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Symposium Review of *Nature and the Environment in Amish Life*—David McConnell and Marilyn Loveless

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK'S AUTHORS AND DISCUSSANTS

In this symposium review, three agricultural and environmental researchers discuss the book *Nature and the Environment in Amish Life* by David McConnell and Marilyn Loveless, both of the College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. McConnell is an anthropology professor and co-author of *Amish Paradox* (2010, Johns Hopkins University Press) and has published his research in *Human Organization*, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies (JAPAS)* (Moledina,

et al. 2014). Loveless is a biology emeritus professor; this is her first academic publication about the Amish.

Our reviewers offer a variety of reactions to this book. The first reviewer, historian Steven Reschly, is a founding board member of the *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* and is currently assistant editor. He has written on Amish agricultural history in *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie* (2000, Johns Hopkins University Press) and in articles in *Agricultural History*, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, *JAPAS*, and others.

Scot Long completed his Ph.D. in anthropology at Ohio State University, having conducted extensive research on Amish farm households in southeastern Holmes County, OH. He has also published in *JAPAS* (Long and Moore 2014) about the impact of the environmental landscape on Amish church districts.

Caroline Brock completed her Ph.D. in environment and resources at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research focuses on

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theoretical models for understanding Amish responses to agriculture and the environment, including organic dairy adoption and water quality conservation practices. Her research has appeared in *Environmental Management, Society & Natural Resources, Journal of Rural Studies, Sustainability, JAPAS*, and other outlets. She recently worked as a senior research associate at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, OH.

This book will certainly generate many conversations and hopefully inspire further research into the Amish relationships with agriculture and the environment.

—Cory Anderson, *JAPAS* editor

DISCUSSANT 1: STEVEN RESCHLY

Academic book reviews seldom open with “This book was fun to read,” but *Nature and the Environment in Amish Life* invites an exception. This book was fun to read. The research by anthropologist McConnell and biologist Loveless is thorough, supported by appropriate and interesting theoretical constructs and statistical analysis, and far more sweeping than I expected. In 12 chapters, organized in four sections, the authors discuss agriculture, forestry, animal breeding, gardening, natural medicine, hunting, liaisons and tensions with public interests and regulation, recreation, Amish writers who focus on the natural world, non-Amish writers who write about the Amish, climate change, and the list of topics continues. Many of these subjects have been researched and published in various venues, of course, but seldom brought together and connected in the way these authors achieve. I consider this book a model for future interdisciplinary, theoretically informed, and significant research.

McConnell and Loveless are both connected to The College of Wooster in east central Ohio, where Loveless is professor emeritus. Much of their research is situated in Holmes County, Ohio, and other Amish communities in the upper Midwest. They include research from many other Amish locations, but the foundation of the book is Holmes County and neighboring counties, the largest Amish population in the world. The authors structure their research around four of the main Amish affiliations in Holmes County and

on a continuum from most tradition-minded to most change-minded (with appreciation to Paton Yoder and his 1991 book, *Tradition & Transition*, in which Yoder used these terms in lieu of the virtually meaningless “conservative” and “liberal”): Swartzentruber, Andy Weaver, Old Order, and New Order Amish. Attempting to give equal attention to all the stripes in the Amish universe would be hopelessly scattered and confusing, and soon out of date anyway, so this strategic choice to focus on four affiliations provides clarity. The authors make use of information from other types and other locations, but the statistical and survey data are built upon these four groups in Ohio. It should not be assumed, therefore, that their conclusions are equally valid for all Amish groups everywhere, let alone the full spectrum of plain people.

The book is clearly written in straightforward prose. There are occasional felicitous phrases, such as “The Amish are virtuoso gardeners” (p. 53), and describing the Amish cultural goal of separation from the world as “deliberate marginality” shaped by an “impulse toward insularity” (p. 163). About foods gathered in the wild, “Amish families were more attuned to the edibility of their landscape.” There were very few sentences I had to read more than once to decipher and not much jargon that sent me to a dictionary. Going “Goodwilling” (p. 198) to search for inexpensive used clothing and other thrift store treasures was a new verb, or gerund, but one that is used by Amish shoppers themselves. The organization is clear and easy to follow, with each chapter covering a separate topic, but the whole is bound together by the authors’ orientation to political ecology and ethnoecology (p. 12). As a package, there is an impressive range of information from general to specific, from a cultural “ecological imagination” to the nitty-gritty details of daily life on a farm, in a household, and in a church district.

While not attempting to summarize the entire book, I found many sections intriguing and “good to think with,” in the phrase coined by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. One such segment is natural gas. The authors observe that average gas consumption across the four Amish affiliations in their study was 149,500 cubic feet, some 57% higher than the English (non-Amish) average (p. 50). The Andy Weaver Amish keep their homes at an average of 73.3 degrees Fahrenheit

during heating season, resulting in a higher than expected carbon footprint for home energy use (p. 51). Many Amish households receive an allotment of free gas from fracking company contracts, so they have little reason to skimp. There is a section on fracking (pp. 194-197), but the word does not appear in the index. Holmes County happens to be situated toward the western extent of the Utica and Marcellus shale formations, estimated by the U.S. Geological Survey to contain some 84 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Many Amish farmers, and Amish persons who own land, lease their acres to energy companies for gas exploration and drilling, and they receive money and a quota of around 250,000 cubic feet of free gas. The geological accident places these Amish communities squarely in climate change science, not to mention the earthquakes associated with fracking. The authors reference a 2013 article in *The New Republic* entitled “The Amish are Getting Fracked.” There should be acknowledgment by the article writer of the TV show, “*Battlestar Galactica*,” which used “frack,” in all its grammatical forms, as a work-around for the inevitable censorship of the more familiar four-letter word. Some Amish households have been paid far too little, apparently, by rapacious energy companies for drilling rights. As the old bumper sticker said, “The meek shall inherit the earth. But not the mineral rights.”

An interesting note is that Amish historical experience tends to lead them to think of themselves more as “subjects” than “citizens” (p. 186), meaning they have a hard time conceptualizing citizenship as a responsibility to a civil government. Amish people tend to consider the natural world as provided by God for human use, not as something to preserve untouched and pristine. In terms of American environmental history, this attitude sets them more in the tradition of Gifford Pinchot and his concept of “conservation” than John Muir and his quest for “preservation” of nature. They wish to “work things out” with various levels of government rather than involve themselves in political and legal decision-making. They do not appreciate government regulation of the environment, or health, for that matter. In the words of the final chapter title, they are “parochial stewards” of nature, preferring to use nature for their own purposes rather than preserving it for some mythical “common good.” The distinction between “subject” and “citizen” is one to “think

with” and ponder much further, with this book as a valuable point of entrée.

The greatest compliment I can offer a book is that it leads me to imagine and visualize more vectors for further research. This exercise can be aspirational, which is how I attempt to recycle, and perhaps even unrealistic. Three ideas that occur to me are, nature and the environment in the full range of plain groups; historical background; and gender. This is not to criticize the authors and claim that they should have written about every possible angle and perspective. Not everything needs to be encyclopedic and I prefer readability over pedantry.

First, it would be fascinating to apply the research methods deployed by McConnell and Loveless to study nature and the environment among other plain Anabaptist religious groups. The Hutterites living in the North American West are obvious candidates, especially comparing the several subgroups. Hutterites indeed use far more technology in farm operations, but perhaps communal meals results in less energy use to feed colony members. Study of Hutterites offers an opportunity to compare Canadian and American environmental and health administrations, for example. The North American grasslands and plains are a far different environment compared to eastern Ohio and the next two largest Amish communities in Pennsylvania and Indiana. Old Order Mennonites, Old Order German Baptists, and other Old Order Amish communities invite additional comparisons. What about urbanized Mennonites and Brethren? What is the range of environmental care and damage? Daunting to contemplate, to be sure, but also exciting to imagine the possibilities.

Second, as a historian, it is pleasant to read a book about the Amish without the usual superficial opening chapter on Anabaptist history and beliefs. In more productive historical research, change over time is the coin of the realm in this discipline. We always want to know how something developed, where it came from, and what the past looked like at the time. However minor the Amish involvement was in the development of the American environmental movement, they do relate in the twenty-first century to some of the outcomes, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, various state departments of natural resources, the National Park System, the Department of Agriculture, organic food definitions and regu-

lations, and so forth. During the Great Depression, the Amish in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, were idealized as a model of sustainable agriculture and rural community by one faction in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The insight that Native Americans have often been idealized in a similar tone is something to explore in history and in contemporary romantic fantasies of rural life. Amish farming, hunting, animal husbandry, healing, suspicion of science and government, and foodways all have relevant histories. Connecting those histories to the research in this book would be a worthy task.

Finally, gender receives some valuable attention, but could be a more visible category of analysis in future research along the lines laid out by McConnell and Loveless. The authors observe that hunting by the Amish is primarily a masculine activity, similar to the larger society. Girls hunt, often with fathers and brothers, but generally stop after marriage and children (pp. 146-150). Mention of the Boone and Crockett Club (p. 119) is an opportunity to discuss the meaning and practice of masculinity in Amish communities and, indeed, in North American culture in general. Founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887 and named after frontier heroes and hunters Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, the club has been active in conservation, “fair hunting” rules, and recognition of hunters who are successful in hunting large game animals. There is a convoluted irony in Amish enterprises that raise deer for confined “hunting range” trophy shooting. The larger the antlers, the better the trophy. One Amish man hilariously called this “deer porn” (p. 119). The Boone and Crockett Club does not deign to recognize killing confined deer as following club hunting rules. Is this a sort of faux masculinity that Amish animal breeders feed without being fully aware of the cultural manliness revealed in this peculiar hunting practice? Amish people and guns appear to be strange bedfellows.

No book can cover everything, but thorough research provides opportunities to select and organize the most relevant information. It is likely that the actual material in the book represents around 10 percent or less of the corpus of research produced by McConnell and Loveless. Interviews, surveys, scholarly and news articles, and many other primary and secondary sources appear in the endnotes and bibliography. As scholars and writers are influenced by this work and strive to

build out this research, credit is due the authors for producing an original and innovative work.

DISCUSSANT 2: SCOT LONG

For a reader interested in how Amish farmers work with, or in some cases work against, the environment, McConnell and Loveless provide an engaging treatise on this topic. The book covers a broad spectrum of topics, from Amish children learning about nature to the Amish’s steadfast faith orientation as stewards of the land. Further, the authors look at many ways in which the Amish make a living from the land, which may not be as benign as popularly romanticized. The authors ask some good questions about how Amish respond to environmental challenges and whether Amish think they have a moral responsibility to protect the local environment. Having worked with Amish on agricultural projects in the Holmes County, OH, community for two decades, I will use my review to present several misgivings about the authors’ assertions: that Amish are depicted as notorious for resisting government-prompted environmental improvements; that the Amish are held to a higher standard than other people; that the diversity of Amish perspectives and practices can be reduced to “affiliations”; and that we need not consider the American agricultural context to understand Amish farming.

First, McConnell and Loveless imply that looming government regulations are the prime mover in establishing cooperation between state agents and Amish farmers in adopting best management practices, but in so suggesting, they have overlooked important local outreach and research. In the chapter “Acting Locally,” the authors write that the Amish “...may see environmental regulations more of a nuisance and constraint on their activities than as promoting the common good” and that the Amish are like “...other political conservatives [who share] a deep suspicion of government bureaucrats and the scientists whose knowledge serves as a basis for regulatory intervention” (p. 186). The authors portray Amish as resisting working with state agricultural extension and other government programs, ostensibly because Amish choose not to take money from the government. For example, the authors offer an account of how SWCD (Soil and Water Conservation District) officials working with the Sugar Creek

Water Quality Trading program explained at neighborhood meetings that regulation was inevitable (p. 191) so compliance was necessary. One gets the impression that Amish are somehow even more resistant to making modifications toward an improved environment than reluctant mainstream farmers. Is this really correct?

More often than not, it is mainstream farmers who tend to make changes after the advent of a government regulation, and seldom do they make conservation modifications voluntarily. The authors have overlooked many effective collaborations, present and past. The authors briefly insinuate that the Sugar Creek Water Quality Trading program of OARDC¹ was largely ineffective. However, they fail to mention the many success stories of Amish farmers from this program—well over 100 in the Holmes County area alone—who, in collaboration with state agents, made improvements by fencing off streams from livestock manure deposition and solving milk house waste discharge. In many cases, Amish farmers received mitigation materials from the local SWCD (rather than direct government payments). Furthermore, under the subheading “Flexible Farmers” (pp. 86-87), the authors ably describe how Amish farmers substitute flexibility for sustainability in farming but overlook past work in Holmes and Wayne Counties. Flexibility as an Amish farming strategy was established as among the most significant ecological concepts identified by the innovative Agroecosystems Management Program developed during the late 1990s by Ben Stinner and Richard Moore as part of OARDC, but the authors do not recognize this important work.

Second, the authors offer a subtle double standard between Amish and non-Amish throughout the book. Per the authors, characteristics and behaviors seen as desirable for non-Amish (e.g., aggressively successful business practices) look aberrant if one happens to be Amish: “This new generation of Amish horse breeders is hardworking and passionate, but they push the limits of traditional Amish values” (p. 117). The authors then quote a high-end horse breeder who, in this context, appears to struggle with his own inconsistency:

I try not to make the community uncomfortable. In everything, you have people talking negative [...] I use local businesses. I want to keep money in the community. Where we’re at is not because of me, just the support I got. It’s down the road I owe it back. (p. 117)

The authors make it sound like he is trying to compensate for misbehavior by supporting local businesses. While casting doubts on the man’s moral character, the authors make no distinction between the sense of pride that Amish, by faith, attempt to avoid, of arrogance and haughtiness [*der Hochmut*], and the type of pride that an Amish horse breeder enjoys from a truly remarkable animal, of fulfillment and satisfaction [*die Verwirklichung*]. The general term for “pride”, as used by the authors, gives this horse breeder, for instance, an “un-Amish” worldly disposition, as the authors imply: “...but high-end breeding, incorporating pride and profit, may be seen as skirting dangerously close to the vices of the outside world” (p. 116). Additionally, the authors miss an important concept about being Amish: generalized reciprocity, where records are not kept of what is given and what is received, because it is understood that, in the long run, mutual aid tends to even out among neighbors.

As another example, in the “Tinkering with Creation” chapter, we read, “Businesses based on animal breeding, however, may take owners in directions that push the limits of church doctrine” (p. 107). The authors describe in detail how Amish owned puppy mills represent the worst of the industry, with the pretense that the callous attitude of Amish toward animals is somehow responsible, and that Amish should have a higher moral standard. Then they make a pointed comment in that the Amish “...see dogs as livestock, as part of the natural world created for human use...” (p. 109), as if the Amish alone under-value dogs’ lives. Some important historical context is missing. During the Great Depression, when many farmers were losing their farms, the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) recommended that failing (mainstream) farmers try dog breeding as an alternative rural enterprise. The regulations for dog breeding were much the same as any livestock: provide adequate food, water, and shelter. As Amish later began moving off full-scale farms, many turned to dog breeding as a small-scale alternative in the shadow of the USDA’s recommendations.

¹The Ohio State University’s Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center in Wooster, OH

All-in-all, it seems that we can cast doubt on religious separatist groups because, as in the case of the Amish, they appear to hold themselves to a higher standard. When there are occasions in which the Amish do not live up to standards that we think they should, they often become targets of outside criticism. The social scientific-secular approach to understanding the Amish ought to achieve a great sense of diplomacy toward the Amish based on what anthropologists refer to as the “emic” perspective. Foremost, the Amish religion, as with much of Christianity, is rooted in the concepts of love, human imperfection, and forgiveness/repentance of sin, but little attention is given to the Amish religion, among other central cultural facets. While in the concluding chapter the authors suggest that “...non-Amish must try harder to understand Amish culture in its own context,” (p. 237), this book does not always exhibit such sensitivity.

Third, McConnell and Loveless shy from offering a useful explanation of diversity, remarkable in that McConnell appears to have ignored his own co-authored advances on this subject from 10 years ago (Hurst and McConnell 2010, pp. 20-25 and ch. 8). They interpret diversity merely in terms of many (unclear) “affiliations” or “federations”—the problems of which Petrovich (2017) has already pointed out—and they have neither adequately defined nor justified their use of this category. Among the more important ideas of the emic perspective is that there should be care in recognizing differences within groups. While the authors genuinely and repeatedly discuss different major “affiliations” of Amish society, they generally gloss over the important differences within each group—from individuals to church districts and even different groupings within denominations, such as three different Swartzentruber branches in the Holmes County settlement.

In the “Parochial Stewards” chapter in particular, while McConnell and Loveless acknowledge that Amish demonstrate variable concerns regarding stewardship of the land, they do not peel away the layers of variability beyond the affiliation categories identified in their study. Much variance exists within each affiliation; hence, there are additional variables that impact the manner in which Amish farm. Whereas Amish share some core beliefs related to the environment, such as the Bible doctrine of man’s dominion over nature, the array

of interpretations toward “Mother Earth” among the Amish ranges from a heightened awareness of nature and its diversity (Amish are among the most skilled at identifying bird species) to a misguided belief that straightening creeks is beneficial to both farmers and nature (a few Amish entrepreneurs earned a side-income from redirecting creek beds around farmer’s fields). Attitudes and practices vary considerably and along more lines than four Holmes County-based affiliations. There are many ways of “being Amish” that tailor individual, variable relationships to the natural world.

Fourth, in several chapters, the authors recognize many benefits of Amish small-scale diversified farming operations, including the economic sustainability of niche markets. At the same time, McConnell and Loveless reflect on environmental challenges in a way that ignores the larger American agricultural context. In the chapter “Transformation of Amish Agriculture,” the authors refer to chemical-intensive agriculture practiced by the Amish. Indeed as there are many ways of being Amish, there is a small minority of Amish farmers who overuse chemical inputs in the field. Otherwise, it is simply an inaccurate representation of their farming practices and counter to past findings that Amish agriculture is generally low-input (Craumer 1979; Johnson, Stoltzfus and Craumer 1977; Stinner et al. 1999; Zook 1994).

In reference to genetically modified (GM) crops, the authors oversimplify the Amish perspective by stating that they follow “the dominant societal narrative” of accepting genetic modification as just another form of plant manipulation (p. 86). Certainly, many Amish farmers plant GM corn of the Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) variety. It resists the European corn borer through its ability to modify insecticidal proteins naturally occurring in Bt. There is no clear evidence, however, that most Amish farmers plant Round-up Ready corn in which glyphosate is the active ingredient. As such, use of the more genetically manipulated Round-up Ready corn is widespread among mainstream farmers (90% to 95% of planted corn and soybeans, as the USDA reports), yet it is used on fewer than half of Amish farms that grow corn in the Holmes County settlement. Of course, with a significant number of Amish farmers going organic and/or doing grass dairy farming, the percentage of Amish who plant Round-up Ready corn drops even further. Amish who resist using glyphosate

tolerant corn offer a variety of rationales: from health concerns, to problems with dairy herd fertility, to how white-tailed deer seem to avoid consuming the Round-up Ready corn.

Similarly, the authors do not compare Amish runoff challenges with other American farmers. Many Amish are familiar with the difficulty of agricultural runoff. However, theirs is not on a level that is significantly more problematic than mainstream agriculture; streams and rivers seem to run brown all across the Corn Belt during late winter and spring rain events. In recent unpublished research of mine, several Amish farmers stated that they would like to be organic, except that their farm happens to be downstream from a farm that uses chemical fertilizer. Many of these “marginal” farms are operating close to organic specifications.

Toward the end of the “Transformation of Amish Agriculture” chapter, McConnell and Loveless cite an important observation by Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt (2013), who make the claim that Amish agricultural practices are not motivated by environmental goals, yet the general manner of the Amish lifestyle and approach to food production “tend to mitigate environmental harm.” This is important for understanding the complex relationship of Amish farming to the natural environment.

Overall, though there are some thoughtful assessments throughout the book, in the end, McConnell and Loveless weave a cynical account of Amish agriculture and its impact on the environment. It would seem that all but the least responsible among Amish farmers offer an ecological improvement over the mainstream industrial agricultural model. Since the writings of Ben and Deb Stinner, Gene Logsdon, and Wendell Berry, many Amish have gone organic. Thus, as a group, the Amish are likely to be even more environmentally sound in 2020 than 30 years ago. Before scholars indict the Amish as being less-than-ideal stewards of the land, we, as part of mainstream society, must concede that the industrial mode of production is much less kind to the natural world. That the authors point out the shortcomings of the traditional model of Amish farming is important—we need not romanticize their way of life. My criticism is that evaluation of Amish and nature should begin with the inherent environmental advantages of the traditional model of farming and

then focus on how our landscape and society benefit from an environmentally gentle people who live on and interact with the land in a mostly benign manner; then, in this context, point out areas in need of remediation.

DISCUSSANT 3: CAROLINE BROCK

When people ask me, “Are the Amish more ecological than the rest of us?”, the question that comes to mind is, “How much time do you have?” David L. McConnell and Marilyn D. Loveless, Anthropology and Biology professors at the College of Wooster in Ohio, offer the first comprehensive scholarship in a reader-friendly format addressing this complex question. The authors dispel popular myths to capture the diversity and humanity of the Amish. If forced to give a short response to this complex question, the authors might respond, “maybe in some certain home economy ways but not for the reasons one might think.” One of the best takeaway statements from the book encourages the reader to consider the Amish not as a “cultural other so that they are neither saints nor demons but people with virtues and faults like anyone else” (p. 236). The authors’ nuanced writing does justice to the challenges of delving deep into questions focused on the Amish. This quality of scholarship is reflective of Dr. McConnell’s earlier book, *Amish Paradox: Diversity and Change in the World’s Largest Amish Community* (Hurst and McConnell 2010), which also gives readers a sense of the diverse and complicated nature of the Amish in the geographic context of Holmes County, Ohio.

Drs. McConnell and Loveless wrestle with Amish understandings of nature, use of nature, as well as their impact on the environment, in deep and thoughtful ways. They conducted extensive fieldwork for seven years. Their research incorporated 150 individual interviews with Amish from a wide range of different settlements, affiliations, and states as well as an extensive survey on ecological views and behaviors. They also spent considerable time reviewing a wide variety of Amish newsletters. In addition, they included interviews with non-Amish individuals who work with the Amish. They cover a diverse range of topics including formal and informal education related to nature, agriculture, forestry, animal breeding, gardening and natural medicine, nature-centered

recreation, nature writing, and responses to environmental issues from a local and global context.

The reasons why the ecological nature of the Amish is so complex can be partly summarized by differing values between Amish and mainstream environmentalists and the diversity of Amish communities. For example, Amish values are based on a Biblical worldview centered on community, simplicity, humility, and family which leads them to have restrictions on personal vehicle ownership and electronic devices as well as other consumer items common in mainstream American life. While these behaviors result in lower ecological impacts by some measures, that may be a by-product rather than a “reflection of ecological mindedness.” However, as the authors point out, the impact on the environment is the same no matter the motivation. This phenomenon may remind us how practicing social distancing during COVID-19 is leading us to reduce our footprint and clearing the skies of smog and pollution in major global cities. While these recent behavior changes are not motivated by concerns for the environment, they have that same sustainability impact, nevertheless. Likewise, while it is far from true that all Amish farmers are organic, they have been at the forefront of that movement due in part to their ability to adapt to a labor-intensive model and the economic advantages of organic premiums. Their community orientation can make it easier to develop innovative solutions to environmental challenges such as the trading system developed with a cheese factory that helped reduce nutrient pollution in the Sugar Creek watershed in Ohio.

Amish values and orientation can also lead them to diverge in various ways from the mainstream environmental movement. The Amish seem less concerned about their individual and collective impact on resources because of the sentiment of God being in control. As one agricultural conservation agent shares, he promotes best management practices in the context of what is best for the farm economically rather than broader environmental concerns which also may be connected to a more anthropocentric view of nature. In addition, a different view of the role of science and limits on formal education, and their local community orientation, may mean that many environmental issues fall outside their normal frame of reference. The portrayal of the Amish version of “science-lite” does not fully embrace an ex-

perimental design and open questioning version of science but does give room to study and better understand some aspects of nature. Science-lite further develops ideas around science and the Amish than any of the premier Amish scholarship books have to date. The Amish are not always aware of the scientific basis for global environmental issues or even the connections between farm manure management and nutrient pollution in Lake Erie and the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, the Amish may align themselves with political conservatives when it comes to environmental regulation. In addition, the authors do a stellar job dispelling popular natural and bucolic images of the Amish, with examples such as an image of a horse-drawn pesticide sprayer, discussions of fracking permits on Amish land, and the sordid affairs of deal-making with landowners on harvesting forestry products.

In true Anabaptist fashion, I approach any possible shortcomings of the book with great humility as Dr. McConnell had asked for input prior to its publication. Upon further reflection, any work that attempts such an ambitious task is going to have room for further development. In an effort to further expand on reasons why it is so challenging to portray Amish views and behavior towards nature, it would have been helpful to have more background on Christian stewardship concepts and the Amish church structure and organization in comparison to other Christian denominations. For example, while the concept of stewardship is loosely referred to, it is not fully fleshed out, which would help balance the references to the hotly contested Lynne White essay which attributes environmental ills to the “Christian dominion view” (White 1967). Extensive literature has been developed by Christian writers since Lynn White’s essay contesting and further elaborating on Biblically-based stewardship views (e.g. Cal DeWitt, Steven Bouma-Predinger, Peter Bakken, etc.). Given that the Amish do not have many views written down and because they are not organized with a denominational structure, one cannot easily look up their stance on these issues. However, one could distill insights from other Christians, more specifically from their Anabaptists cousins, the Mennonites, who have some organizational structure at the denominational level and do have some written statements on these and other matters. While the authors did acknowledge other Christians who elaborated on religious views on

the environment such as the Catholic pope and the Evangelical Environmental Network, further expanding on these views particularly with groups like the Mennonite Creation Care network could help the authors start from a more Christian stewardship worldview. For example, the framework used to assess environmental concerns in the book, the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) has been shown to be affected by a certain view of Biblical dominion which influences comparisons between the Amish and others. The NEP could be enhanced with a stewardship concept framed in language that the Amish could relate to and understand (Hockman-Wert 1998). The authors did a stellar job citing and building on other scholars' work overall. The Christian stewardship element was the main exception that I noticed.

The Amish are organized at the local level which makes it challenging to capture their views on a number of subjects and the environment is just one example. While the authors do discuss diversity in the Amish church and provide a handy figure for the different affiliations on page 17, they do not always explicitly connect that diversity and local organization to the puzzle at hand. For example, what seems surprising, for someone who has studied similar topics for over a decade, is the choice of topics such as nature recreation including extensive bird watching excursions, rearing exotic animals for visitors, and nature writing. These activities were foreign to me having focused mostly on more conservative Old Order settlements who emphasize farming. While the authors acknowledge that many Amish do not partake in these activities for economic as well as other value-based reasons, they do not link that to their context. One factor that could play a role in these dimensions is the degree to which the settlement is focused on farming. The authors allude to how this farming dimension could impact behaviors but do not connect it explicitly to explain behavior differences. Likewise, the choice of topics may have been apparent in the broader context if summarized and connected more to the major themes at the end of the book.

All in all, *Nature and the Environment in Amish Life* is an honest and thoughtful journey into complex sentiments and behaviors. Anyone can learn something from this book, including the completely uninitiated, as well as scholars who have studied the Amish and / or the environment or

both for more than a decade. Besides giving an in-depth encounter with Amish views and behaviors towards nature in "their own context," one of the most useful takeaways of this book which could lead to further explorations of this topic is for the "non-Amish" to "be aware of the consequences of interpreting Amish actions out of context, and to see the diverse ways the Amish approach nature as a potential catalyst for self-reflection."

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