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21st century enlightenment

Review: Paying earth's rent

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collection. Professor Gerard L'E. Turner of Imperial College, University of London, has written the book to commemorate the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the RMS.

Gondola kittens

MAKING SENSE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING;
DIVERSITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE
edited by Susan Warner Weil and Ian McGill
*Society for Research into Higher Education and
Open University Press, 280 pages, £27.50*

Once upon a time there were two scientists¹ who rigged up a contraption in which they put two litter-mate kittens. The first kitten was relatively free to move about, just like a normal kitten. The other was suspended in a cradle or gondola. By a simple mechanical attachment the first kitten, in moving about, swung the gondola passenger around too. This meant that the gondola kitten saw much the same things as the other, but was not at all active in doing so. The kittens were in the contraption for several hours a day and otherwise both were kept with their mother in darkness.

After some weeks the kittens were given little tests. For example, they were each placed upon a narrow shelf which they could leave on one side with a small drop or on the other with an intimidating fall. (The scientists prevented any untoward damage on the dangerous side by placing a transparent shelf there.) The active kitten always chose the easy side, the gondola kitten chose either side at random. In other words the active kitten showed a mastery of the visual world and the gondola kitten had learned nothing.

The conclusion that I draw from this story is that continually active exploration is necessary if animals, and humans, are to learn anything of importance. Most education is organized on exactly the opposite principle: it makes gondola kittens of pupils and students. They are swung about vigorously in front of facts and experiences but they initiate little active exploration. They have little command over their own education and most leave formal schooling (and even 'higher' institutions) ignorant, incompetent and dependent.

Many recent attempts have been made to remedy this. One was the secondary modern school; another, still inchoate, is Records of Achievement. The RSA has for many years harboured the Education for Capability Movement. There has also been 'experiential learning'. The latter, in its manifold forms, is characterized by the value it places on the actions, achievement and experience of the learner. The question is how these can be given an educational value: in what ways can education be based upon them?

The present book edges towards an answer. It begins with

intellectual frameworks and individual self-knowledge, before offering examples of experiential learning in practice and an exploration of its social potential, and concluding with further possibilities. It is a helpful guide to the diversity, the incoherence, even, of its subject. Alas, it is no freer than other committed literature from twee jargon ('we have identified four distinct "villages" within the global village of experiential learning...'), potty diagrams and lumpish prose. But much can be forgiven to people who want to evolve an education which is apt, creative and free from harm. They are indeed trying to 'make sense' of an approach that has little current support in students' expectations, political decisions, academic practice or any familiar philosophy.

It has, however, always had intelligent advocates: there is something of it in all the great educators. The puzzle is why, given this support, it has never caught on. What makes the gondola system so durable? What pitfalls threaten the alternative? The authors of this book scarcely face these questions. They do not even note the thoughtful attempt to do so in the same SRHE/OU series.² The intellectual support for their attempt is deeper than they seem to suspect, and its realization much harder.

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Paying earth's rent

COSTING THE EARTH

Edited by Ronald Banks

Shephard-Walwyn, in association with the Centre for Incentive Taxation. 195 pages, £5.95

This must be the first book on environmental economics to quote Mrs. Thatcher on its front cover. 'No generation has a freehold on this earth,' as she put it late last year. 'All we have is a life tenancy with a full repairing lease'. Fine, as far as it goes, but how do we work out what sort of rental we should be paying?

How much rent, for example, should we be paying for the CFCs our aerosols and refrigerators have released into the ozone layer? This question is raised at the beginning of a contribution by Fred Harrison, Director of the Centre for

Incentive Taxation, and it symbolizes some of the new, highly taxing questions we will have to ask ourselves in the 1990s if our environment is to be properly valued.

The recent publication of Professor David Pearce's *Blueprint for a Green Economy* has helped thrust environmental economics into the limelight – and not before time. As Ronald Banks, who has edited this book, puts it, 'Political economy is at the crossroads'. Unfortunately, he argues, economics took a series of wrong turnings in the waning years of the nineteenth century. Both in the capitalist West and in the Marxist East, the rental value of land was ignored or obscured by the value of capital or labour. As a result, the value of the environment and of natural resources has too often been excluded from the political process.

Some of the language in this book is too abstruse for the non-economist, but the message is clear. The failure of economics and economists to provide for sustainability has resulted in a growing number of environmental problems. Among those mentioned are the Antarctic ozone hole, the destruction of the tropical forests of Amazonia and the deforestation of the Himalayas.

Whether in Britain or Brazil, our failure properly to appreciate the value of land (that is, the value distinct from that attributed to undepreciated capital improvements like buildings, roads and drainage systems), and of the natural resources that go with it, is resulting in the wrong questions being asked and the wrong answers given.

Among the questions that the authors address is whether, and how, we should relieve the Third World of its staggering debt burden. Harrison suggests that under the existing Third World tenure and tax regimes the benefits of debt relief would go to landowners, not to the landless or unemployed. The result could be political destabilization.

In Brazil, for example, fiscal and monetary policies have encouraged the extensive acquisition and hoarding of land, which in turn trigger '... a leapfrogging chain in events. Businessmen buy farmland to reap the tax benefits, which then encourages the farmers to proceed to the Amazon where they can stake their claim to tracts of land to qualify for favourable tax benefits. The owners of land in Brazil, then, both inside and outside the Amazon, are not so much farming the land as farming the Brazilian taxpayer. The tragic result is that fertile land in the south is under-used while fragile land in the Amazon basin is over-exploited.' A sound grasp of environmental economics is clearly going to be essential in managing the transition to more sustainable forms of economic development.

Back in Britain, the book's key recommendation is that we should put together a new Domesday Book, based on a 'cadastral' survey. This would provide information on the ownership, present and permitted uses and value for every square foot of the country. The cost, the authors suggest, would not exceed that of compiling the register for the new poll tax. *Costing the Earth* argues that a sustainable framework

for understanding and managing the complex interaction between social, economic and ecological variables can only be developed once such an inventory of the nation's stock of natural resources has been compiled.

Although the book is not perhaps the 'comprehensive remedy to apparently intractable problems' that its cover claims it to be, it is a useful guide to some unexplored, forgotten or under-valued areas of economics which could serve us well in evolving strategies for developing natural resources, while protecting and enhancing the quality of our environment.

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Cardew the potter

MICHAEL CARDEW: A PIONEER POTTER

An Autobiography

Oxford University Press, 208 pages, £6.95

For those who have enjoyed Cardew's pots, or his book *Pioneer Pottery*, or heard the man himself from time to time, this autobiography will be opened with high expectations. They won't be disappointed but at the end may feel that much more remains to be said, regrettably now not by Cardew.

This book describes his life from childhood until 1948 and his return from Africa. It is edited by Seth, his son, from manuscripts prepared by Cardew and now in the Craft Study Centre in Bath. His early interest in hand-made pottery whilst a schoolboy, then as a student at Cambridge University, became a passion and a crusade. In a world where pottery was perceived as the province of industry or the rural artisan, the notion of the 'artist' or philosophical potter must have appeared bizarre. The period of Cardew's training with Leach and the creation of his own pottery at Wincombe were frugal but enjoyable: pioneer work of a different order. There was none of the support industry for the crafts which we see today. Nevertheless, he pursued his passion with a zeal and a sense of vocation which never left him.

Although he enjoyed the admiration of his peers and some critical acclaim, he was clearly uneasy in the exclusive world of galleries and exhibitions but any close examination of the reasons for this distaste is sacrificed to moving the narrative along.

The offer of a post in the Colonial Service in Ghana, West Africa, in 1942 was a lucky opportunity. The work of the individual potter in a time of war does not find a ready market, and financial pressures, including the need to pay