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Review: Environmental Citizenship

Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell (Eds.)

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Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell's. (Eds.). *Environmental Citizenship* .
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. 285 pp. ISBN: 0-262-52446-5 (paperback
original); US\$24.00.

Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell combine the work of specialists in sociology, political theory, philosophy, psychology, and education to provide a multidisciplinary perspective of the theory and practice of environmental citizenship. The book consists of a thorough introduction and ten thematically grouped chapters: the chapters in part I illuminate what environmental citizenship is and how it can be achieved; the chapters in part II examine existing obstacles and opportunities for environmental citizenship.

John Barry introduces a concept of sustainability citizenship, which goes beyond the purely environmental sphere and includes social and economic practices. He holds that sustainability citizenship has to be learned and that the state needs to play an active role, encouraging citizens to fulfill their obligations to secure the common good and their own interest . Barry doubts that citizenship requires suppression of private interests in favor of public ones. Instead, he suggests: "the private sphere can partake of ecological virtue and be a site for practicing green citizenship" (p.37).

Drawing on the work of philosophers from Aristotle (350 BC/1976) to Rawls (1973), James Connelly explores the concept of green virtue, defining it as: "character trait a human being needs to realize environmental ends" (p.51). Environmental citizenship does not require establishing new virtues but utilizes existing virtues to bring about a new, sustainable form of society. That means, "an eco-virtue is an internally motivating ecological thoughtfulness leading to action" (p.66). Further, Connelly explores a legislative framework within which virtues can be exercised and stresses that environmental citizenship requires an active state. Taking a Heideggerian (1962) approach, Bronislaw Szerszynski employs three visual metaphors (blindness, distance, and movement) to illustrate how citizenship requires "an imaginative removal of the self from immediate everyday engagement in the world" (p.75). He emphasizes the need to combine a locally rooted "wayfinding" (p.94) with an abstract universal approach to environmental citizenship.

The next two contributors examine the concept of environmental citizenship from a feminist's and an activist's perspective. Sherilyn MacGregor critiques the gender blindness of existing environmental citizenship concepts and highlights the tensions between advocating labor- and time-intensive lifestyle changes and demanding more active citizen participation in the public sphere. Dave Horton examines "green lifestyles" lived by activists, the role of green networks, spaces, materialities, and times, and how the activist derived "elite model" of environmental citizenship can be broadened (p.127). Horton emphasizes that "the practice of groups and networks of the environmentally concerned and committed" best define environmental citizenship (p.129).

Turning to psychological motivation, Nicholas Nash and Alan Lewis introduce the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) to illuminate reasons for the apparent dissonance between citizens' stated attitudes toward the environment and their everyday practices. Traditional liberal and civic-republican conceptions of environmental citizenship are found to be problematic. In contrast, locally based commitment to responsibility that includes broader arenas of political, social, and economic life could result in a transformation towards sustainability.

The following contributions focus on policy relevant aspects of environmental citizenship. Julian Agyeman and Bob Evans examine the current situation in the United States and Europe and conclude that the commitment in Europe is to a broader, justice-based conception of sustainable development in which equity, justice, and democratic governance play key roles. The authors suggest that only broad concepts of sustainability can impact policy at the global level and lead to "a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community" (p.202). David Schlosberg, Stuart Shulman, and Stephen Zavestoski discuss the potential of Web-based public participation in rule making in the US. The authors acknowledge potential problems of web-participation (e.g., power imbalances, isolation from local groups) but hope that virtual discussion will provide an opportunity to develop the common good aspect of environmental citizenship.

The final chapters of the book explore the role of education in promoting environmental citizenship. Monica Carlsson and Bjarne Bruun Jensen discuss the results of two case studies in Denmark, which suggest that environmental education is most successful when students (not teachers or community partners) decide which action to take and activities focus on practical problem solving. Stephen Gough and William Scott emphasize the importance of educators focusing "on the developing abilities of learners to

make reasoned choices for themselves” (p. 283).

Overall this book touches on many practical and theoretical aspects of “environmental citizenship” in an engaging and accessible way. Readers may not agree with the claims put forward by some of the contributors but, at the very least, every contribution opens the floor for fruitful discussion and further enquiry into a subject that will continue to be of interest to a wide audience.

References:

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