

Review: Seeing the Forest and the Trees

By Emilio F. Moran and Elinor Ostrom (Eds.)

Reviewed by [Elery Hamilton-Smith](#)
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Emilio F. Moran & Elinor Ostrom (Eds.). *Seeing the Forest and the Trees: Human-Environment Interactions in Forest Ecosystems*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005. 442 pp. ISBN 0-262-63312-4. US\$35.00 (trade paper).

This is an intensive and tightly focused discussion that reviews current thinking about changes in the ecology and geography of forests as shaped by human actions. It concentrates its discussion at the global level, with some local examples that further elucidate global understandings. The book is lodged firmly in the context of contemporary United States scholarship. Virtually all authors are associated with the Center for the Study of Institutions, Population and Environmental Change at Indiana University in Bloomington. Given that, the subtitle might have provided a better description of the book if it had been based upon the name of the Center.

Although the book provides a high quality analysis of global changes in forest distribution and character, it simply does not deal with perception or with ecosystems in the generally understood meaning of these terms. It emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation, but the tight focus upon the field of global change research obscures and overrides interdisciplinary exploration. It does not draw upon perceptual theories, the psycho-physiology of human-environment interactions, or the models of mutual interaction between human beings and their environment developed by Rapaport and his colleagues in their studies of built environments. It is also seriously deficient in paying no attention to historical and philosophical analysis of its own topic. Similarly, I find the total lack of attention to fire and its influence on forest ecosystems to be quite inexplicable, when catastrophic fires have so often generated significant change, not only in forests, but also in the institutional arrangements that govern them.

I feel it is problematic to focus upon what a book is not when it fulfils its own mission so well, but it seems necessary to emphasize that the book is not, in my view, what the title promises. For readers who are centrally interested in models for analysis of global changes, this is an excellent book. But outside of that, I seriously question the extent of its contribution.

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