

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

CARL COON, *One Planet, One People: Beyond 'Us vs. Them'*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. 2004, 139p, Index.

Carl Coon is not, himself, an academic. He is the son of anthropologist Carleton S. Coon and the former United States ambassador to Nepal. His writing style and citations are, therefore, somewhat different than those used in academe and have made this review an interesting challenge.

Coon says that *One Planet, One People* is actually two books: one which traces the evolution of humans and human society; and the other which examines the present and speculates on some future scenarios. A chapter on nation states serves as a bridge between the two books. The central thesis of both halves of *One Planet, One People* is that an agreed upon set of human ethics is requisite to a civil society. He argues that there have been two major transitions through human history – humans learning to think and communicate symbolically, and the current era where globalization and cybernetic communications are ‘forcing’ significant changes to human societies.

In the first ‘book’ Coon is setting the stage for the second ‘book’. He contends that human society, like the biological species *homo sapiens*, has evolved over time and that this evolution of societies has been a step-like progression with changes sometimes happening quite suddenly. He uses as one example a more ‘advanced’ society either killing off a less advanced one or absorbing it. The time lines he uses - modern humans appearing about 150,000 years ago and humans developing speech about 50,000 years ago - are supported by others who write about human evolution. However, his arguments that we are innately group oriented and have a basic set of ethics and sense of altruism which is primordial seems to suggest a genetic basis for what is more likely learned. Further, this first ‘book’ borders on being androcentric and ethnocentric. Women’s use of symbols is mentioned only once and he is critical of feminism. He ignores some of the best examples that would support and/or refute his arguments - the aboriginal peoples of the Americas.

In the latter chapters of *One Planet, One People* (the second book) Coon argues that part of the modern crisis is that contemporary society is changing more rapidly than our ethical code. He is critical, in particular, of the neo-conservatives in the United States who think military might is more important than ethics and civility.

Coon argues that to overcome the current crises there needs to be a strong, globally based body that has the ability to judge those who commit crimes against humanity and the right to intervene as a military based police action where one or more countries fail to observe key common ethical considerations (human rights, for example). He also contends that this body needs to have a tax base to support its operations. He further suggests that: 1) this governing body would still allow nations to protect their economic bases and citizens; and 2) that multinational corporations need to be more closely policed to ensure that the rights of humans, world wide, are protected.

The latter part of *One Planet, One People*, although brief, is the better part of the book. Coon is drawing on his own expertise here and has clearly spent considerable time thinking about future possibilities. Given his expertise and experience, this part of the book could easily be a full-length book. That it is not is the greatest short coming of the entire book.

Despite its short comings, and despite not being written for an academic audience, *One Planet, One People* is an interesting read for anyone concerned about the impact of globalization on human societies.

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