

Review: Environnement et développement durable: une approche méta-économique [Environment and Sustainable Development: A Meta-Economical Approach]

By Olivier Goddard

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Goddard, Olivier. *Environnement et développement durable: une approche méta-économique* [Environment and Sustainable Development: A Meta-Economical Approach], Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium: de Boeck supérieur. 2015, 489 pp. 9782804192266, €36.00 **Series:** Ouvertures économiques [Economic Openings].

This hefty treatise about the environment and sustainable development is written by Professor Olivier Godard, a famous French academic and economist interested in global environmental issues. His recent book presents the main concepts, issues and debates, principles and guidance for governance in terms of sustainability from Meta-Economic mind-set principles. As with many titles published in Europe (in this case in Belgium), Olivier Godard investigates environmental issues using a variety of sources and thinkers that might seem uncommon for most U.S. readers, and that is one of the most valuable points of his book. For example, his opening sentences question how the possible sources for pollution and environmental hazards are perceived, valued, and sometimes dismissed. Could they be an unwanted effect of technology, an “inevitable counterpart of technical progress”, or an “accident of our modernity”? (p. 29). After raising these basic questions, the author proposes a variety of possible answers, for example by using a Marxian critique of capitalist production (p. 41). Among the other themes discussed here are the precautionary principle in environmental science, Risk Society, and the 'polluter pays' principle. As the many demonstrations prove, Olivier Godard does not address environmental problems the way most economists do; rather, he conceptualizes these environmental issues in meta-economical terms and proposes various strategies for action, taking into consideration, through a critical prism, the cultural dimensions, morals, but also overconsumption and the faith in unlimited progress (p. 28).

This *Environnement et développement durable: une approche méta-économique* covers a diversity of topics: how markets cause environmental problems, environment as complex system, the effects of collective decisions, the social reproduction of environments, the environment in the public sphere, environment ethics, protest groups, environmental justice, and distributive justice. In the final chapters, the author suggests specific actions to act in sustainable ways, for example voluntary initiatives emerging from enterprises (or even from a group of rivaling firms) to counter or avoid pollution (p. 443).

Because his books were not translated into English, Olivier Godard is not very well known within the Anglo-Saxon readership; nevertheless, his works are influential and have been discussed in France for many decades. However, Godard's *Environnement et développement durable: une approche méta-économique* is not exactly an economics book. Instead, it is a rigorous, nuanced, and interdisciplinary treatise on environmental issues written primarily for economists but also for graduates and scholars from other fields. Of course, we find references to the Ellsberg Paradox and Hotelling's Law, plus tables, formulas, and mathematical models here and there (see pp. 83, 115, 233, 259, and 460), but we also encounter rich discussions about environmental ethics, the various forms of Natural Heritage, and the often contested status of experts; we also get many accurate quotes from philosophers of the environment such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Edgar Morin (see pp. 32, 53, and 205). My only quibble would be about the absence of an index.

All in all, this encyclopedic treatise by Olivier Godard is much superior to the average sourcebooks because it covers a wide spectrum of issues in environmental studies, with many non-English sources used as bibliographical references. At least two main readerships would correspond to this single-authored book: advanced undergraduates who can understand French, or Anglo-Saxon scholars in environmental issues who are already familiar with this domain but in need to be exposed to new frameworks and different ways of thinking relying on economics. And among publishers in French, De Boeck Supérieur is considered as a major player in the Francophonie.

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***Electronic Green Journal*, Issue 40, Winter 2017, ISSN: 1076-7975**