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Nature

Green Morality: Mankind's Role in Environmental Responsibility
Edward Flatteau
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There is a time and a place for impatience, and, if one has written a twice-weekly newspaper column on environmental issues since 1972 (after taking over the duty from former Interior Secretary Stuart Udall), seen little to no progress, and watched politician after politician dance around the angry and darkening cloud that hangs over the world's future, perhaps impatience is the only reasonable response. Edward Flattau has an urgent message to communicate, and in *Green Morality,* he summons his experience and expertise to deliver it in straight talk. The planet is in peril, and it is morally imperative that we, as a society and as individuals, act now.

While the environment may be the catalyst, it is the leadership failures that lead to or perpetuate environmental problems which capture Flattau's attention. This book, his fourth, is organized into sections that focus, not on dimensions of environmental problems, but on dimensions of human leadership (or lack thereof) including: "Respect," "Compassion," "Courage," and "Honesty." Examples of specific environmental issues illustrate the patterns of human behavior of which Flattau writes. For example, in "Courage," he describes US Representative John Dingell's (D-Mich) 2007 gamble that Congress would not have the guts to pass a new tax on carbon usage. Dingell, a career-long friend to the auto industry, introduced such a bill, and his gamble paid off.

Flattau's long career as a columnist is evident. At times the book reads like an arrangement of columns, rather than as a continuous text; the prose is written in short bursts, each capped with a snappy title. This makes for a choppy read. The limits of a column may also lead to rather disingenuous or incomplete coverage. For example, Flattau's treatment of the Dingell bill described above fails to mention that Dingell's environmental scorecard, as tallied by the League of Conservation Voters, is pretty good, and that his legislative strategy may have had more subtle motivations and results.

However, subtlety is not Flattau's primary interest. His goal is to light a fire under

Americans' collective fanny to re-evaluate values and (in)action, and his writing is admirably focused on that goal. He looks longingly across the Atlantic at Europe's various successes in curbing consumption and pollution, and mourns missed opportunities for solutions. He is not all gloom, however, and his last chapter summarizes reasons for hope.

Educated at Brown University and Columbia Law School, Flattau is the author of a long-running nationally syndicated column which was the first of its kind; he is the recipient of several journalism awards. *Green Morality* is a useful introduction to this important national voice and may spur a wider segment of readers to further research and action.

Teresa Scollon