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Review of *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation*

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Book Review of *The Tao Of Liberation:
Exploring the Ecology Of Transformation*
By Mark Hathaway and Leonardo Boff.
Foreword by Fritjof Capra. Ecology and
Justice.

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This joint project is inspired by the ancient Chinese text Tao Te Ching, informed by current cosmology and ecology, and deeply concerned about the adverse effects of global capitalism on people and Earth. Hathaway, an eco-justice educator-activist, and Boff, a liberation theologian, search for the wisdom needed to liberate us from “perceptions, ideas, habits, and systems that perpetuate injustice and destroy our planet’s capacity to sustain life” and to guide our transforming toward “new ways of living that will allow the needs of all people to be equitably met in harmony with the needs and well-being of the greater Earth community” (xxv). This process of transformation is “the Tao of liberation.” It requires delving deeply into our various religious spiritualities for insights that will stimulate a “cosmovision,” a worldview that

recognizes our interconnection with all entities and our role as “active participants in the subtle mystery of the unfolding cosmic purpose” (10).

H. and B. strive valiantly toward their goal in twelve chapters, eleven of which are subsumed under three parts. Each chapter opens with a salient excerpt from Tao Te Ching. Throughout, the authors rely on a plethora of credible scientific, sociological, psychological religious, philosophical, and economic sources as they move the reader from today’s reality of destruction and inequity to a spiritual awakening that will propel the development of an equitable, constructive, and shared way of functioning as a life-sustaining community. The integration of disciplinary contributions to this project is exemplary.

Part 1 explores in three chapters some obstacles to the authors’ hope for a sustainable planetary community. The system in which we are enmeshed is sick, they lament, as indicated by the material wealth of a few amid the impoverishment of many, the depletion and degradation of the natural goods of Earth, the growth of population and consumption, the unsustainable path inherent in the profit-driven global economy, and the persistent mentality of domination and control prompted by myopic androcentric and anthropocentric views of the world. H. and B. insist wisely that we need to turn to a healthy, sustainable, and equitable future for all constituents of Earth, and they find in ecofeminism and deep ecology some ways of thinking that can facilitate this turn.

Part 2 comprises six chapters, each emphasizing the importance of cosmology in framing our understanding of the place of humans in the universe and in relation to other species, biological regions, and the planet. After a succinct overview of the development of cosmology from mythic in ancient times to modern scientific constructs, H. and B. lament the increasingly reductionistic and materialistic view of the universe as devoid of purpose and ripe for domination and exploitation. They find hope in the emergence of a new cosmology that explores the interconnections of all entities in “a dynamic dance of energy and relationality,” and that is imbued with “a deep and abiding sense of purpose” (167). The remaining chapters of this part thoughtfully explore, through the lens of this new cosmology, the radical relationality of all natural entities, the emergence of creativity and intelligence, and the “wisdom” emanating from the cosmos that can lead to “harmony, peace, and right relationship” (278). The authors conclude this part with a well-argued promotion of the Earth Charter as a framework for an “ethics of respect and care” that will bring “peace on Earth and with Earth” (306).

Two concluding chapters focus on (1) spiritual sources for stimulating the process of liberation from inequities among humans and (2) planetary devastation to the development of a sustainable planetary community. H. and B. retrieve promising spiritualities from the world religions that may bring about the needed essential transformation in thinking, and they perceptively urge each of us to seek insights from our spiritual traditions that inspire us to “heal the Earth and, at the same time, enrich the quality of human life” (342). When addressing Christianity, they correct some misappropriations of biblical terms and phrases (e.g., “dominion” from the Hebrew root *radah* and “subdue” from *khavash*), explain a cogent panentheistic way of thinking about God in light of the new cosmology, and reflect on the interrelationship of the three Persons of the Trinity in parallel with ecological thinking about relationships, reciprocities, and intercommunion of Earth’s diverse constituents.

A masterful work and rightful recipient of the Nautilus Gold Medal for Cosmology and New Science, *The Tao of Liberation* is especially well suited for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in courses that concentrate on environmental theology and ethics, sustainability, the relationship between religion and the natural and social sciences, and peace and justice. To facilitate the exploration of ideas in this book and to identify additional sources for reflection, a Website has been established at www.taoofliberation.com.