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## Book Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Beyond developmentality: constructing inclusive freedom and sustainability**, by Debal Deb, London, Earthscan, 2009, xxiii + 521 pp., indices. £24.95 (paperback), ISBN 184407711X, £85.00 (hardback), ISBN 1844077128

This is an ambitious work, and may well come to be seen as an important one. As the title suggests, it is a passionate and multifaceted plea for a move beyond ‘developmentality’, which Deb defines as the ‘mindset which equates affluence with development . . . and accepts development to be the destiny of civilisation’ (p. 2). This mindset is seen as a ‘sickness of civilisation’ (p. 3). This trenchant claim sets the scene for a wide-ranging attack on the dominant paradigm of development based on market solutions and economic growth.

An (inevitably) brief but compelling history of ‘development’ presents it as a powerful hegemonic concept which followed neatly on from more overt colonialism. Nineteenth century progressivists, including Marx, believed that societies ‘develop’ spontaneously according to more or less mysterious teleological forces. But ‘champions of Euro-imperialism conceived development as a process that is not spontaneous, but an activity that requires to be galvanised by the government’ (p. 39). This very different transitive sense of the verb was imported after World War Two into the new doctrine of global economic development, and ‘is now universally accepted as a normative goal’ (p. 42). It creates the powerful notion of ‘underdevelopment’ and ‘implies that all the diversity of underdeveloped cultures and traditions must be homogenised and improved through the application of the Western model of industrial growth and Western way of life’ (p. 42).

At the core of the book is a fundamental disagreement with Amartya Sen’s influential idea of ‘development as freedom’. Deb argues that development as currently practiced does not bring freedom but in fact destroys it for the majority, by increasing inequality and weakening community while building up the ‘exclusive freedoms’ of powerful elites. It also inevitably brings environmental degradation. These two negative outcomes are linked, since healthy communities which are able to control and manage their natural resource base are essential for ‘inclusive freedom’. This ‘inclusive freedom’ is also seen as a prerequisite for the ethic of intergenerational equity, which is essential for ecological sustainability, since only communities enjoying inclusive freedom will be either willing or able to secure it for future generations.

Against either state or private ‘authoritarian enclosure’ (p. 505) of natural resources, Deb marshals a wide array of empirical and theoretical arguments in defence of the commons, and in particular of the common property regimes that have characterised so many indigenous peoples’ land and resource management practices. The general argument is most fully illustrated in the context of agriculture, where high technology and market solutions are shown to be disastrously inferior to the clear-sighted and non-romantic updating of traditional practices. Here, Deb is on home territory: he is no ivory tower social scientist, but a hands-on expert in the conservation and propagation of traditional Asian rice varieties. His background as an Indian ecologist also informs his nuanced discussion of how ‘new ecology’ concepts such as uncertainty and persistence demonstrate the critical importance for sustainability of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) derived from the co-evolution of human societies and their non-human surroundings. This view is skilfully contrasted with dangerously simplistic attempts to protect TEK by appealing (implicitly or explicitly) to connections between the alleged ‘balance of nature’ found in ‘unspoilt’ places and the supposed ‘innate biophilia’ of their romanticised indigenous inhabitants.

Given its scope, coverage of some areas is inevitably better than others: Deb’s use of ethical concepts (for instance his confusing use of the term ‘ecocentrism’) is less impressive than his command of ecological and political ones. A second edition would also benefit from more thorough proofreading. These, however, are minor quibbles which in no way detract from the undoubted value of this book, particularly for students of the environment/development nexus.

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**Money & soul: the psychology of money and the transformation of capitalism**, by Per Spen Stokes, Totnes, Green Books, 2009, 296 pp., index. £14.95 (paperback), ISBN 1-900-32246-3

The title of this book could make the reader wonder whether it was written in a rush after the eruption of the current financial crisis. However, the contrary is more accurate: the author saw it coming. Or at least, he pointed out that some features of modern capitalism, such as its dependence on credit and debt, are unsustainable. What makes this work notable is the author’s refusal to embrace the clichés that routinely announce the death of capitalism and his subsequent exploration of new ways of thinking about – but also within – it. As Jonathon Porritt says in the prologue, we should free ourselves from the constraints with which we approach economic debates. This is an important point for many green theorists who were