
BOOK REVIEWS

Jay E. Austin and Carl E. Bruch, eds.: *The Environmental Consequences of War: Legal, Economic, and Scientific Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

The title of this collection of conference papers accurately describes the content. With a minimum of necessary overlap and repetition the editors have brought together contributions that review the fragments and pieces of humanitarian law, natural science assessment, and economic valuation that for more than one hundred years have been dancing together like complex molecules in an evolution toward new and more effective global control over the consequences of war. The break up of bipolar geopolitics, acceleration of economic globalization, proliferation of weapons, and increase in the number and severity of humanitarian emergencies have speeded up the search for new ways of assessing, valuing, and ultimately avoiding environmental and public health consequences of modern warfare.

This book comes from a conference held in 1998 with support from the Environmental Law Institute in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science. The editors and Cambridge University Press are to be commended for relatively speedy and relatively inexpensive production of this important material.

The volume is divided into five parts: General principles, The Legal framework, Assessing the impacts, Valuing the impacts, and, finally, Prospects for the future. At least one or two chapters in each of these parts are memorable, challenging, and innovative. All are useful and competent performances by specialists. Although the topics are complex and specialized, the book can be used both as an introduction to this topic and a specialist reference tome.

Roughly half of the 35 contributors are lawyers or take a legal perspective. There is a great deal of detail concerning more than one hundred years' accumulation of law-of-war and humanitarian law more generally. Nevertheless, there are lucid summaries such as Adam

Roberts' chapter, "The law of war and environmental damage," and excellent treatment of the limitations that this large body of international law have faced in chapters by Michael Schmitt, Richard Falk, and Arthur Westing. In fact, this part of the book — in some ways where one might have expected to find "dry" material, is the most exciting.

The other half of this section devoted to "the legal framework" deals with lessons to be learned from other legal regimes. Here I was disappointed by more plodding, detailed discussion of the Law of the Sea, international agreements on shared rivers, and, oddly enough, civil liability law in the United States. Much more could have been done with this part of the book by looking to other cutting edge uses of human rights discourse — environmental rights and environmental justice debates, economic rights, cultural rights.

In part III, Asit Biswas' chapter on scientific assessment provides an excellent overview. The rest of the chapters in this part of the book suffer the inevitable imbalance that conference proceedings often produce when they appear long after the immediate context. There are two very detailed accounts of the environmental damage caused by the Gulf War. These are solid pieces, but one could easily go to specialist journals for this information. The paper on biodiversity deals mostly with protected areas and species. It does not address what is probably a more pressing issue: that the most of the areas of first domestication of humanity's major food crops (Vavilov zones) are currently theaters of war or civil unrest.

Turning to public health impacts, however, this volume again lives up to its potential as both inspiring introduction for the beginner and heuristic for the specialist. Jennifer Leaning produces an elegant history of public health, a reflection on the evolution of field assessment methods, and a review of health issues. Victor Sidel broadens the discussion by considering public health impacts of preparations for war, of economies and geographies within which war industries proliferate, testing and training occur. Alastair Hay reviews carefully the evidence of harm from Agent Orange used during the Second Indochina War. Finally, David Fidler reintroduces international law, wrapping up an excellently balanced 90-page section of the book.

The three papers that constitute treatment of the "value" question were written by economists. Carol Jones' way of explaining the economic analysis of ecological restoration fits well with the language and style of the rest of the volume. However, the two papers on "valuing" public health impacts jar and irritate with their econometric

jargon. It is somehow difficult to take seriously studies that reveal that North Americans would rather die of chronic bronchitis than in an auto accident in a book that is dealing with war crimes and ecocide.

The final part of the book suggests that, in Mark Drumbl's words, the "fragments" might be "consolidated" and yield, eventually, international definition of and protections against "the crime of ecocide." Certainly many fragments of such an understanding are revealed in the diverse chapter that come before. However, perhaps there is still not enough raw material, not enough fragments included. There are no voices from civil society represented, no victims' voices, no anthropologists, sociologists, geographers or philosophers. The result is that the critical relationship between the *political* and *social* demand for action against ecocide and *legal* definition is only once mentioned (by Falk). Moral issues are generally crowded out by legality, rather than integrated. Also, as a result of the narrow selection of "perspectives," important forms of environmental impact such as the destruction of food systems and use of famine as a weapon are passed over very lightly (see, by contrast, Alex de Waal's *Famine Crimes* [Bloomington: Oxford and Indiana University Press, 1997]), nor is the destruction of urban places which are the life worlds of half of humanity discussed (such as Kenneth Hewitt's treatment of saturation bombing in his *Regions of Risk* [Harlow: Longman, 1997]). Since the topic of public health becomes narrowed and contorted in part IV, B to fit with fashionable North American economic models, the full potential of public health as a central environmental issue is blunted. An important and vital literature on refugee health and on the public health consequences of disasters is not discussed (see Eric Noji, ed., *The Public Health Consequences of Disasters* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997]).

Nevertheless, this is a most valuable collection and deserves space in any library where scholars, scientists, and activists meet in their efforts to piece together the fragments of a possible future world without war. — **Ben Wisner**

Stephanie Pincetl: *Transforming California: A Political History of Land Use and Development*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

California, the so-called Golden State, is anything but El Dorado as described by Stephanie Pincetl in *Transforming California*. Instead, the

place she writes about is one of widespread environmental destruction, and a politically alienated and apathetic citizenry. The title of the book refers to two transformations. The first is the transformation of the landscape — natural, demographic, economic, and political — that has occurred over the last one hundred years. The second is the transformation Pincetl believes California now needs to undergo; a transformation that would renew democracy and citizenship and put the brakes on further natural degradation.

Pincetl tells a remarkable story (she refers to it as “a sort of political archeology,” [xviii]) that links evolving structures of governance and political institutions to changes in the use of land and natural resources in California. Throughout this political history particular attention is paid to agriculture and irrigation, the fishery, logging, and urban development. Pincetl also emphasizes the links, both governmental and developmental, between urban and rural California. For example, pumping water to thirsty cities in the arid southern part of the state has had a devastating impact on fish and agriculture in the north. The astonishing result of rapid urbanization in the Central Valley is air pollution that is worse in Sequoia National Park in the Sierra Nevada than in Los Angeles.

Pincetl lays responsibility for today’s environmental mess and political anomie at the feet of the Progressive reformers of the early part of this century. “Progressives disconnected politics from democracy, gutting the politics, the very activity by which the broad public acts together to build democracy. In its stead Progressives put managerialism.” (p. 29) The Progressives believed that the role of governments was to execute but not to determine policy. Instead policy would be formulated by experts drawn from the business community and appointed to unelected agencies, boards and commissions. Thus those agencies came to be dominated by the very sectors of the economy they were meant to regulate. As Pincetl describes it, California’s Progressive Era seems an eery precursor of today’s entrepreneurial state committed to public/private partnerships, and providing infrastructure to facilitate capital accumulation.

Ironically, at the same time that the Progressives were establishing a managerial model of governance, they gave ordinary Californians the right of recall and the right to put citizen initiatives to the ballot. Citizen groups (especially those on the right) have seized upon the initiative as a means of forcing their way into politics. The notorious Proposition 13 was approved in 1978 and led to the dramatic slashing of local property taxes (by \$41 billion between 1979 and 1983) and subsequent public sector layoffs and service reductions.

The challenge Pincetl leaves us with is enormous. Can widespread and ongoing participation in democratic political processes be reinvigorated? Can the linkage between urban and rural be made an explicit part of any political discussion? Can nature be restored to a central place in local and state politics? There have been earlier attempts at resisting the first of California's transformations. In the 1870s the California Workingman's Party campaigned in support of the eight hour day and unionization. In 1934 Socialist Upton Sinclair campaigned for Governor with a program called "E.P.I.C." — End Poverty in California. Pincetl tells us that in the early 1930s Los Angeles was home to 45 percent of all the producer co-ops in America.

Pincetl concludes the book with a list of recommended changes to the organization and process of government in the state that directly challenge the Progressive Era reforms. Her recommendations include the re-introduction of political parties into local elections, the elimination of unelected agencies, boards and commissions, the creation of regional governments and the regional co-ordination of land use. As necessary as we come to believe those changes are, this century's transformation has been so thorough that one wonders how and by whom they would be initiated.

This is an accessible book that will be of interest to planners, geographers, political scientists, historians, public administrators, environmentalists, and Californiaphiles. The scope of the book is impressive and readers will be left wondering how a political history of land use in their own state, province or region would compare with *Transforming California*. A minor quibble is with the maps used to illustrate the book — there should be more and they should be of better quality. — **Douglas Young**

Felix Dodds, ed.: *Earth Summit 2002: A New Deal*. London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2001.

This volume grows out of the work of a British based NGO, the United Nations Environment and Development Forum, which acts as advisor to many NGOs on issues related to sustainable development and Agenda 21 related matters growing out of the 1992 Earth Summit. Drawing on the work of no less than 26 contributors, not counting Klaus Topfer's foreword, the volume tackles the Agenda 21 legacy in the lead up to what is often simply called "Rio+10," the planned 2002 United Nations summit on Sustainable Development.

In addition to Topfer the volume includes chapters by Gro Harlem Brundtland and urbanist Herbert Giradet as well as contributions by politicians, academics and activists. Not all of the writers share former New Zealand environment minister Simon Upton's critical tone in arguing that "[w]e need to dig Agenda 21 out of the morass of bureaucratic process, diplomatic verbiage and the mental trenches laid down on the battlefield of geopolitical debate," (p. 5) but the failure of the Earth Summit process to provide substantial progress is common to all these chapters.

The book is unevenly divided into five sections. The first, on roadblocks to implementing Agenda 21, starts with Upton's government perspective and is followed by Nitin Desai on a United Nations view, Victoria Elias arguing that three barriers, lack of peace and security, lack of resources, and lack of public involvement prevent the implementation of the Agenda. Jeb Brugman discusses local governments' role, Winston Gereluk and Lucien Royer discuss the exclusion of workers from corporate decisions relevant to sustainable development and Minu Hemmati writes on the role of women in sustainable development.

The second section hardly deserves such a designation at all, being a short introduction to and reprint of the Earth Charter. This document, for those unfamiliar with it, is a succinct statement of the global predicament and the need to reform institutions and modes of living to take sustainability seriously. It offers something close to the international NGO consensus on what needs to be done in terms of new thinking and institutional innovation.

The third section titled "Overriding Concerns" has chapters by Stephen Bass on international forest initiatives, Dieke Peters on sustainable transport in Europe, Cletus Avoka on poverty and the environment, Barbara Bramble on finances needed for a transition to sustainable development, and Andrew Simms on trade and investment. The section concludes with Rob Lake who manages to capture the current neo-liberal situation neatly in his long chapter title: "Civil Society, Business and Sustainable Development: Regulating (almost) without Regulation."

Part four is rather oddly called "Emerging Issues" but deals with many themes that are not in many senses new or emerging. Margaret Brusasco-Mackenzie outlines the conventional view on environment and security, Giradet the possibilities of cultures of sustainability in cities which includes a few interesting paragraphs on London's ecological footprint. Frans de Man discusses the Commission on Sustainable

Development and international tourism while Jagjit Plahe and Pieter van der Gaag discuss issues of corporate accountability among transnational corporations. Chip Linder discusses health matters, Brundtland reflects on progress made since Rio, Laurie Michaelis writes on sustainable consumption and production while the section ends with John Gummer on the need for sustainable fisheries.

The fifth section is the editor's conclusion, focusing on the needs to reform international institutions.

Not surprisingly, given the diversity of perspectives and topics, this is an uneven collection. Activists, academics and administrators don't see the world in similar ways nor do they write in consistent styles even if they are ostensibly writing about the same topic. Some chapters offer fairly detailed analysis, others provide commentary or statements of political aspiration. But one common theme that repeatedly appears concerns the politics of the Commission on Sustainable Development and its role in environmental matters at the planetary scale. Clearly the Rio agenda of 1992 is badly off track, and although only a few chapters explicitly make clear that the neo-liberal ideological agenda, as well as various processes of globalization have driven its concerns off the public agenda, the theme pervades the volume.

The book also reflects on, and is a clear contribution to, the inter-governmental as well as transnational dialogues about the future. In both discussions there is an emerging understanding that governance is about considerably more than states. In the process the sheer scale of the difficulties of coordination do become clear; so too do the depressing extremes of social injustice which is the ideological driving force behind so much sustainable development rhetoric. Political strategies for resolving these difficulties are not all that clear in these pages, but nonetheless in total this is a useful volume for those planning involvement in the 2002 proceedings, whether in Johannesburg or elsewhere.

This is not a book that points the finger solely at the evils of global capitalism, nor is it a volume that suggests huge programs of technological innovation are needed. The most interesting chapters are where the contributors focus on workplaces as well as living spaces in emphasizing the importance of local transformations as an integral part of the Agenda 21 process. Sadly, one of the most telling points in the whole volume is Jeb Brugman's discussion of the four-year battle one innovative house builder had to get exemption from numerous planning bylaws to allow the construction of a low chemical, two family

dwelling that was self sufficient in the production of electricity, water and waste treatment in Toronto. But the regulatory exemptions applied only to this demonstration project. Cities are, he points out, literally mandating unsustainable resource uses and environmentally destructive lifestyles by limiting what it is legal to construct. We are literally building unsustainability as a result of building codes and regulations that do not consider the environmental disruptions implicit in their reasoning.

Obviously thinking differently isn't enough to solve the major political and ecological problems that have given rise to the discourse of sustainable development. But rather than dismiss sustainable development as either an ideological smokescreen on the part of politicians, or a matter of greenwash on the part of corporations, the pages of this book might offer some useful lessons for students on how environment is constructed in contemporary political discussions and some suggestions to activists as to how to rethink where change might be most effectively pursued. On the latter point, however, the richest irony in all these discussions is the implicit assumption that world summits might actually be able to deliver what they promise. Their record so far is less than encouraging. — **Simon Dalby**

Edésio Fernandes and Ann Varley, eds.: *Illegal Cities: Law and Urban Change in Developing Countries*. London and New York, Zed Books, 1998.

Law and urban change is an urgent, vital, complex issue. It is not dry. It is not about the infamous 88,000 pages of EU regulations or what insomniacs see at 2 a.m. on C-SPAN.

Recently in El Salvador, I was told that the biggest problem facing the 200,000 families made homeless by the earthquakes in January and February of 2001 was not building materials or labor, but finding permanent, secure, safe sites for these new homes. El Salvador has 262 municipalities. Most do not have professionally trained lawyers or planners. Although in theory, the 1997 Municipal Code provides these municipalities the right and power to acquire land for such a purpose, there is a lack of experience and skill in using the Code. The judiciary has also not often seen it used. Development agencies call this a problem of "capacity." But what is the history of such a problem, and what are the broader social and political solutions?

This excellent anthology address precisely such questions in 14 competent and information rich chapters. Introductory material by the editors and also the very experienced Patrick McAuslan merge beautifully with the final two chapters (Conclusions and Future Trends) by Alain Durand-Lasserre and Sergio de Azevedo. Totaling 92 pages, these bracketing and contextualizing chapters are very substantial reviews. In between there are ten case studies from Istanbul, Amman, Bangalore, Caracas, Mexico City, and Nairobi, as well as more general studies of national level legislation and programs of “regularization” in Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa.

The editors emphasize that these are not simple studies of law, but of the relationship among law, society, politics, and change. They highlight four key questions: why and how different forms of ownership are treated differently in law; why and how individual behavior and social practices are often regulated by non-legal, unofficial criteria; why and how societies define different “degrees of legality” according to which some forms of illegality are tolerated or accepted and others not; and why and how the rich in these cities also practice and benefit from illegality (pp. 4-5). This broad and highly political approach is firmly rooted in the work of such progressive philosophers and planners as Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells, Jorge Hardoy, and David Harvey.

Ayse Yonder summarizes a series of institutional and legal reforms in Istanbul, finally concluding that “low-income housing continues to be an afterthought in Turkey.” (p. 65) Yonder sees this as being “critical to the distributional and environmental implications of housing policy.” (p. 66) This is an understatement. In view of Istanbul’s high degree of vulnerability to a major earthquake under the Sea of Marmara, a disaster worse than that which befell more eastern parts of the Marmara region in 1999 seems inevitable, given the quality of this housing.

Omar Razzaz draws several lessons from detailed case studies from the Yajous district of Amman, Jordan. One of the most interesting is that the imposition of law can bring unanticipated side effects. Attempting to provide more certainty to consumers, a new law worked as a disincentive to traditional land lords. This finding is not surprising. In a similar way, the imposition of a cap on rents in Mexico City is thought to have caused landlords to neglect maintenance on low rent building near the center of the city. This, in turn, was a factor in building collapse during the 1985 earthquake and loss of lives.

Amanda Perry describes a situation in Bangalore, India, in which the poor are caught between unrealistic and overly ambitious plans to

“clear” some 400 slums and provide high rise accommodation on the one side, and a formal real estate market to which they have no access because of lack of income, on the other.

Asteya Santiago reviews the development of land and housing law in the Philippines and finds that there has not been enough emphasis on enforcement. The society is also described as “highly legalistic.” (p. 107) This is not a contradiction, but two aspects that coexist. I witnessed the former when I visited the site of a massive landslide that had destroyed a middle class housing development called Cherry Hill on the edge of Metro Manila. Land use regulations covering this situation’s clear geotechnical data had not been enforced (this site was an abandoned quarry). A few days later I gained some experience of the latter when I spoke with people protesting their expulsion from homes by the side of a river in the part of Metro Manila administered autonomously as Malabon City. They insisted that the proper procedures for eviction had not been followed. However, whatever the adherence to rules, eviction deprived them of livelihood. They fished in Manila harbor for a living, and the resettlement area offered them was landlocked and distant. Under the legal name of “flood control,” powerful elites were about to make a seasonally flooded coastal urban zone more attractive to foreign investment.

Rogelio Perdomo and Teolinda Bolivar present a very interesting portrait of informal governance and conflict resolution in the *barrios* of Caracas, Venezuela. Contrary to the stereotype of lawlessness and violence, they find that “the residents have managed to create not only a place for themselves in the city (however precarious), but also an efficient system for dealing with the conflicts that may arise in their neighbourhood.” (p. 136) This more balanced view of social order in informal settlements agrees with that of the classic work by Jorge Hardoy and David Satterthwaite, *Squatter Citizen*.

The chapter on Brazil, authored by Edésio Fernandes and Raquel Rolnik, departs from earlier ones in an important way: it emphasizes that the role of civil society in *demanding* changes in law. They write that “trade unions and social movements had already forced a partial redefinition of the national political order, since their attempts to participate in decision-making and their identification of some principles of ‘popular justice’ were leading to a serious crisis of legality.” (p. 146) Earlier chapters, in particular the one on the Philippines, would have been improved if this more dialectical view had been adopted. Popular protest movements have had a large role in shaping the settlement patterns in Manila since the 1970s, for example.

This more political theme is carried forward by the two chapters on Mexico, a general review by Antonio Azuela and Emilio Duhau and a case study of Mexico City by Ann Varley. Both chapters emphasize the political function of very ambitious programs to legalize informal settlements. This serves to entrench the state (and previously the PRI party apparatus) through dependency relationships, while it provides a very low cost solution to the housing needs of the poor, thus depressing the cost of labor to industry. "Very clever" one might think. The catch is that this strategy has led to horrendous sprawl into ravines and up hillsides in the Valley of Mexico, where life is threatened daily by untreated sewage (*aquas negras*) and long commutes by killer vans (*los micros*), and where catastrophic loss of life is simply a landslide or earthquake away.

Nairobi is described in "A Tale of Two Cities" (legal and illegal) by Winnie Mitullah and Kivutha Kibwana. This distinction dates from the colonial period, and the rapid growth of the city from 340,000 in 1962 to between 1.3-2 million in 1989 has been largely due to the increase in the illegal city. (p. 199) The authors explode another myth: informal settlements are not where the unemployed sit in despair waiting for formal employment. They are dynamic centers of small businesses (some 40,000 counted in 1993, [p. 201]) and the self employed. Despite their productive function, the authors identify 17 laws in Kenya that "are outrightly hostile and unaccommodating; their unabashed goal is to bulldoze such settlements and facilitate the wholesale legalization and 'gentrification' of urban centres." (p. 201)

A more permissive approach has been adopted in the early years of the New South Africa since 1994, indeed even before the fall of apartheid, when the Pass Laws were repealed in 1988. Nevertheless Stephen Berrisford discusses a series of challenges to the profound change in territorial organization and access that is required in South Africa's cities. Judging by how difficult the process of re-districting and establishing cross subsidies for services in cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town has been, there is a long way to go. Pressure from below from the civic organizations, and, to some extent, the trade unions, is strong; middle class and elite interests in maintaining their spatial enclaves of privilege and their levels of service are also strong.

Much of this book discusses the experience of popular, local participation in urban improvement schemes, in planning, and in urban management. Sergio de Azevedo rightly points to the difference between what he calls "instrumental" participation, limited to direct beneficiaries of top down projects, and "neo-corporatist" participation, in which a cross section of the community participates fully with officials in

regulatory and planning activities. He discusses the potential and limitations of this kind of citizen based self management. In this he seems to concur with Auslan's call for new models of regulatory mechanisms. (p. 47)

Auslan notes that the crisis of urban governance and legality revolves around two more general challenges: legitimacy of the state one the one hand, and a mounting consensus that people have a human right to basic shelter and urban services, on the other. He notes that to promote public health, public safety, and environmental protection requires innovative legal frameworks that direct or constrain the effects of economic activity. (p. 46) Given the enthusiasm for de-regulation that accompanies neo-liberal economic thought, I have to wonder if Auslan's is a voice in the wilderness.

Alain Durand-Lasserve makes a convincing case for diverse, flexible, and decentralized approaches to progressive "upgrading" and incorporation of illegal settlements. He sees this happening in many cities in part motivated by the failure of more ambitious attempts to impose a unitary approach, partly by the trend to extend commercial relations into the informal housing market and decrease of "squatting," and partly by the increased role of citizen based groups at the neighborhood level in self management. The implications of these trends is more tolerance for legal pluralism and the use of what he terms "appropriate" norms and standards.

While there is a great deal in this chapter — indeed the whole volume — that rings true with my experience as coordinator of a United Nations University study in six large urban regions (the metro regions of Mumbai, Manila, Johannesburg, Mexico City, Los Angeles, and Tokyo), I have two lingering doubts. First, Durand-Lasserve himself points out that most success has been obtained where economic growth has been strong (and associated with the development of housing finance systems, accommodation between formal and informal legal systems and land development practices). It remains to be seen whether the juggernaut of economic globalization and neo-liberal governance (e.g., free trade, privatization of government function) will distribute economic growth equitably enough to satisfy the pre-condition identified. As Miguel Rosetto, Lieutenant Governor of Rio Grande de Sul state in Brazil, stated in Quebec City at the Summit of the Americas in April 2001, the expansion of free trade to all the 800 million people in the Americas "will simply have no room for disadvantaged people" (Anthony DePalma in *New York Times*, April 21, 2001, p. A6).

My second doubt, or caution, concerns norms and standards. This point brings me around full circle to the time spent in El Salvador following the earthquakes there in January and February of 2001. I would hope that “appropriate” norms and standards would include “minimum” standards compatible with safety. For example, application of minimum internationally accepted norms excluding development of steep slopes derived from particular geologies would have prevented the loss of lives when 400 houses were buried in Nueva San Salvador (Santa Tecla). Likewise, application of earthquake resistant design and building practices would have prevented the loss of tens of thousands of lives in northwestern Turkey in 1999 and in Gujarat in 2001. — **Ben Wisner**

J.R. McNeill: *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century*. New York, Norton, 2000.

With large overview works of this type appearing, environmental history has apparently come of age. McNeill’s work in some ways updates Alfred Crosby’s earlier classic studies although, in comparison, he is less the biologist, and more the social historian. More specifically McNeill is concerned with the direct, and importantly the indirect consequences of fossil fueled industrialization. The appropriate scientific innovations are briefly discussed and carefully contextualized in case studies.

Tackling such a large topic in a single volume is a daunting task. The author notes as much at the beginning of this volume and explains that selectivity is unavoidable if the wide range of the topic is to be condensed into a manageable text. Having said that, the author then presents the environmental history of the last century in overview in seven chapters, one on the lithosphere, and two each on the atmosphere, hydrosphere and biosphere. These are comprehensive but the ecological science is very lucidly presented. The text is supplemented by simple tables and figures as well as some classic “environmental” photographs from the past.

The book focuses on the 19th century only in so far as its dominant coal powered industrial mode of production, what he terms “Coketown” following Charles Dickens’ designation in the novel *Hard Times*, set the context for the emergence of 20th century petroleum powered “Motown,” based on the automobile production complex

centered in Detroit. How humanity has rearranged biology and hydrology as a consequence of this mode of political and economic activity is a central theme through all these chapters. Dams, oilwells, chlorofluorocarbons, floods, the green revolution, deforestation, urbanization and many other aspects of environmental change are interwoven in the narrative. McNeill's overall argument, captured in the title drawn from a verse in Ecclesiastes, is that humanity is changing the global biosphere as a result of its economic activity. Hence there is something new under the sun; the environmental context for human life is being remade by human activity. This has potentially very dangerous consequences for the future that need attention.

The second part of the book discusses the causes of the changes documented in the seven substantive chapters, focusing in turn on population and urbanization, fuels, and technologies, and on political ideas and institutions. In the last of these three chapters McNeill emphasizes the importance of industrial production justified by the search for military security on the part of the industrial powers. This is a most useful correction to many accounts that forget the crucial legacy of industrialized militarism in their condemnation of the destruction of capitalism, population growth or the evils of multinational corporations.

Specialists reading this volume will no doubt bemoan the lack of detail on their favorite topics. Marxists will probably be disappointed by the lack of detailed analysis of social processes. Activists will be disappointed by the lack of discussion of strategies to tackle the litany of natural disruptions. Political scientists too might wish for more details about legislation and international agreements to reduce environmental damage. Ecologists no doubt will miss the more detailed discussions of natural systems that other environmental historians such as Crosby, Diamond, Grove and Flannery are becoming adept at working into their accounts. But this is an overview volume, part of the Norton global century series, and judged as such it clearly works very effectively as an overview of recent environmental transformations.

This is a volume that many college instructors will wish their students to read as background material for many discussions of social science, historical, as well as contemporary, environmental matters. Not least, because this volume is so well written that it invites attention. One of its especially useful aspects as a teaching text is the comprehensive bibliography which is judiciously referred to in the notes in the text. The selection of sources across disciplines is exemplary but presented in an uncluttered fashion that makes it useful without disrupting the flow of the narrative. Combined with a detailed

index this makes this book especially useful as a source to begin debates about numerous environmental matters.

There is something very compelling in McNeill's treatment of his topic. Mixing carefully crafted vignettes with a broad sweep of narrative the chapters cumulatively build an overview of natural systems and their disruption. They also tell the story of the increasing consumption, environmental damage and growing inequality in the global political economy. There are no political polemics here; nor is the tone ever bluntly condemnatory. Instead the matter of fact lucid prose leads to a chilling evaluation of the dangers and inequities of the present as a consequence of the human wrought environmental changes of the last century. This volume offers no simple political solutions or moralizing by way of conclusion. As such it does what good history does best; tells big stories in compelling narratives that present current dilemmas in their appropriate contexts without underestimating their complexity.

The relentless documentation of folly, ignorance, and avarice in these pages works more effectively than either polemical denunciations or announcements of looming disaster to convince the reader of the importance of thinking hard about environmental change as an integral part of the human condition. McNeill's caution that it will be very difficult to change the patterns of human activity once the cumulative changes we have wrought change the context of ecological stability and abundance that made our Motown mode of living possible in the first place, is, as most readers of this journal realize, the big political question of our time. McNeill's contribution is a useful addition to the debate although one can only hope he is wrong in his predictions concerning the difficulties of future political change. One could also hope that his cautionary tales and carefully worded warnings about the consequences of continuing to operate in "Motown" mode become required reading in Washington in the first few years of the new century. If they are, much destruction, violence and injustice in the near future might be prevented. — **Simon Dalby**

J. Donald Hughes, ed.: *The Face of the Earth: Environment and World History*. Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2000.

The history we learned when we were young focused a lot on war and religious ideas, on politics, on great men, and sometimes on culture and art. A few historians during the 20th century paid some attention to economic realities like the extraction and trade of natural resources.

Fewer still have given us a true environmental history, where the spoliation of nature is not portrayed as progress. J. Donald Hughes, a regular *CNS* columnist and well-known historian who specializes in the history of the environment and in the ecology of ancient civilization, particularly Greece and Rome, has put together a small collection of essays by historians who look at some aspects of recent world history, using ecological processes as a central theme and as the context in which that history unfurls.

The book contains seven essays on very diverse topics, but each one gives the reader some insights on the dynamic relationship between human societies and their biophysical environment. Hughes' two chapters, one on "Ecological Process in World History" and the other on "Biodiversity in World History," not only furnish us with excellent references on these topics, but they also contain excellent background information for anyone who is open to the idea that environmental issues did not emerge out of nothing around 1970 in the United States.

Martin V. Melosi from the University of Houston writes on an issue which attracted much attention in Houston during the 1970's, namely "Equity, Eco-racism and the Environmental Justice Movement," (ch. 3) as exemplified by a (lost) legal battle to block the siting of a polluting municipal landfill in a Black neighborhood. John R. McNeil traces a synoptic environmental history of the Island Pacific, in which he focuses on human migrations, animal extinctions and depletions, on the impact of settlers on vegetation through the extraction and trade of natural resources, and on the degradation of the soil because of plantation agriculture. Population growth, warfare, tourism, and nuclear testing are but the most recent scourges to affect those fragile ecosystems isolated in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Helen Wheatley's short piece on "Land and Agriculture in Australia" tells the story of the encounter between Australian sheep and wheat growers in the Northwest Prairies of New South Wales, and the farmers who came from the Western United States in 1960 to grow cotton, and the key role that water played in the conflicts that developed between them over the years. Valery J. Cholakov's even shorter chapter on environmental concerns in Russia indicates how important these issues have been in recent Russian history, how they contributed to the downfall of the Soviet communist regime, and how they might now lead to an eco-revival. Finally, Diane M. Jones, in the shortest piece of all on "the Greening of Gandhi," tries to show that there is a relationship between Gandhi's ideas and the environmental movement in India, and she succeeds fairly well in proving her point. In sum, this is an interesting little book, well worth the time spent reading it,

although I must admit that I found the general biography at the end of the book as interesting as and more useful than most of the seven chapters. If I were an historian rather than a sociologist, I am sure I might be more enthralled by it, but I confess that it certainly widened my horizons both historically and geographically, on the topic of the uneasy relationship between humans and nature on the fragile surface of planet Earth. — **Jean-Guy Vaillancourt**

John Barry: *Environmental and Social Theory*. London and New York, Routledge, 1999.

This is an easy to read undergraduate level textbook on the way social theory has approached the study of the environment, both historically and at the present time. The book uses various pedagogical devices (outlines and summaries, cartoons and overview diagrams, a list of internet resources and sites, a glossary, and rich bibliographies) to help the reader see how theorists have thought about the environment. Starting with the non-Western and Judeo-Christian legacy, Barry moves on to examine the ideas of some of the leading theorists of the Enlightenment like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Godwin and Condorcet. He also focuses on the contribution of Malthus, Darwin, Spencer, Kropotkin, Marx and Engels, and John Stuart Mill, whom he considers to be the first “green” social theorist. For the 20th century, his attention goes to classical sociology, Freud, existentialism, the Frankfurt School (mainly Marcuse and Habermas), Anthony Giddens, ecofeminism, Karl Polanyi, environmental versus ecological economics (we should ecologize economics rather than economize the environment), Ulrich Beck’s risk society and the reflexive modernization thesis, and postmodernist constructionism. Barry is critical of postmodernism, and seems to agree with Habermas, Giddens and Beck who view environmentalism as a type of critical analysis and a fulfillment and completion of the “project of modernity” rather than as an outright rejection and negation of it.

Chapter 8 examines the theories that seek to integrate biology and ecology in social theory. Barry criticizes sociobiology, which attempts to explain social behavior in terms of genetics and evolutionary factors, as a reductionist biological-ecological determinism based on a conservative political ideology rather than on scientific theory. Sociobiology reduces the “social” to the “natural” on the basis of a deterministic account of human nature, which should be rejected because of its misguided manner of trying to transcend the nature/culture

dualism. Ted Benton presents an alternative leftist approach to that question, a naturalistic perspective that is non-reductionist, and which recognizes the relevance but not the complete determinism of genetics and evolutionary theory. Humans are different, but not entirely separate from other species. We are connected to them, we are *a part of* and *apart from* nature. We are “biologically embodied,” and “ecologically and socially embedded.” “Organism and environment are dialectically related.” (p. 188) We adapt to the environment and transform it simultaneously. The difference between a right-wing and a left-wing perspective on the issue of ecology/biology and social relations is that the first insists on individual responsibility, and on a negative view of an unchanging human nature, while the second stresses the importance of external social conditions and the need for socializing people who are naturally good.

In Chapter 9, entitled “Greening Social Theory,” the environment is seen not so much as something on which we depend (as seen in Chapter 8), but as something which depends on us, and is at risk from our actions and our negligence. Barry describes the origins of green social theory (from Romanticism to the emergence of sustainable development), and lists the implications of this newly invented green theory. These characteristics are: 1) multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary; 2) an orientation towards the future, the global and the biosphere; 3) a naturalistic approach rather than human exceptionalism; 4) biological embodiedness and ecological embeddedness and, 5) a normative perspective. Green social theory is human based but not human centered, since humans are both *a part of* and *apart from* nature. In sum, social-environmental relations are constitutive of society, and the concept of sustainable development is the central issue of green social theory today.

In the past few years, scores of books and hundreds of articles have appeared on social theory and the environment. Most are listed in the bibliographies at the end of each chapter, and at the end of the book, but this book is special and different, because it is pedagogically simple, scientifically serious, and politically and ethically radical. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants a rapid and relatively comprehensive overview of the present situation of this field, and who does not want to waste too much time with the current faddish infatuation in many quarters with deep ecology and with social constructivism. — **Jean-Guy Vaillancourt**

Andriana Vlachou, ed.: *Contemporary Economic Theory*.
London, MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999

Andriana Vlachou has assembled a broad and persuasive chorus of voices critical of neoliberalism and its ongoing impacts on the process of European economic and monetary union. *Contemporary Economic Theory* includes sweeping theoretical and applied works that seek to profoundly question the theoretical assumptions, specific analytical tools and policy implications of the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

Vlachou and Georgios Christou offer, by way of introduction, a remarkably thorough and detailed presentation of neoliberalism and its theoretical and practical implications. A comprehensive survey of central precepts and critical issues prepares readers well for the array of critiques offered in the ensuing chapters

The first collection of essays represents a painstaking effort to familiarize readers with the wealth of critical analyses of the basic dualities assumed by neo-liberal theory. Ben Fine offers a well-crafted criticism of the theory of privatization. By re-introducing the need to consider privatization programs as state policy initiatives, in specific social contexts, Fine opens a previously closed debate. Given the primacy of privatization in neoliberal discourse, questioning its foundational beliefs is of the utmost importance. Richard Wolff offers a broad and far reaching argument against accepting as central the debate over state versus market economic coordination and control. This essay offers a radical alternative — in theory and in political strategy — to the endless struggle over the quantitative and qualitative role of the state.

Anwar Shaikh continues the profound questioning of the dominant neoliberal paradigm by offering theoretical and empirical evidence mortally damaging to the presumed inflation/unemployment trade-off as necessarily limiting economic growth. He proposes and demonstrates an alternative metric of the limitation on growth based on the relationship between normal profit and accumulation rates. David Laibman furthers the book's criticism of neoliberalism by suggesting the ability of socialism to facilitate both enhanced social and personal development. He suggests the development of a socialism based on the acknowledgement of the successes and failures of the Soviet era and dedicated to democratically fulfilling the material and ideological needs of all.

Contemporary Economic Theory moves from criticizing neoliberal theory to a second set of essays that profoundly question the way this theory has guided the prevalent public understanding of and action toward European Union. This transition leaves one wanting more in the way of exploration of the many and diverse theoretical alternatives sketched in the first part of the collection.

Georgios Katiphoris offers both a broad sketch of the great potential offered by integration and a demonstration of how the actual path taken by governing elites today fails to achieve that potential. He argues that the criteria for Union, as developed in the Maastricht Treaty and Amsterdam Stability agreements, will likely undermine a historic opportunity. Louka Katseli attacks the widespread neoliberal presumption that economic and political policies can be understood or applied separately. The example that she develops shows how neoliberal economic policies undermine social equity as well as produce inadequate aggregate demand and unemployment. Guglielmo Carchedi presents a powerful critique of the belief that technological innovation will solve all the problems of European integration. Carchedi offers a theory of the dialectical employment results of innovation in the context of European Monetary Union (EMU). He shows how the dominant German agenda combines with neoliberal policies within the southern nations of the Union, to increase exploitation. Costas Lapavistas debunks the foundational assumptions of the operations of both the EMU and the European Central Bank. He carefully reviews the theory underlying central bank independence to reveal the social biases of central bankers and their policy agendas. Alternative agendas and guiding principles are seen as possible and practical when the breadth of central bank activity and the subjectivity of neoliberal assumptions are laid bare. Jorg Huffs Schmid closes this compilation with a thorough exploration of the dangers of the present course of economic integration and, by contrast, the great possibilities, theoretical and real, that integration holds forth. An alternative to the present deflationary and damaging thrust of EMU is offered as within reach.

Despite an abrupt transition, the two distinct sections of this compilation, when taken together, offer a systematic and far reaching alternative to the presently dominant neoliberal paradigm. Beyond that they also present an alternative to the actually existing European integration path that embodies neoliberalism. — **Max Fraad Wolff**

Herbert Reid is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Appalachian Center at the University of Kentucky. His critique of neo-liberal globalization can be found in *Rethinking Marxism*, 13, 1, Spring, 2001.

S. Ravi Rajan is Assistant Professor in the Environmental Studies Department, University of California (Santa Cruz).

Jean-Guy Vaillancourt is Professor of Sociology at the University of Montreal (Canada).

Ben Wisner teaches in the Environmental Studies Program at Oberlin College (Ohio).

Max Fraad Wolff is completing his doctorate in economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His most recent research paper offers a class analytic conception of the operation of equity markets. He also writes on the role of banks in the U.S. economy.

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