

## BOOK REVIEW

Andrew Goudie: 2000, *The Human Impact on the Natural Environment*, 5th edn., MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 511 pp. + xvi.

Jill Schneiderman (ed.): 2000, *The Earth Around Us. Maintaining a Livable Planet*, W. H. Freeman, New York, 441 pp. + xx, \$27.95.

The popularity of environmental studies among students poses a challenge to teachers. This is a sprawling subject, as disorderly as a metropolis: tidy enclaves where the disciplines mow their lawns; polluted, abandoned by-ways where problems like environmental justice fester; fast-spreading slums (think of invasive species) where no scholar ventures alone; all connected, more or less, by the concrete and neon of popular culture. Two recent volumes illuminate the pedagogical difficulties in different ways.

Goudie's update of his standard text provides an over-the-shoulder look into a well-known geographer's notebook. The illustrations are broad-ranging; his examples are global in reach and local in detail. Human impacts on air, water, land are surveyed. Goudie is often illuminating; for instance, he draws together examples from England to Bahrain to buttress his judgment that the human role in modifying geomorphological processes "has not received the attention it deserves" (p. 261). One might cavil that this fifth edition is too confined by its earlier versions; the discussion of climate, a fast-moving topic, seems dated.

Yet the problem may be more student than material. There is a vast amount that can reasonably be included under the heading 'environment, human impact on'. Confronted, the neophyte is pressed to develop an intellectual perspective that can grow with its complexity. The task of the teacher is to share her own struggles with an elephantine subject, and her provisional syntheses. On this count Goudie's encyclopedic approach overwhelms rather than stimulates, his very capability daunts.

The 31 chapters of Schneiderman's collection reveal one teacher's struggle, perhaps too well. The large number of authors and topics provide technically capable discussions from the vantage of the geosciences. But in their assembled voices there are few clear themes or usable simplifications, beyond a much-iterated insistence that geoscience is too often ignored in social policy.

So the subject sprawls, shapeless except for environmentalism itself. Yet that is what students already bring to the subject. What teachers can do is to graft



intellectual curiosity onto the sturdy rootstock of values. This educational purpose can be advanced via excellent chapters by Naomi Oreskes on models and observational science, and by Steven Stanley on the relationship between ice ages and the thermohaline circulation, together with a thoughtful essay by E-an Zen on long-term sustainability. But the assay of the ore is disappointingly low overall.

These two books show hard work and sound disciplinary thinking. The challenge of making the vastness of Earth engaging to student minds endures.

*Center for Environmental Studies,  
Williams College,  
Williamstown, MA 01267,  
U.S.A.*

KAI N. LEE