

Ecological Reciprocity

A Treatise on Kindness

By Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison

A book review by Geoffrey Holland

“Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” – *Mark Twain*

Ecological Reciprocity, authored by Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison is, to my knowledge, the first book ever written focused entirely on the most virtuous of all human traits...kindness.

With this book, the authors have created a compendium of wisdom on kindness and compassion, two words that go together like glove on hand. The chapters reflect a close examination of kindness in the historical record in literature, the arts, natural history, and philosophy.

Kindness as a virtue has long been subverted by the human culture. Since the end of the stone age, life on Earth has been marked by dominance and hierarchy, with men on top, and women and nature exploited relentlessly. Wealth and privilege have been rewarded to those men, who most effectively dominated their peers, and who could most ruthlessly exploit the natural world.

The historical record, as revealed by *Ecological Reciprocity*, shows that thoughtful people have long recognized and valued kindness as a worthy part of individual character, despite the craven cultural momentum behind ‘the tragedy of the commons’.

The authors point out that, ‘we are improving as a capably empathic species, and such changes must be accelerated if we are to effectively prevent and ameliorate the wanton ruination that is our present ecological legacy’.

In the introduction of *Ecological Reciprocity*, Tobias and Morrison tell us the book ‘focuses primarily upon the very metaphysics inherent in our individual and collective will to protect the world.’

The authors warn that ‘the weight of human impact has become only too increasingly clear, we know now that this generation is tasked with getting it right.’

Early in the first chapter of *Ecological Reciprocity*, Tobias and Morrison encourage with the revelation that ‘in the mid-nineteenth century there were fewer than a dozen politically protected ecological parks and reserves in the world. Today there are 265,000 of them.’

On the other hand, we all share some responsibility for the simple reality that, ‘Since 1970, humans have extirpated at least 60% of all wildlife on the planet, excluding invertebrates.’

Fortunately, there are worthy examples of a profound shift emerging in the human cultural momentum, including ‘Donut Economics in the Netherlands; Gross National Happiness in Bhutan; Costa Rica’s relatively stellar financial inputs to education and the environment; Surinam’s extraordinarily high percentage of old growth forest.’

Another wonderful example of the cultural change that reflects *Ecological Reciprocity* comes from the South American nation of Ecuador, which has just committed to a law that grants legal right to wild animals.

Clearly, there is reason for hope but, as the authors point out, humanity has come to the end of the road with mindless hubris. With a human population of eight billion, more than double what it was just fifty years ago, we are already guilty of serious overreach, and the momentum is still moving in an ecologically catastrophic direction.

Like all of the books authored by Tobias and Morrison, *Ecological Reciprocity* is thoroughly and impeccably researched. It shows that kindness and compassion are a part of human nature, long suppressed, but now increasingly emerging in an era that recognizes that humility must triumph over self-absorption and hubris if life on Earth is to survive and thrive.

Geoffrey Holland, Author, *The Hydrogen Age* – April, 2022