



Human Ecology: Fragments of Anti-Fragmentary Views of the World by Dieter Steiner;
Markus Nauser

Review by: Gary Bridge

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Human Ecology: fragments of anti-fragmentary views of the world edited by *Dieter Steiner and Markus Nauser*

London: Routledge, 1993, 384 pp, £65.00 hardback
 ISBN 0-415-06777-4

The ecological crisis is a social crisis. This premise underlines the efforts of the nineteen contributors to this volume who seek to integrate the insights of ecological studies with social theory in a transdisciplinary approach to the environmental question. *Human Ecology: fragments of anti-fragmentary views of the world* emerged from the proceedings of a workshop convened in 1987 by the 'Theory and Integrative Approaches' working group of the Swiss Association of Geographers (including contributions from geography, biology, economics, psychology and linguistics). The editors claim that social science and not natural science (which is overly technocratic) should be the basis for solutions to the ecological problem. The onus is put on the individual as the critical locus between society and the environment and thus it is individuals who must change environmental behaviour. The chapters in section I attempt to trace states of consciousness (for example, 'techno-addiction') that inhibit radical changes in behaviour. Section II traces some alternative formulations, for example, ecological units of perception in psychology, strategies for incorporating externality effects (eg pollution) into price fixing in markets from economics, a description of modes of behaviour to overcome the lemming effect of environmentally destructive actions (from synergenics). The third section seeks an integrative approach through the application of Giddens's structuration theory to the person-society-environment relation. It is easy to see how this adaptation came about. The focus of *Human Ecology* is on self reflexive, knowledgeable human beings whose daily routines involve social practices that are environmentally destructive. Furthermore the editors are at pains to stress the recursiveness of the person-society relation and its iterative detachment of self-conscious human beings from any feeling of influence on environmental matters. At the same time they share Giddens's view that there is the constant potential for individuals to 'make a difference', to transform the structures. The capabilities of individuals to engage in co-operative grassroots mobilisation over environmental issues is indeed significant (evidenced by the growth of environmental pressure groups). Yet 'making a difference' demands engagement with the structuring conditions one is seeking to change. In this regard any account of the environmental impacts of capitalism is entirely absent (indeed capitalism is scarcely mentioned in the book). This prevents consideration of alternative integrative approaches such as materialist conceptions of the society-person-environment relation. This is a weakness because Marx dealt so explicitly with the anatomy of capitalism, its relation to nature and the impact of transformed nature (second nature) on human consciousness (alienation, commodity fetishism). The call for eco-regionalism as a way to limit environmental disaster (section IV) is attractive (especially for a group of geographers) but again the relationship of these possible strategies to the global nature of the current economic system (and to governments, multi-nationals and politics) is less clear. The editors provide a clear route through the diverse contributions although a general conclusion would have been useful. Suitable for senior undergraduate geographers onwards this is a technical rather than inspirational contribution to the greening of social theory.

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Transport and communications innovation in Europe edited by *G Giannopoulos and A Gillespie*

London and New York: Belhaven Press, 1993, 369 pp, £42.00 hardback
 ISBN 1 85293 269 4

This book is a product of co-operative work carried out by the Europe 2020 Group of the Network for European Communications and Transport Activities Research (NECTAR) which has been examining the possible implications of innovations in communications and transport,