

Human Ecology: Fragments of Anti-fragmentary Views of the World

Edited by Dieter Steiner and Marcus Nauser. 1993.
Routledge, London and New York. xxv + 365 pp.

This is another multi-authored volume in which workers in a field which ought to have been ecologically premised try to come to grips with the fact that they have slighted the ecological basis of the phenomena they study. Here Swiss geographers face the danger that impressive neologisms will arrive at a commonplace reading of the daily headlines in a convoluted rehearsal of what every naturalist has long known.

There is nothing here that is much like ecology, and if geography is not already, or does not already contain, human ecology, then geographers should try out existing ecological theories and practices, rather than inventing over-elaborate theories which give the impression that the social sciences are an exercise in flawed assumptions. Scientific ecology is no panacea, but geography will not be ecologically grounded by infusing quasiecological concepts into the arcane conceptualizations and unneeded classifications of social pseudosciences. *A priori* descriptive theories of society will always prove too artificial, complex, and self-referenced to predict future events.

Would-be eco-reformers should review the literature of other fields to see who first made suggestions similar to theirs, and study the success of previous usages before proposing new terminology. Is "the ethico-political articulation of ecosophia" (page 333) an improvement on the preservation of the world in wildness, wise use of natural resources, the land ethic, ecophilia, sustainability, biophilia, sense of place, or the many other names by which ecological responsibility has been known? The struggle for a human ecology is not so much with facts and events but against the ease with which ideas can be narrowed, professionalized, and co-opted. There are good and valid ideas here, but we need clear, simple language, not jargon-bound fragmented scholarship, to describe and confront ecological change.

In the chapters of the first of four parts, *Human Ecology*, S. Boyden uses new-made words to seek trans-disciplinary understanding; D. Steiner reinvents historical contingency in the arbitrary formalism of triangular interactions among Person-Society-Environment; P. Weichart reflects on human nature, finding that in ecological interactions, actions are a more appropriate unit of study than the interacting individuals; and M. Hupperbauer finds philosophies of the ahistorical sciences inadequate for dealing with the "ecological crisis," but does not invoke existing philosophies of the historical sciences.

Part II, *The implicit and the explicit*, deals with People's knowledge of their environment. C. Carello tries to break down artificial limitations on the academic study of phenomena; I. Josefson makes preci-

sion rather than falsifiability the criterion of scientific discourse; G. Pillet reinvents economics with additional non-monetary currencies; H.-J. Mosler proposes that a phase-shift towards ecologically benign behaviour may come through a combination of government incentives and individual commitment; and finally D. Reichert channels streams of consciousness about the philosophy of subject-object relationships into diverse fonts. Part III considers structuration theory, which in R. J. Lawrence's exposition seems to be a formalization of political discourse, ignoring the wider realms where such discourse is known to break down; while M. Nauser points out that People have differing access to, and abilities to evaluate, "environmental" information; and A. Lang disparages vaguely described, "traditional" theories of the mind, and then applies basic ethological principles to human memory, culture, and architecture.

Part IV, *The regional dimension*, seeks to apply these ideas to "the environmental crisis." G. Bahrenberg and M. Dutkowski present a brief for a decentralized post-commercial society with "fault-tolerance," which seems mostly an epiphenomenon of local scale; B. Werlen develops the notion that People associate events with the places where they happened; D. Steiner, G. Durrenburger, and H. Ernste counter the fragmentation of personal roles in modern commercial society with commonplaces of the back-to-the-land, home-schooling, feminist, and regional development movements. O. Soderstrom wavers between multiple theories, all of which seem too abstract to handle data which might bear on them, and when data finally are considered by P. Gould, spatial "analysis" is isopleth maps of the spread of AIDS, without correction for population density or other plausibly explanatory factors.

In general these essays are more decorated with references to the literature than documented by them. There is no attempt to falsify alternative theories with data, and the discussions occasionally break down into ecofreak whining. There is little of the recognition one would expect from Swiss authors of traditional public democratic deliberation, among People who understand the long-term ecological consequences of their actions, in appropriately bioregional jurisdictions, as a means of settling ecological problems. Perhaps there is more among these admitted fragments than "think globally, act locally," but if we could implement that admirable slogan we could then test the further geographic theories an ecologically sustainable society would need to guide itself through the millenia.

FREDERICK W. SCHUELER

Biological Checklist of the Kemptville Creek Drainage Basin, RR#2, Oxford Station, Ontario K0G 1T0



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