

**UCLA**  
**Electronic Green Journal**

**Title**

Ecological Vignettes: Ecological Approaches to Dealing With Human Predictions

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/58r991cb>

**Journal**

Electronic Green Journal, 1(11)

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**Publication Date**

1999

**DOI**

10.5070/G311110359

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**Review: Ecological Vignettes: Ecological Approaches to Dealing With Human Predictions**  
by Eugene P. Odum

Reviewed by: [Irwin Weintraub](#)  
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Odum, Eugene Pleasants. *Ecological Vignettes: Ecological Approaches to Dealing With Human Predicaments*. Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998. 269pp. US\$22.00 paper ISBN: 90-5702-522-11.

Ecology is the study of the environment and the organisms and communities that comprise it. The organized symbiotic community is known as an ecosystem. Ecosystems change over time through a process of development and resource renewal and each element, including humans, has a role to play in helping that holistic environment to survive. In *Ecological Vignettes*, Odum offers readers a panoramic view of the ecosystem and an explanation about how the parts fit together. He begins with a series of vignettes, covering basic ecological principles and the effects of growth, energy, organization, change, behavior, diversity, and nature. Each vignette, which runs about two pages, offers basic facts that readers should know before reading the more detailed discussions in the essays. Interspersed among the vignettes are cartoons with ecological themes that add both wit and urgency to Odum's presentation. Odum informs readers that there are limits to growth, and a great deal of energy is needed to sustain our air, water, soil, food, and life support systems. He emphasizes that human behavior, and our willingness to cooperate with other organisms as they carry out their roles in the ecosystem, play a key role in their ability to survive. He cautions readers that when population density and human infrastructures become large and complex, we must learn how to control growth and the increasing costs of energy and resources needed to maintain the natural order.

Following the vignettes are 24 essays in which Odum expands upon the ideas he set forth in the vignettes. The essays were gleaned from his articles in journals, newsletters, and book chapters written during a forty-year career as a professor of ecology and zoology at the University of Georgia. He discusses a range of environmental issues including public policy agendas, watershed and ecosystem management, and the roles of

energy, ecology, economics, policy making, and risk in determining our ecological priorities. He urges readers to strive for a worldwide environmental awareness that compels us to set limits on human needs and aspirations and strive for a harmony between man and nature. He believes that the consequence of technological success and exploitation of the earth's finite resources has been an "uncoupling" of man and nature in which each competes for its place in the ecosystem. In Odum's view, four major gaps must be narrowed if humans, nations and the environment are to exist harmoniously: the income gap between rich and poor, the food gap between the well fed and the underfed, the value gap between market and non-market goods and services, and the education gap between the literate and illiterate. He proposes models of cooperation and restraint where all components function together holistically to produce a sustainable ecosystem.

There is a wealth of information in this book that will teach every reader something about the environment. Although the author states that readers from kindergarten to senior citizens will learn many lessons from the vignettes and essays, much of the presentation is geared to an academic audience. An ability to read and understand formulas, diagrams, and basic scientific terminology is necessary for full comprehension of some essays.

It would serve as a great textbook for high school or college students and as a guide to the ecosystem for general readers.

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