

Ignoring Nature: Why We Do It, the Dire Consequences, and the Need for a Paradigm Shift to Save Animals, Habitats, and Ourselves

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What in the world is happening to our planet and why?

We live in a wounded world that is in dire need of healing. We all should be troubled and terrified by what we have done and continue to do. Humans have made huge and horrific global messes that need to be repaired now. The overriding sense of turmoil is apparent to anyone who takes the time to pay attention. Researchers and non-researchers alike are extremely concerned about unprecedented global losses of biodiversity and how humans suffer because of our destructive ways. We are animals and we should be proud and aware of our membership in the animal kingdom. However, our unique contribution to the decimation of the planet and its many life forms demeans us.

Humans are big-brained, invasive, and omnipresent mammals who seem to think they can do almost anything they want. Individuals in most cultures claim to love nature and other animals but then go on to abuse them in a multitude of ways. Clearly, our relationship with the rest of the world is a very confused one and our actions are often contradictory and paradoxical. Why do we ignore nature when the messages about our abusive and excessive behavior are abundantly clear?

One would have to be a hermit not to hear about the damage we are causing on the planet, yet we continue our harmful ways as if in we're living in oblivion. Sadly, most people do not have access to information that will help them understand our place on Earth and the consequences of our behavior. Most people are also unable to do much if anything about the dire situation in which we find ourselves.

We are here, there, and everywhere and this isn't good for us or other species because our peripatetic omnipresence and short lifespan have removed us from the nuances — the ups, downs, and timelessness — of natural cycles. Our glob-

al presence is a problem because we are able to trespass at will even when we're not physically present, and there aren't any ecosystems in which we're not present and intrusively damaging. Truth told, we're a species whom almost all other species could easily live without. We breed too much and over consume as if it's the thing to do. To wit, The Global Footprint Network reports the world's 6.7 billion humans are now consuming all resources 30 percent faster than the sustainable rate of replenishment. In the United States, people are consuming resources nearly 90 percent faster than the Earth can replenish them (http://www.worldpopulationbalance.org/wpb_newsletters/wpb_newsletter_2009aug.pdf)

Humans have an interesting past. We evolved in a world unimpeded by "human progress" and then we began tripping over our own feet. Once, we were alert to and in tune with nature and the other beasts with whom we shared space. There was competition for survival but also reverence and respect, and we knew that coexistence and sustainability were necessary even before science told us this was so (as evidenced by remnant indigenous cultures). When did we begin ignoring nature? Why did we start ignoring our need for untainted and healthy food, clean water, clean air, and reasonable shelter? How did we become so disconnected from nature and an understanding of basic ecological processes? What allows us to tolerate human-induced losses in biodiversity? What can we do about the distance and alienation from nature and other animals that allows us to be so damaging? While it may be that some early humans lived unsustainably (e.g., Easter Islanders) and life back then is easy to romanticize, it is not only our peripatetic nature and mobility but also our ability to deal with situations using technological fixes unavailable to early humans that allows us today to live out of synch, in abusive ways, with natural rhythms and other species, at least for

now. Our escape into technological fixes, many short and superficial, gives us a false sense of security that all is okay. Clearly it isn't.

Among the main reasons for our disconnect centers on our ignoring the fact that we are not exempt from ecological principles that we accept for all other species. Our big-brains also allow us to come up with short-lived band-aid solutions that diminish our unsustainable and destructive habits. One way we clearly ignore nature is in our purchasing practices. Buying something is a vote for the production and sale of that product and in some cases implicitly grants permission to abuse animals, destroy forests, rivers and oceans, support child labor in sweatshops, and more. For example, people who know about the humane and ecological effects of, for example, factory farming, but dismissively say "Oh, but I love my steak", must be shown that this behavior significantly contributes to the demise of Earth and other animals (Bekoff 2010). People who over-consume by buying gas-guzzling cars and SUVs or trophy homes need to be shown how easy it is to change their ways and still be happy, in fact, probably happier.

Where have all the animals gone?

Researchers and non-researchers alike are very concerned about unprecedented global losses of biodiversity. Questions concerning how we interact with other species are at once extremely challenging and frustrating, and among the most important with which we must deal in a time when losses in biodiversity, for the most part anthropogenic, are staggering and threaten our own survival. Ecosystems and webs in nature are being recklessly and routinely destroyed. Animals are dying and vanishing before our eyes — even as you read this essay — and concerned citizens all over the world are asking, "Where have all the animals gone?" We are deep in a serious crisis out of which it will be difficult to emerge successfully.

As far as animal species are concerned there are a number of strategies (including reintroduction and captive breeding often in association with reintroduction, translocation, and establishing protected areas) that are used to try to "recreate" or to "restore" viable populations in the native or historical range of the imperiled animals. Success is rare, people disagree on what "success" means, and we need to ask if these strategies are still useful in the midst of the current crisis. We also need to ask why there have been relatively few proactive and preemptive attempts to curtail losses in biodiversity although a good deal of time and effort and many words imply that this is not the case.

Although we are in a dire situation, individuals in societies play a vital role in trying to right the wrongs and start the healing. One thing we must do is spread the message outside our circles and comfort zones and get the mass media not

only to report on what is happening but also to suggest simple and viable solutions to remedy the situation. Researchers also need to be good role models for the general public and more importantly for countries in which it is difficult to make changes because of economic constraints. Currently the United States is like the spoiled child of the planet, demanding every comfort, luxury and over-indulgence. Other countries recognize our greed yet at the same time strive for it. Who wouldn't?

A cross-disciplinary and ambitious effort to deal with the decline of biodiversity and what's being done and not being done to curtail these losses is imperative and pressing. As people involved in conservation issues and the human condition, we must ask ourselves why we stick our noses to the grindstone and continue work on many band aid projects that the media then uses to placate policy makers and the general public. This is not to say that these projects are not important, however, we must effectively deal with a number of significant issues such as human overpopulation, over-consumption, the lack of adequate protection for most species other than ours (while we are also seriously failing the majority of humans), losses of habitat, the lack of awareness of what is actually happening, and cross-cultural perspectives on the nature of human-animal relationships. We must also consider how speciesism influences how we interact with other species and their habitats and why we continue to trump their interests. Humans are not "better" or "higher" than individuals of other species. We share many similarities but we're also different, but different doesn't mean better.

We should also be concerned about what future generations of people will say about our efforts to protect animals and habitats and to curtail biodiversity losses. Climate change influences the viability of animal populations and biodiversity losses. Concerning the price that future generations will pay for our indiscretions and the lack of long-term solutions, a recent summary of climate change policy notes, "the idea of ensuring justice between those generations responsible for the effects of climate change and those who will have to pay the heaviest price for it, is still not being adequately reflected in climate change policy, with world leaders instead choosing to focus only on solutions that can accommodate their short-term national interests." (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8374965.stm>)

Conservation psychology and conservation social work

It's rarely a lack of knowledge and concrete data that result in missed opportunities to preserve biodiversity or that inform decisions about who lives and who dies (animals and ecosystems). Rather, losses are typically due to problems of human psychology and social and cultural factors that result in the inadequate protection of animals and their habitats.

Therefore, we must address the important psychological and social/cultural issues that support our poor stewardship of Earth, our only home, and psychological barriers that prevent people from facing and addressing these complex, frustrating, and urgent issues that are human-induced (anthropogenic). (The importance of the social sciences in dealing with climate change serves as a nice model; <http://www.apa.org/releases/climate-change.pdf>) We need to extend efforts to inform people as part of a social movement that is concerned with losses in biodiversity and the implications of these losses for animals and for us.

The new and emerging fields of *conservation psychology* (<http://www.conservationpsychology.org/>) and *conservation social work* (<http://www.humananimalconnection.org/>) are addressing various questions about why and how people do some of the unconscionable and destructive things they do, what we can do to change our behavior, how the inclusion of the natural world is important in the social sciences and hands-on social work, and how our own well being is influenced by how we interact with animals and the environment (e.g. Norton 2009). We can ask, for example: Why do people estrange themselves from nature and other animals? What are the effects of this disconnection from the natural world? Why do humans break appropriate regulations and laws that could work for the benefit of animals and us? Of course some do it for survival, still others for financial gain and/or to increase their professional status, but perhaps they (and others) do not really understand the damage they are doing that also threatens our own survival. At the local level laws are often broken because there is a lack of awareness of existing regulations and laws, enforcement of the laws is not possible, or because a huge number of impoverished people are simply trying to survive.

Fundamental to the field of conservation social work is the acquisition of the knowledge and skills to be effective in all areas of the human condition, including a comprehensive understanding of the critical importance of nature, animals, and healthy environments and the ways in which environmental forces create, contribute to, and address problems experienced in the everyday lives of people (the person-in-environment construct that is central to social work; Norton 2009). We must encourage and empower people to gain an understanding of the interrelationships among themselves, their families, and communities, including the natural environment and its non-human inhabitants. Humans need an ecological understanding of their place in natural environments to promote personal health and well being as well as environmental awareness, sustainability, and advocacy. It is imperative that we draw on the wealth of knowledge we possess in the biological and social sciences to form the basis of a social movement that will make positive and enduring differences in the future.

So that academics and non-academics alike can gain a deeper understanding of what is being attempted, most often in futility, to curtail losses in biodiversity and why so many humans today ignore nature, we propose that interdisciplinary groups work in concert with each other to address the major points that need to be discussed among people from different disciplines and various cultures. While biologists, including those specializing in conservation, ethology, and ecology are needed, we also need social scientists, conservation psychologists, conservation social workers, conservation and humane educators, and philosophers to engage in the discussions that will and must inform action. It is important to stress that the loss of animal species must be presented in a direct manner. Even if people do not want to face up to the fact that we are the major (some would say the only) reason for declines and extinctions, the facts show clearly that we are. We are truly living in the “anthropocene” a latter part of what is called the “sixth extinction” (<http://www.actionbioscience.org/newfrontiers/eldredge2.html>).

So, what do we need to do?

It is important to revisit some of the things we need to do to correct the current situation because of our continued inability to deal with all that is happening globally. To respond effectively, we should:

- Discuss our inability to address the serious issues that are the result of over-population (but see Mazur 2009) and why curtailing our breeding is so hard for humans to accept. It is a very sensitive topic, yet this is one of a number of major ways in which we clearly ignore nature. Human cultures try to define their world through their own special interests, in turn losing the overall perspective of the needs, and limitations, of our species. For thousands of years, humans have struggled for survival against a hostile natural world along side other struggling organisms, and as a result many traditional values and institutions favored the growth of human numbers (Cassils 2004). However, today it is in the interest of humanity to act with anticipatory intelligence and to override our predisposition to reproduce (Mazur 2009).
- Alert people about the level of on-going losses in biodiversity and the grave implications of these losses for human and non-human animals.
- Get scientists to act as concerned citizens (see the excellent essay on this topic in *New Scientist* in March 2009 “We need another kind of scientist to save the world”; <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20127003.000-we-need-another-kind-of-scientist-to-save-the-world.html>, as well as get citizens to act as responsible stewards.

- Bring together those who are interested in animal protection, in which the focus is on *individual* animals, with those whose main concerns are in conservation and environmental issues where the main focus is on higher levels of organization such as populations, species, and ecosystems. A unified collective approach is sorely needed to make positive changes.
- Discuss why humans are so fixated on technological fixes and being “heroes” for cleaning up what we ourselves have done after we’ve redecorated the habitats of animals.
- Consider how who we are, or who we perceive ourselves to be, influences how we intrude into the lives of other beings. Here, ethical questions from the animal protection movement and the field of conservation ethics need to be discussed in a motivated way.
- Reach out to mass media and help them share the truth about the global situation and encourage them to be voices for the animals by assuring they represent animals as who they are not who they want them to be (Ross et al. 2008; Freeman 2009).
- Ask what we can do to make the world a better place for animals and children. We must teach our children well. They care about animals and we can all too easily take that compassion and empathy away from them (Bexell 2006, Bexell, Jarrett, Xu and Feng 2010).
- Get the necessary global social movement started (see Johns 2009).

While this list is only a beginning, many examples of what can be done when people from different disciplines talk to one another and bring in community members are included in Susan Clayton and Gene Myers’ *Conservation Psychology* (2009). Similarly, in a developing program in Conservation Social Work at the University of Denver’s Institute for Human-Animal Connection (<http://www.humananimalconnection.org/>) academics (including ourselves) and non-academics are working together to foster change in people’s attitudes towards animals and nature. An excellent example of what needs to be done concerns the role that researchers from different disciplines and community members are playing to reduce the slaughter of African elephants who are destroying the precious land (and sometimes the animals themselves) of extremely poor people whose animals need it for grazing (Bradshaw 2009). Another concerns efforts to reduce conflicts between people and much-maligned wolves (Musiani, Boitani, and Paquet 2009). While these are local issues they can inform how we approach larger issues worldwide in that they provide good examples of the social movement that is

needed to change how we interact with animals and act on their behalf.

In many ways those interested in making positive changes — AKA activists — are also social workers. The much needed paradigm shift demanding a change in our behavior is a social movement requiring everyone to discuss harmoniously what must be done to make the world a better place for all beings and *act* so that peaceful coexistence and habitat protection are the norms rather than the exceptions (see also Clark, Rutherford, and Casey 2005, Herda-Rapp and Goedeke 2005, Corwin 2009, Goodall 2009, Minter 2009, Taylor 2009, Bekoff 2006, 2010, and Crist and Rinker 2010).

Where to from here? We need a revolution in thought, heart, and action

Michael Soulé (2002), founder of the field of conservation biology, perhaps said it best: “We’re certainly a dominant species, but that’s not the same as a keystone species. A keystone species is one that, when you remove it, the diversity collapses; we’re a species that when you add us, the diversity collapses. We can change everything, dictate everything and destroy everything.”

Soulé is right. As big-brained, invasive, and frequently self-centred and arrogant mammals, we can do just about anything we want anywhere, anytime, and to any other beings or landscapes. We must recognize that this unprecedented power comes with enormous and compelling ethical responsibilities to be good stewards. Let us remember that in most cases we can do better; and in all cases we have an obligation to strive to do far better than the current norm.

Clearly, we need a paradigm shift, a revolution, in how we think about and educate people on biodiversity losses, over-population, and over-consumption and what we can do about our destructive ways. We need to make room for animals in our lives and in our hearts so that we stop wantonly redecorating their homes for our, and not their, benefit (Bekoff 2006, 2010, Fox and Bekoff 2009). We have an obligation to expand our compassion footprint to other animals and to other humans (Bekoff 2010).

For our interactions with animals, a good beginning is to call attention to the “safe operating space for humanity” (<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v461/n7263/full/461472a.html>; <http://www.grist.org/article/2009-09-22-scientists-identify-safe-operating-space-for-humanity-nature>). Recently a team of 28 scientists identified ten separate biophysical systems that are crucial to humanity’s flourishing. For each system they identified a “safe operating boundary” including levels of biodiversity within which humanity must remain if it wishes to maintain the basic environmental conditions in which it evolved. We have already violated these boundaries

and this is very dangerous.

In the near future, there likely will be fewer people who will actually be able to make a positive difference in our relationships with animals and ecosystems. Joel Cohen (2009), head of the Laboratory of Populations at the Rockefeller University and Columbia University, offers the sobering fact that the difference in the population numbers between less developed areas of the world (the have-nots) and more developed regions of the world (the haves) will have increased from two-fold in the 1950s to about six-fold by 2050. This means that it is imperative — perhaps it is truly a moral imperative — that those who have the resources to do something good for animals and earth do it, and that they not succumb to the inevitable disappointments, frustrations, and burnout that are associated with animal and environmental activism (Bekoff 2007a,b, 2010, van Dornoot Lipsky and Burk 2009). People who care about animals and nature should not be considered “the radicals” or “bad guys” who are trying to impede “human progress;” in fact, they could be seen as heroes who are not only fighting for animals, but also for humanity. Biodiversity is what enables human life as well as enriches it. It is imperative that all of humanity reconnects with what sustains the ability of our species to persist and that we act as a unified collective while coexisting with other species and retaining the integrity of ecosystems. There are no quick fixes and we need to realize that when animals die, we die too.

Endnote

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***The Ecological Revolution:
Making Peace with the Planet***

By John Bellamy Foster

New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009

ISBN: 978-1-58367-179-5.

***The Bridge at the Edge of the World:
Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from
Crisis to Sustainability***

By James Gustave Speth

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008

ISBN: 0300136110.

Reviewed by Thomas J. Burns
University of Oklahoma

History is replete with evidence of serious environmental degradation following closely in the wake of industrialization and the rise of capitalism. Even among people who are not in denial about potentially catastrophic problems, there is disagreement about how to go about addressing them. One set of approaches, broadly categorized as *ecological modernization*, converges around incremental steps managed with technocratic methods. These approaches tend to take globalizing capitalism as a given.

In stark contrast to the ecological modernization way of seeing the world, John Bellamy Foster makes a compelling case that a more radical set of approaches are necessary. Foster leans heavily on Marx's ideas about the metabolic rift between urban and rural areas that resulted from the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism and the concomitant general formula for capital that arose with it. Like Marx, Foster sees a fundamental flaw in capitalism. By its nature capitalism must expand; yet on a planet with finite resources, this is a formula for disaster.

Foster outlines a number of environmental problems, and links them directly with the workings of capitalism. He has, for example, a chapter on the Jevons Paradox: when new discoveries are made that increase efficiency, changes in consumption patterns tend to follow in their wake that more than negate any gains. The introduction of more fuel efficient automobiles led to a number of other use changes such as buying more cars, building more freeways and exurbs. These secondary and tertiary changes led to a virtual doubling of the number of cars on the road (p. 125).

In the problem is implied the solution. Foster sees the importance of an unwinding of capital accumulation and the alienation and metabolic rift attendant to it. As Foster sees it, there needs to be a transition from capitalism to socialism,

with societies in the periphery of the world system leading the way (p. 265). Yet it is not enough merely to move to a socialism devoid of ecological consciousness. Rather, environmental sustainability and well-being would need to be central organizing principles in such a transition.

Although not as radical in his suggestions, Speth nonetheless adduces his own withering critique of capitalism. He acknowledges that free market capitalism tends to inadequately value the well-being of the planet and the life dependent upon it. Even when value is placed, it typically is in monetary terms. This is a fundamental flaw in "mainstream" economics as it is taught in many if not most universities.

Speth advocates a "post growth" society. This will necessarily involve new ways of thinking on a number of different levels from the individual to the global. This is, of course, easier said than done, and some of the practical steps here are much more Keynesian than radical. Given his background as a high level government advisor (it bears noting here that Speth was a former Chair of the U.S. President's Council on Environmental Quality as well as one of the founders of the Natural Resources Defense Council and the World Resources Institute), it is perhaps not surprising that Speth looks to such technocratic fixes. A major component of Speth's suggested program would involve heavy consumption taxes. While this is an attractive suggestion on some levels, it is not without potential perversities.

Rather than reiterate those arguments here, I will refer the reader to the very first issue of *Human Ecology Review*. An extended section of that issue centered around an article by Matt Ridley and Bobbi Low (1993/94) entitled "Can Selfishness Save the Environment?" There are over a dozen articles in commentary, each of which points out potential difficulties in this "rational choice" approach to environmental problems. *Inter alia*, the issue of norms was raised by a number of authors; without an underlying normative context, numerous ways to beat the system could be found, each of which brings its own set of perverse consequences.

Speth does acknowledge some of these potential difficulties. In fact, the problem that Speth identifies ultimately is one of consciousness. No technocratic changes will work effectively without a significant rise in the collective consciousness of the people of the planet. Here Speth is onto a crucial point, and yet it is just here that his work becomes vague. How is this growth in consciousness to occur? He does not see it emerging from environmentalism — in fact, Speth examines environmental movements and concludes that, by and large, they are failures. Here Speth puts a huge amount of faith in policy. If there are the right kinds of policies that give financial, social and legal incentives to people to engage in smaller scale sustainable practices, a new communalism is likely to emerge.

These books converge around a common theme: Environmental degradation, particularly in the centuries since the Industrial Revolution, is inextricably intertwined with the structure of global capitalism itself. *A fortiori*, the planetary degradation has gone beyond the point that it could be addressed adequately by incremental measures, and thus more radical approaches are necessary for the survival of life on Earth.

Like many writers before them, both Speth and Foster do better in articulating the problems than they do in proposing workable solutions. This is not a major criticism of either author, but more of an expression of hope that both will continue to develop their thinking in the direction of practical solutions.

Both of these are important books. Either or both are appropriate for an advanced undergraduate or graduate seminar in Human Ecology or Environmental Social Sciences. Both deserve to be taken seriously, read and discussed.

Reference

Ridley, Matt, and Bobbi S. Low. 1993/94. Can Selfishness Save the Environment? *Human Ecology Review*, 1(1):1 ff. {Note: see the entire section under the heading of *Human Ecology Forum* for the article, fourteen commentaries, and the Ridley and Low response to those commentaries}



Gerald L. Young
2009 Book Award in Human Ecology

**exemplifying the highest standard of scholarly work in
the field of human ecology**

is presented to

Eric Chivian and Aaron Berger

for their edited book

Sustaining Life: How Human Health
Depends on Biodiversity

Published by Oxford University Press (2008)

International Conference on Human Ecology
Manchester, UK, June 29th to July 31st

Jointly convened by the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council,
the Society for Human Ecology and the University of Manchester
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The Shadows of Consumption:
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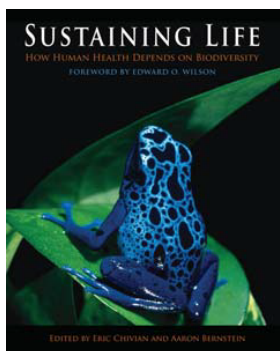
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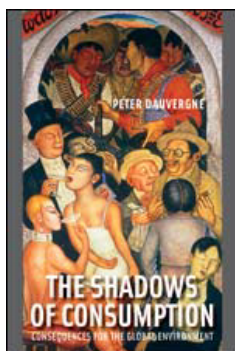
The Society for Human Ecology distinguished scholarly book award, named in honor of Gerald L. Young who is considered one of SHE's founders and a recognized leader in scholarly publications in human ecology, is presented annually for the best single book published in a calendar year (published in 2008). This year we present book reviews for the two winners (and one honorable mention) for the 2009 Gerald L. Young Book Awards in Human Ecology. These awards exemplify the high standard of scholarly work in the field of human ecology.

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Sustaining Life:
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Edited by Eric Chivian and Aaron Bernstein (2008)
Oxford University Press, New York.



The Shadows of Consumption:
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by Peter Dauvergne (2008)
The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA

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Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity
Edited by Eric Chivian and Aaron Bernstein
Oxford University Press
ISBN13: 9780195175097
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Hardback, 568 pages, Apr 2008.

Review by Scott D. Wright, University of Utah

This volume is a magnificent treatise – a tour de force on the elaborate interconnections between biodiversity decline and the consequences for human health. The breadth and depth is simply astonishing and the quality of the publication - from cover to cover – has set a new standard in the domain of environmental literature. Not since the publication of Dasgupta's (2001) *Human Well-Being and the Natural Environment* have we seen this kind of necessary and dedicated weaving of natural capital with ecological concerns in relation to habitat at “oikos” (οἶκος; οἶκος) and the study of the “household” - to which captures the imperative to understand and protect the well-being for and of the entire planet.

Sustaining Life is a grand exemplar of scholarship that captures the latest scientific findings associated with biodiversity and ecosystem services while establishing a new benchmark for authentic interdisciplinarity that is robust and accessible. This volume is long overdue and the editors (Chivian and Bernstein) have captured the intricate dimensions of a human ecology that is both accessible and hopeful – in other words, it is a powerful resource for the individual, for our communities, and for the collective effort that must be international in scope. The policy and outreach quotient with this volume is its greatest asset; this volume must be read by every citizen of Planet Earth and I hope it is brought to the attention of every schoolchild, parent, elected official, NGO, and governmental agency, and is at the highest priority for every librarian who values a book that would make a difference in the quality of life – for all of life.

About the Authors

Eric Chivian, M.D., is the Director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School. He shared the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. He is the lead editor and author of *Last Aid: The Medical Consequences of Nuclear War* and *Critical Condition: Human Health and the Environment*. Aaron Bernstein, M.D., is a Research Associate at the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School, and pediatrician at Children's Hospital Boston, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School.

The Shadows of Consumption: Consequences for the Global Environment
by Peter Dauvergne
ISBN: 978-0-262-04246-8
The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. Hardback, 315 pages, 2008.

Review by Scott D. Wright, University of Utah

While it has been uplifting to see the rise of a “green consciousness” take place on so many levels of human organization, there is also the attending and urgent need to discover the consequences of well-intentioned actions and behaviors in the name of “ecological well-being” in a specific area or place, that may “balloon squeeze” the problems somewhere else. The resulting progress (well-lighted and transparent) in one area may in turn amplify the negative effects (shadows and hiding) in another. This book seeks to investigate the full dynamics of consumption in all of its consequences so that even when we believe we are victorious in reducing environmental degradation in one geographic region, the net effect may be that we have shifted environmental burdens to fragile ecosystems and to poorer people less able to cope with the consequences” (p. xiii). There is much to admire in this publication: the coverage is thorough, the narrative is grounded in empirical results, and the structure (table of contents) is aptly designed. More significant, is the resulting epiphany in the reader to finally – and fully appreciate that economic and political decisions made on behalf of the environment at local and regional geographic areas is only one side of the coin

The author begins the book by posing the following questions: What are the environmental consequences of consumption? How do they affect our health and society? And to his credit, Dauvergne uses these questions to justify why the optic for answering the questions needed to be expanded by using a wider lens and from a different angle, and so his approach is deeper and ultimately more rewarding. Dauvergne captures the essence of the detective on the trail of elusive culprits, and the clues are not always evident and obvious, and only with great tenacity and sustained dedication to the “big picture” can the effective outcome to the problem be truly resolved,

“...I analyze not only through direct consequences of consuming, but also the environmental spillovers from the corporate, trade, and financing chains that supply and replace consumer goods: what, to capture the full resulting global patterns of harm, I call the “ecological shadows of consumption” (p. xi).

Dauvergne’s brilliant investigation will show you the “other side” of the coin and that we must all incorporate a deeper awareness and take the “long view” into our efforts to make a positive difference for human well-being near and far – immediately in your neighborhood and incrementally on the other side of the planet.

About the Author

Peter Dauvergne is Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair in Global Environmental Politics at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of the award-winning *Shadows in the Forest: Japan and the Timber in Southeast Asia* (MIT Press, 1997), and the coauthor (with Jennifer Clapp) of *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of Global Environmental Policy* (MIT Press, 2005).

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