

BOOK REVIEWS

Ecology and Our Endangered Life-Support Systems. By Eugene P. Odum. Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts. 1989. 282 pages. \$14.95 (paper).

This book is a hybrid ecology text and citizen's guide to protecting the environment. The core of the book is organized into eight chapters focusing on the life-support environment; levels of ecological organization; the ecosystem; energetics; material cycles and physical conditions of existence in ecosystems; population ecology; development and evolution; and major ecosystem types of the world.

The treatment of ecology is solid, well balanced, and clear throughout the book. Odum provides brief but accurate summaries of many of the current issues in ecology, including biological diversity, the Gaia hypothesis, and scientific debates surrounding the Clean Air Act. He avoids the tendency to overemphasize current trends in ecological thought that in a few years may be regarded as aberrations.

Anyone familiar with Odum's past books will find the scientific aspects of this book familiar. However, the same cannot be said of the editorial slant. It is often unnerving to find political advocacy in what appears to be a text. Odum points out that the "boxes throughout the text" are his personal views on some of the issues we are facing today in ecology and environmental science. Readers will probably find much with which to agree in these mini-editorials, but they do add a political dimension and advocacy to the text. For example, Odum addresses the issue of the interrelationship between city life and country life in a society and concludes that urban-rural interdependence is crucial to the well-being of the country. He goes on to say, "Let us hope that our political systems reach maturity before we kill all the country geese that lay the golden eggs for the city."

I personally found this book thought-provoking and lively. A teacher, however, would have to balance the text with alternative viewpoints to achieve a more impartial political analysis of environmental issues.

I recommend the book for introductory ecology classes, including those at the advanced high school level, and as a supplemental text in classes aimed at environmental engineering, environmental ed-

ucation, economics, sociology, environmental law, public health, and political science.

Odum's bottom line is that he will be optimistic about the future of humankind when ecology and economics "can be merged, and when ethics can be extended to include environmental as well as human values."

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