

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

PHILIP W. SUTTON, *The Environment: A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, v +163 p, index.

In the preface to *The Environment: A Sociological Introduction*, Philip Sutton sets out the goals he hopes to achieve with this book: an introduction to the sociology of the environment, and an introduction to how sociologists think and do research. His stated readership is “intellectual laypeople” and “lower level undergraduate students” (xi). To make the book more accessible, he has minimized the citations normally used in academic literature (xi).

Most of the topics discussed by Philip Sutton are similar to those covered by Charles Harper in *Environment and Society: Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues*; by Michael Mayerfeld Bell in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*; and by Craig R. Humphrey, Tammy L. Lewis and Frederick H. Buttell in their book *Environment, Energy, and Society: A New Synthesis*. A partial list of topics includes an overview of sociological theory about the environment, energy, pollution, population, sustainability, and an examination of the environmental movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

After chapter 1, each chapter in Sutton’s volume begins with a bridge which provides a link to those before it. Every chapter includes a “conclusion” which summarizes the key points. A list of suggested readings, with annotations, closes each chapter. In addition to the examples discussed below, he uses charts, black and white photographs, statistics and quotations from other authors to support his arguments. Boxes with illustrative case studies are also included.

Sutton’s *The Environment: A Sociological Introduction* differs from the previously mentioned studies in that it offers a broader range of international examples with greatest focus on Europe. Here are some illustrations. When discussing the concept of a risk society, he gives three examples of nuclear fission reactor fires and meltdowns – Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, Windscale in the UK (where a reactor caught fire in 1957), and Chernobyl in the Ukraine where the worst nuclear accident in history occurred. Unlike the American authors, Sutton goes into some detail about the long-term impact of the accident at Chernobyl on humans, the natural environment, and the way we now regard nuclear fission power.

When discussing the resurgence of the environmental movements, Sutton mentions the growth of environmentalism in the UK and talks about the influence authors such as William Wordsworth had on establishing the nature conservatory in the Lake District of northern England. (He does omit one person who wanted

the Lake District preserved however, Beatrix Potter.) Sutton's reflection about the social impact of the environmental movements goes beyond the coverage of the American authors when he devotes roughly half of the chapter "Politicizing the Environment" to the Green parties in the UK and Germany. He analyzes, for example, why the Greens were more successful in having candidates elected to the legislature in Germany than in the UK. One reason Green political parties have had some impact in Europe and Canada, rather than the USA, may be related to the former having multi-party political systems, not the two party system in place in the USA.

With key terms highlighted, chapter summaries, case studies, photographs, and suggested readings, Sutton's book is student-friendly. Among the other sociologists to which I have compared Sutton, only Harper includes a list of readings. Harper also adds a list of questions for students to consider at the end of each of his chapters.

There are a few weaknesses in the Sutton book: it is very short and to achieve this brevity Sutton has glossed over some issues and theories other sociologists would have expanded. (This could be used advantageously by adding a second source, or a reader, as Humphrey, Lewis and Buttel did.) One example is that Sutton mentions the "new ecological paradigm" but does not discuss it thoroughly except by implication. Although he does include more citations in the latter part of the book, the paucity of citations could be problematic, especially if an instructor is trying to teach undergraduate students to cite properly. However, the advantage to a student or layperson is that the book is easier to read.

In his discourse about global climate change, Sutton consistently refers to "global warming," claiming that it is a North American peculiarity to use the term "global climate change" and that this is really a matter of semantics. To his credit, he does discuss what appear to be increasingly violent storms as a part of global warming. Most of the other sources I have read would argue that the difference between "global climate change" and "global warming" is a bit more than semantics.

Overall, Sutton does accomplish his goals – the book is written for readers other than graduate students and teaching sociologists, and he does introduce readers to the process of sociological thinking and research. The book is well researched, well written, and should hold the interest of undergraduate university students and lay readers.

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