

Book Review: Climate Change Begins at Home: Life on the Two-way Street of Global Warming

Smith, Nicholas W.

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principle has not been applied to environmental concerns (such as global warming). In contrast, the precautionary principle has dominated the response of the USA and its allies to post-9/11 terrorism, with the consequent loss of personal freedoms and human rights.

The last part of the book thus attempts to apply the *Risk Society* framework to current events such as the so-called “war on terror”. There are dangers in trying to provide theoretical perspective on such recent events: many statements have to be qualified with “. . . at the time of writing”, and this makes Denney a potential hostage to fortune. However, the social scientific debates on risk have little currency if they are not applied to episodes of such enormous significance. Denney’s contribution is therefore welcome.

Although at the outset Denney describes the book as examining the social construction of risk from a number of theoretical perspectives, his main focus is on Beck. Beck is initially positioned as one of several theorists, but in subsequent chapters, discussions of Beck’s opinions book-end the material. The early chapters could therefore have given a more thorough exposition of Beck’s ideas as students without this background may have trouble getting a foothold. However, this criticism is offset by the fact that each chapter contains an extremely useful guide to further reading.

There are relatively few accounts of risk that manage to be accessible and comprehensive. This readable book achieves this, and, particularly in the later chapters, is both provocative and polemical. It will provide a useful resource for students and scholars in many social sciences where discussions of risk are increasingly pertinent.

Peter Washer

Academic Centre for Medical Education,
University College London, UK

Dave Reay, *Climate Change Begins at Home: Life on the Two-way Street of Global Warming* (Houdmills: Macmillan, 2005). xiii + 203 pp. ISBN 1403945780, £16.99 (hbk).

“Be worried, be very worried” runs the caption on a recent front cover of *Time* magazine. It accompanies a picture of an isolated polar bear on a melting ice sheet. According to this special report on global warming, the earth is currently at a tipping point. Before it’s too late, humans must change their destructive behaviours in order to avoid environmental catastrophe. Public understanding of climate change is therefore of paramount importance if these effects are to be

minimized. Much is being done, and, in the UK, government policies are certainly increasing engagement with the issue. The problem, however, is at what level this can be realistically achieved.

The author of *Climate Change Begins at Home*, Dave Reay, a University of Edinburgh researcher, is “frightened by what climate change has in store” (p.xi) and has crafted an insightful guide on how to do your bit in the battle to save the planet. Unconvinced with the Kyoto Protocol targets and other institutional regulations implemented to combat global warming, Reay advocates a bottom-up solution aiming to modify individual lifestyles. In order to stabilize the climate and meet the proposed scientific consensus estimate of a 60 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, urgent action needs to be taken. And, Reay argues, it is at the individual level that this action is most likely to succeed.

The book opens with a description of the Carbones, a typical middle-class family in the south-eastern United States. Thinking they are doing their bit for the environment, each member is introduced by the individual climate contribution he or she makes. The Carbones pump 39 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere annually, half of this by way of their transport. Despite managing to cut annual emissions by 3 percent, considerable improvements can be made in order to dramatically lower their overall impact. By summarizing the main contributors to this climate impact Reay neatly establishes the structure for the rest of the book. The remaining seven chapters act as an informative guide introducing a variety of ways reductions in greenhouse gas emissions can be made without dramatically altering individual lifestyle.

Using each member of the Carbone family to personalize the message, Reay steers his readers through these well-researched scenarios. Firstly he deals with transport, the most important impact “topping the lifestyle chart at close to half of all our greenhouse gas emissions” (p.25). Transportation in the USA alone generates nearly two billion tonnes of greenhouse gas per year. Despite travel being an indispensable part of modern life, the reader is introduced to considerable adjustments that can be made to reduce this quantity of emission. Using more public transport, changing driving habits and buying cars with smaller engines are just some examples mentioned.

Domestic energy use is “the next big hitter accounting for over a third of emissions” (p.26). Contributing to the 11 tonnes of greenhouse gas the average family home emits per year, heating

and cooling of spaces is the largest at 41 percent of this total. Adjusting heating habits, installing more efficient lighting and switching off all appliances after use provide readers with considerable options for reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions in the home.

Continuing through the book, other lifestyle impacts covered include food (particularly production and transportation), backyards (with a focus on waste and recycling) and work environments. All outline the main greenhouse gas contributors and offer the reader a variety of options for reducing emissions. The chapter detailing the financial burden of climate change is enlightening. Reay suggests that every tonne of greenhouse gas emitted costs an estimated US\$40 through damage caused. With an average family producing 39 tonnes per year, costs quickly mount. At present it is only those affected who are shouldering this financial burden, but with increasing talk of green taxes and emission quotas, individual accountability is becoming a distinct possibility. Convincing people that environmental taxation is the way forward is a little trickier, and herein lies the problem.

On the individual level it appears a lot can be done to help save the planet. We are all aware of the need to recycle, drive cars a little less and replace light bulbs with energy efficient ones. Where this book fills a niche, however, is with the lesser known facts and figures. Who knew, for example, that the average western family's Christmas contributes over half a tonne of greenhouse gases or that burials in the USA generate over 1.5 million tonnes of emissions per year? Since the more obscure climate impacts and mitigation options are addressed, even the most climate-savvy person is bound to learn a thing or two. Above and beyond a simple "how-to" guide Reay also digs a little deeper by acknowledging not only our impact on a changing climate but also a changing climate's impact on us.

Although we are made all too aware of the impact human actions have on the natural world, the impacts *we* face from these actions have only recently become salient. Recent extreme weather events, for example, are producing a torrent of health-related issues including thermal stress, with higher mortality rates for elderly populations and increased incidence of malaria and other infectious diseases (McMichael, Woodruff and Hales, 2006). Even within the home, our daily activities are shaped by the changing climate. Whether it is turning up the air conditioning during summer or switching on the heating two weeks later in winter, life in this global warming era is clearly a two-way street.

Despite Reay painting a compelling picture in the fight to combat climate change, I cannot help but clutch my pragmatist's hat. We are certainly living in an era of environmental awareness and opinion polls increasingly demonstrate this. Individuals however are particularly adept at thinking one thing yet doing another. How pragmatic then are the suggestions presented in this book? Although clearly thought out and meticulously researched, consideration of the likelihood of changing behaviour is insufficiently addressed. Collectively, it may be possible to change the path of the climate change glacier, as Reay suggests; but how this is done in practice is a different question altogether.

Reference

- McMichael, A.J., Woodruff, R.E. and Hales, S. (2006) Climate change and human health: present and future risks, *Lancet*, 367, 859–69.

Nicholas W. Smith

Department of Psychology,
University College London, UK

Nigel Sanitt (ed.), *Motivating Science. Science Communication from a Philosophical, Educational and Cultural Perspective* (Luton: Pantaneto Press, 2005). 243pp. ISBN 0954978005, £13.95 (pbk).

Motivating Science is a selection of articles published in the Pantaneto Forum (<http://www.pantaneto.co.uk/>), a quarterly e-journal which, "aims to promote debate on how scientists communicate, with particular emphasis on how such communication can be improved through education and a better philosophical understanding of science". Not surprisingly, 14 of the 26 articles have been published elsewhere or are based on talks given several years ago. The book has been put together by Nigel Sanitt, Pantaneto Forum's editor.

There is a danger, when putting together an edited collection spanning a broad range of topics, that the end result is a dog's breakfast. Sadly, this collection falls into this category. Part 1 of the book, "Media Issues", opens well, with the UK's Astronomer Royal, Martin Rees, addressing the issue of "Science, communication and the media". Rees notes that the phrase "public understanding of science" has "unfortunate connotations" and argues for a general understanding of science (GUST). Rees also argues that scientists should engage with social scientists about "the nature of the scientific enterprise, emphasizing that . . . the outcome of scientists'