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Book Reviews

Human ecology

Human Ecology: Fragments of Anti-fragmentary Views of the World. D. Steiner and M. Nauser, eds. 1993. Routledge, London, xxvi + 365 pp.

Gregory Bateson in *Mind and Nature* argued for a new science of survival specializing in putting together the fragmentary perspectives of other disciplines. This volume, originating in a conference organized by geographers in Switzerland in 1989, illustrates many of the merits and difficulties of such an undertaking. "Human ecology" may well be an adequate label for the ambition to integrate different discourses on sustainability and human-nature interaction, but after decades of discussions there are still a number of competing approaches as to how such integration might best be achieved. Against this background, the editors have admirably succeeded in indicating some of the most promising avenues.

The normative foundation of human ecology is easier to delineate than its conceptual framework. Its point of departure is immediately evident in the evocation, in the book's abstract, of "an environmental catastrophe of global proportions" and the questioning of modern, "technocratic" rationality. The environmental crisis is identified as a fragmentarizing "crisis of society" which can only be alleviated through a "new kind of consciousness" conducive to responsible, sustainable lifestyles.

In biology, sociology, anthropology, geography and psychology the editors recognize the 5 interdisciplinary "roots" of human ecology. They argue persuasively not only that it should be "centred in the social sciences and the humanities rather than in the natural sciences", but also

that it inevitably must embrace "trans-scientific components of a philosophical and religious nature". Of the 19 contributors, 11 are geographers, 3 psychologists and one a biologist. The absence of contributions from sociologists is well compensated for by the strong interest in Giddens, Luhmann and Habermas shared by many of the Swiss geographers. On what anthropology might have to contribute, however, the book is almost completely silent. Considering the extensive anthropological literature presenting itself as "human ecology" (cf. the journal *Human Ecology* as well as recent volumes by, e.g., Ingold, Moran, Bennett or Campbell), this is a major omission.

A central theme is the "human-ecological triangle" of Person-Society-Environment which gave the conference its name. According to Steiner, this triangle defines four kinds of relationships which need to be elucidated and which organize the book, namely person-society, person-environment, person-self, and society-environment. He suggests that all but the last of these relationships tend to be autopoietic or "recursive" systems in the sense that entities belonging to different levels of inclusiveness are mutually self-reinforcing. He is thus able to subsume various understandings of these relationships within a new, non-reductionist "evolutionary cosmology" focused on self-organization.

Several contributors note that Giddens' theory of structuration is of crucial significance for an understanding of the recursive nature of the *person-society* relationship. The recursivity of the *person-environment* relationship, on the other hand, can be illuminated from the perspective of Gibson's "ecological psychology" (championed by Carello) complemented with Lang's interpreta-

