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International Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis, Richard W. Barrett, Editor

Graham A. MacDonald

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BOOK REVIEWS

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

RICHARD N. BARRETT, Ed.

Boulder: Westview Press. 1982. Pp. 298. \$20.00, s.c.

Twentieth century geographers are notorious for their advocacy of regional studies. This book of seventeen essays will please those who favor the in-depth scrutiny of an area or the comparative study of regions. The authors, representing many disciplines, are, with one exception, drawn from the faculty of the University of Montana. The papers printed represent the outcome of a special lecture series organized to stimulate interest in the University's international environmental studies program. The book is arranged in five sections: (1) Practical and Philosophical Problems, (2) Latin America, (3) Europe, (4) Asia, and (5) Africa. As a resource book capable of offering stimulating viewpoints, solid scholarship, good bibliographic references, and departure points for future student inquiry, the collection is a great success, and helps to fill a considerable void.

Essays of such diversity and drawn from one community of scholars inevitably tend to be somewhat uneven in thematic unity and quality. The reviewer found that the theme of "environmental crisis" was most convincingly developed in those papers which focused on very concrete situations. R. E. Erickson's discussion of the Amazon, D. S. Kang's description of the Punjab, Fred Reed's analysis of the historical evolution of the Sahara, and Peter Koehn's comparative study of Ethiopia and Nigeria, must all be singled out for their interest and for the manner in which they confirm the seriousness of certain environmental trends which have been the concern of organizations such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The singular lesson to be drawn from these papers, perhaps, is an appreciation for the nemesis which seems always to accompany one-purpose technical solutions to problems which were perceived by decision-makers to be fairly straight-forward. Be it a system of government-drilled water-holes in the Sahara or a large-scale promotion of the "green-revolution" in the Punjab, severe and unexpected ecological adjustments have a way of coming back to haunt the host society. This is particularly sad, as Peter Koehn makes clear, when green-revolution economics are still being actively promoted in the 1980s. A number of the authors have also pointed to the unholy alliance which has

developed between politicians, new national elites, and international agribusiness. This influence, when translated into policy terms, is seen to be the most important factor involved in preventing sound land reform and the development of ecologically sane agriculture based on small landholdings. The policies of the World Bank leave much to be desired from this point of view.

Another group of essays focuses on the political economy and institutional arrangements which have come to characterize certain international experiments. Forest L. Grieves provides a solid analysis of the regional organizations of Western and Eastern Europe; he identifies the proliferation of agencies concerned with environment as a problem in itself. Duplication and confusion in the effort to foster "the coherent evolution of environmental rules" are sometimes the unexpected result of current efforts. John Duffield documents the experience of Scandinavians and Americans with energy problems and makes comparisons between Norway and Montana. Air-born pollution from foreign sources is viewed as a major problem for future environmental and international law. Michael Kupilik demonstrates the inadequacy for environmental protection in the Soviet Union of the mere promulgation of environmental Soviet law. He is less convincing, however, with his thesis that "the Soviets have built environmental destruction into their system by the way they have structured their institutions and that this structure is independent of the existence of socialism" (p. 161).

Logically, whatever Soviet Socialism is, it is reflected in the institutions which post-1917 Soviet society has sanctioned. In his study of "Resources, Scarcity and Population Growth," Dennis O'Donnell puts forth the proposition that synecology models can be employed in the analysis of human environmental ills. ("Synecology is the study of relations between organisms in their environment.") This leads the author into a theory of "externalities," situations in which the benefits and costs of decisions are not received or born by the decision maker. This is a slightly abstract idea as developed in his paper, but elements of his thesis are repeatedly confirmed by some of the other contributors to this volume. The argument is echoed for instance in Chris Field's discussion of "Dirt, Water, International Security, and Resource Development." The environmental question is identified as *the* international question, the one on which hang all other important questions of conventional freedoms and the maintenance of civilization. Costa Rica is discussed with the pessimistic note added that even the progressive policies of this country have not left it free of serious environmental threats in the future.

A third group of papers approaches the topic from a philosophical perspective. These compose Part I of the book, but logically include Philip Maloney's paper on Soviet Literature. In general, the essays in

this section are more argumentative and suffer on occasion from philosophical confusion with respect to the man-nature relation. Clarence Glacken, the author of the monumental *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, once remarked about his life-long preoccupation with study of the man-nature theme that "it is exceedingly difficult to say anything new or fresh about it." As with the other essays in this book, the papers in this section will provide considerable food for thought for the inquiring student interested in the perplexities of the intellectual history of the idea of nature and man's place in it. Herman Daly's essay on "Three Visions of the Economic Process" can be profitably read in conjunction with Robert Eagle's essay from Section V on China and Tanzania.

GRAHAM A. MACDONALD
The Crocus Group: heritage planning
associates
Winnipeg, Manitoba