanations for humanity's conditioning to accept the capitalistic exploitation of the environment and all concern a strong sense of belonging; belonging to a free nation, belonging to a normal self, belonging to the market, and classic communism and sociocentrism. The need to belong comes with the desire to be part of a free nation. For example, this belonging is exemplified in the Polish nation where citizenship is granted through festivals to those that exhibit the strongest nationalist qualities (Connolly 2017, 17). This sense of belonging combines with capitalism to fill humans with a sociocentric mentality found in all levels and forms of societies. Connolly states:

[I]ndividualist, nationalist, communist, neoliberal and republican traditions assumes [*sic*] that a political economy is either in charge of nature, or that the limits that if we lift the human footprint nature will settle down into patterns that are benign for us (Connolly 2017, 20).

Connolly draws on the work of Isaiah Berlin, Richard Flathman, and Friedrich Hayek to explore the concept of belonging to a normal self and its relationship to freedom (2017, 19). Connolly uses these thinkers to deflate positive, collective freedom, the nation, as providing freedom for individuals. He argues that the individual can only have freedom if free from the nation as well. Moreover, drawing on Hayek, Connolly argues that

in essence, for an individual to be free, we must submit to the discipline of the market. By competing for jobs, shopping for goods, and participating in market activities, each human creates their individual freedom. But, by participating in the market, humans exert dominance over nature. Conversely, belonging in classic communism entails breaking away from capitalism and participating in a communal setting in which each individual is free. However, again, this creates a sociocentric mentality in which humans use natural resources to meet their material needs as if those resources were unlimited. These arguments are sound and well established by Connolly.

However, Connolly's discussion of human entanglement and humans evolving into the highest lifeform on earth is problematic due to it assuming humans are the only creatures capable of specific actions, such as cognitive thought and the ability to control nature. Connolly states:

Today perhaps a model of species evolution is needed that appreciates the complexity of these processes while emphasizing numerous entanglements of human beings with a vast array of beings and force fields that qualify its sense of uniqueness, its sense of being at the top of things, and its modern sense of world mastery (Connolly 2017, 39).

The mindset of superiority through evolution excludes serious discussion of human entanglement with other species with which man coexists. This negation or rejection of the concept of entangled humanism allows for human beings to be at the top of the evolutionary process. This natural teleology places the achievement of consciousness, judgement, responsibility, and so on at the apex of the evolutionary process and therefore places man on top (Connolly 2017, 42). However, Connolly's argument excludes counterexamples such as the fact that dolphins possess a faster mental processing ability than humans or that bats, many insects, and other species have specific abilities humans do not.

The teleological process, according to Connolly, is a teleodynamic process, which involves more than espousing humans as the greatest beings on earth. The teleology process has multiple causes and paths to the human-centric mentality of dominance over nature. It is evolution, experience, humans teaching future generations, and the creation of systems and tools to prove dominance. Creative evolution replaces a linear process that progresses man from simian. Symbiogenesis is the understanding that all forms of life have a symbiotic or mutually beneficial life sharing responsibility with another. Man does not survive without the existence of specific amoeba, enzymes, plants, or animals but species-centric thought ignores this fact. Humanity maintains a binary superior/inferior existence, which perpetuates the neoliberal agenda of consumerism of products and resources without limitation. This consumeristic desire is a drive that propels us forward as we consume more products requiring more natural resource usage and waste creation. Connolly tells us that drives are teleodynamic in their internal relations, their entanglements with larger social processes, and their variable degrees of sensitivity to nonhuman processes (Connolly 2017, 54) but does so in a human-centric approach.

Teleodynamic processes consist of pluripotentiality, meaning that the multifactorial causality can have a multitude of results or a plurality of possibilities for results. This allows for any process to have many different results with or without interference by humans. Evolution is not linear in the creation of a new species. It can result from internal and/or external influences not always controlled by humans. This creativity of nature must be understood and not repressed by humans. The climate and the planet have undergone cycles or, as Connolly states, bumpy temporalities through history. These bumpy temporalities have consisted of warming and cooling trends, extinction life events, and earth plate shifts that alter the face of the planet. Humans must understand these previous events, not to discount the footprint humanity is leaving on the earth, but to learn how to maintain a truer balance between humans and the earth to avoid human-created catastrophic impacts.

In understanding the Anthropocene, humanity's time on the earth, one must understand the bumpy temporalities *and* the increased effects due to humanity's impact on the environment. To counter or lessen this impact, Connolly suggests a politics of swarming (Connolly 2017, 185) in which global social movements agitate for change. In his view, the capitalistic leadership of society maintains control and only swarming politics will allow for a shift in mentalities. But swarming is not the final piece needed to create the necessary mentality for change. Swarming is an original movement that will lead to general strikes across borders and regions. This gives an impression of the Marxian proletariat uprising; a movement that gains momentum until the world unites against the bourgeoisie and creates an earth-friendly society. Unfortunately, most movements lose momentum and fail before they reach the general strike status. This is the author's message to all who desire a change in the general mindset towards climate issues and resource consumption. Scholars,

activists, and all interested in learning why and how we should care about limitless consumption will find this book of interest. Those more focused on science and specific arguments may take issue with some of Connolly's arguments. However, the overarching message is still relevant to all who live on the earth.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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