Book Notes “Economics and Social Sciences” 2/2022

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Ananish Chaudhuri: Nudged into lockdown? Behavioral economics, uncertainty and Covid-19. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022. ISBN 9781802205664. 256 pp., GBP 90.00.

This book provides a comprehensive critical perspective on the role of cognitive biases during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a broad set of social science theories and bodies of knowledge, it investigates the effectiveness and acceptability of behaviourally based pandemic policy responses such as social distancing and vaccination efforts. Discussed are a range of concepts from heuristics and biases literature, including priming, framing, anchoring, prospect theory, and loss aversion.

Ananish Chaudhuri (Ed.): A research agenda for experimental economics. Elgar Research Agendas. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021. ISBN 9781789909845. 264 pp., GBP 90.00.

This new book series—Elgar Research Agendas—outlines the future of research in a given area. This issue focuses on experimental economics and illustrates the application of decision-making experiments, highlighting how this can add a new and novel dimension to social science research. The chapters cover incentivised decision-making experiments in studying social norms, law and economics, environmental regulations, entrepreneurship, healthy behaviour, gender and leadership, political ideology, and neuroeconomics.

Benedetta Brevini: Is AI good for the planet? Polity Press, 2022. ISBN 9781509547944. 160 pp., GBP 12.95.

This book discusses the impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on the environment, specifically climate change. AI is often praised for making our lives easier: Siri helps you find what song you just listened to on the radio, and Alexa dims the light when you go to bed. In medicine, for example, dermatology, AI could help improve diagnostics, and in conservation work, AI can help monitor biodiversity loss and coral reef resilience. The list continues and has resulted in a leading discourse around AI being a solution to many of our problems—from mundane issues to global challenges. However, AI has its dark sides, including ethical concerns and environmental impacts. This book focuses on the latter, specifically

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on how and why AI worsens the climate crisis. Environmental challenges of AI include, amongst others, electronic waste, material toxicity, and energy consumption and emissions linked to this. The book proceeds in four chapters, discussing what AI is and how to define it; why data capitalism is essential for AI; how AI relates to the climate crisis; and what to do about this. The book ends with a critical note on capitalism and consumerism that argues for the need to question AI-centred utopias that ignore these dark sides while pushing for a green agenda around AI.

Diane Coyle: Cogs and monsters: What economics is, and what it should be. Princeton University Press, 2021. ISBN 9780691210599. 272 pp., GBP 20.00.

The author, a British economist, explores the enormous problems facing economics today, from pandemic recovery and inequality to slow growth and the climate emergency. According to Coyle, mainstream economics still assumes people are “cogs”—self-interested, calculating, independent agents interacting in defined contexts. But the digital economy is more characterised by “monsters”—untethered, snowballing, and socially influenced unknowns. The book asks whether economic individualism is still valid in the digital economy, whether growth and progress should be measured in new ways, and whether economics can be objective since it influences what it analyses.

Robert Falkner: Environmentalism and global international society. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge University Press, 2021. ISBN 9781108833011. 320 pp., GBP 75.00.

This book provides an in-depth account of the transformation of environmental values and ideas into a normative structure of international relations over time. By tracing the historical roots of environmentalism and its development, the book proposes that “environmental stewardship” has become a centrally accepted norm. However, this has not always been the case as environmentalism developed from a somewhat loosely connected set of ideas and principles in the nineteenth century to the primary institutions it is today. The book also draws attention to the role of different actors, such as governmental and non-governmental actors, and their interplay. Moreover, it assesses how the norm of environmentalism relates to other primary institutions such as sovereignty or diplomacy. To summarize, the book’s historical lens outlines how environmentalism developed into a central norm and institution over time and thus what we can learn about environmentalism today by looking at the past.

Axel Franzen and Sebastian Mader (Eds.): Research handbook on environmental sociology. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021. ISBN 9781800370449. 360 pp., GBP 100.00.

This Research Handbook presents the state of the art of empirical sociological research on the causes of and solutions to environmental problems. It covers issues from anthropogenic climate change to environmental pollution; the causes and consequences of ecological deterioration; the measurement, development, and precedents of environmental concern; the determinants of pro-environmental behaviour; and the (non)acceptance of environmental policies. Key topics include the development of global CO2 emissions, prices, income and energy demand, climate change knowledge, meta-knowledge and beliefs, the collective risk social dilemma, and support for city road tolls.

Gerard George, Martine R. Haas, Havovi Joshi, Anita M. McGahan and Paul Tracey (Eds.): Handbook on the business of sustainability: The organisation, implementation, and
practice of sustainable growth. Research Handbooks in Business and Management Series. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022. ISBN 9781839105333. 608 pp., GBP 230.00.

This handbook focuses on the sustainability business, offering insights and practical solutions to the challenges businesses today face in making human activity sustainable. Covering a comprehensive set of topical issues, it reviews recent research and empirical evidence on sustainable business. In addition, it explores the importance of private sector engagement and implementation in a more general way.

Rachel Hay, Lynne Eagle and Abhishek Bhati (Eds.): Broadening cultural horizons in social marketing: Comparing case studies from Asia–Pacific. Springer Nature, 2021. ISBN 9789811585197. 293 pp., EUR 150.00.

This edited book presents a series of case studies conducted by Asian-Pacific social change scholars. It presents recent social marketing approaches geared at improving societal well-being in the region. Cutting across cultural perspectives, the contents gather ideas on social marketing campaigns and strategies from around the region and use these case studies to address concomitant challenges in employing marketing tools to change social behaviour positively. The topics covered include public health and well-being and public environmental consciousness in terms of driving attitudes towards implementing improved sustainability in developing and developed countries.

Kai-Uwe Hellmann, Ansgar Klein and Bernward Baule (Eds.). Verbraucherpolitik von unten: Paradoxien, Perspektiven, Problematisierungen (Consumer policy bottom-up: Paradoxes, perspectives, and problem perspectives). Springer VS, 2022. ISBN 9783658297534. 377 pp., EUR 49.99.

Historically and until recently, consumer policy in Germany was a network of activities, organizations, and strategies that were particularly close to the state or run by state actors—hence, essentially a “top-down” policy field. In recent years, however, this asymmetry has shifted in favour of a bottom-up civil society-driven consumer policy with “political consumption” at its core. This anthology presents evidence for and examples of such a change to bottom-up action in consumer policy and discusses what this means for consumer policy in Germany.

Tim Jackson. Post growth: Life after capitalism. Polity Press, 2021. ISBN 9781509542512. 256 pp., USD 19.95.

The author’s provocative key message is that “capitalism is broken” and that the relentless pursuit of more has delivered climate catastrophe, social inequality, and financial instability and left us ill-prepared for life in a global pandemic. Tim Jackson dares to imagine a world beyond capitalism—where relationship and meaning take precedence over profits and power. Post-growth is both a manifesto for system changes and an invitation to rekindle a deeper conversation about the nature of the human condition.

Lutz Jänckes: Von der Steinzeit ins Internet: Der analoge Mensch in der digitalen Welt (From Stone Age to the Internet: The analog human being in the digital world). ISBN 9783456861500. Hogrefe, 2021. 168 pp., EUR 24.95.

The neuroscientist Lutz Jäncke describes the possible future of humans during technical digitalization. Is modern digital technology changing our social behaviour, communication, and the way we see ourselves? How are we coping with the increasing flood of information pouring over us? Does this information flood have an impact on our
work and private lives? The author aims to show how our communication and our entire social behaviour suffer under modern digital technologies.

**Minna Kanerva: The new meatways and sustainability—Discourses and social practices. Doctoral Dissertation. Transcript, 2021. ISBN 9783837654332. 350 pp., EUR 40.00.**

Social practice theories help to challenge the often hidden paradigms, worldviews, and values at the basis of many unsustainable practices. Discourses and their boundaries define what is seen as possible, as well as the range of issues and their solutions. By exploring the connections between practices and discourses, Kanerva develops a conceptual approach enabling purposive change in unsustainable social practices in meat consumption and production in her doctoral thesis. She argues for radical transformation towards new “meatways,” i.e., approaches to production and consumption of meat, and looks at the complex psychological, ideological, and power-related mechanisms that inhibit change.

**Bruno Latour: After lockdown—A metamorphosis. Polity Books, 2021. ISBN 9781509550029. 180 pp., EUR 17.00.**

One way in which states addressed the COVID-19 pandemic was by imposing public lockdowns. While many surely awaited the end of these restrictions and a return to the “old normal,” Latour invites the reader to consider a different perspective—one characterised by learning from the lockdowns as a way of preparing for possible climate change. Lockdowns, in that sense, might offer a way of re-thinking about where and how we live—an opportunity for a radical change of habit. The book, a sequel to the author’s prior work “Down to Earth,” discusses a range of concepts of centrality to societal debates during the pandemic, including the role of freedom. The book should appeal to anyone interested in Gaia, climate politics, and the philosophical meaning of lockdown.

**Emily Martin: Experiments of the mind: From the cognitive psychology lab to the world of Facebook and Twitter. Princeton University Press, 2021. ISBN 9780691177311. 312 pp., GBP 22.00.**

This book traces how cognitive psychological research methods that once evolved in cognitive psychology laboratories escaped the boundaries of the discipline and infiltrated social media and society at large. Despite claims of experimental psychology’s focus on isolated individuals, the author finds that the history of the field—from early German labs to Gestalt psychology—has led to research methods that are, in fact, highly social and are now deployed in the online world.

**Stefan Müller and Katja Gelbrich: Interkulturelles Konsumentenverhalten (Intercultural consumer behaviour). Vahlen, 2021. ISBN 9783800661817. 463 pp., EUR 44.90.**

This textbook provides an overview of what we know about the influence of national cultures on consumer behaviour. Based on the seminal work of Geert Hofstede and the cultural dimensions it introduced (collectivism and individualism; power distance and uncertainty avoidance; masculinity and femininity; short- and long-term orientation), it compiles and discusses a wealth of recent empirical and conceptual approaches to the research field.
Carl Rhodes: Woke capitalism: How corporate morality is sabotaging democracy. Bristol University Press, 2021. ISBN 9781529211665. 240 pp., EUR 19.99.

This book discusses what Rhodes terms “woke capitalism” and the implications of such forms of corporate morality on democracy. Rather than being against “wokeness,” the book outlines how corporations use social causes for their benefit. Examples range from Nike’s support for Colin Kaepernick to Gillette’s involvement in the toxic masculinity debate. The book takes the reader on a historical journey from early CSR debates in 1950 to the 1980s’ neoliberalism to contemporary discussions around wokeness. It also traces the origins of the notion of “woke” in Black American culture. In doing so, Rhodes conceptualises woke capitalism and distinguishes it from other concepts used to describe the involvement of corporations in social, political, and environmental efforts. To summarize, the book critically discusses the role of corporate actors under a phenomenon termed “woke capitalism.” It challenges how corporations might co-opt social causes and thereby produce hypocrisy and serve their self-interest while potentially undermining democracy.

Nikolas Rose and Des Fitzgerald: The urban brain: Mental health in the vital city. Princeton University Press, 2022. ISBN 9780691178608. 280 pp., GBP 22.00.

Urbanization and the growth of “megacities” have changed the meanings and experiences of living in the cities. While cities are often centres of economic growth and form the bedrock of what many people call their home, urbanised areas also impact their inhabitants’ well-being, health, and stress levels. This book sets out to study mental health in the city and to understand how “urban experiences” shape the bodies and brains of city inhabitants. In doing so, the book bridges insights from the social sciences and life sciences, specifically from sociology and psychiatry, with what the authors call a “vitalist” perspective. Questions of life and living in cities are thus central to the analysis. The argument for a vitalist perspective on cities unfolds in six chapters of discussions and questions about life in modern cities, e.g., cities and migration, mental life and stress in cities, the “urban brain,” and different ethical and political factors.

Jutta Roosen and Jill E. Hobbs (Eds.): A modern guide to food economics. Edward Elgar, 2021. ISBN 9781800372047. 384 pp., GBP 135.00.

This book provides detailed theoretical and empirical insights into critical research areas in food economics. It takes a forward-looking perspective on how different actors in the food system shape the sustainability of food production, distribution, and consumption, as well as on significant challenges to efficient and inclusive food systems. Analysing the main characteristics of modern food markets, the chapters introduce readers to the economics of food systems, product differentiation, the mediating role of food retailers, and the increasing significance and complexity of international trade in food.

Sara Valaguzza and Mark Alan Hughes (Eds.): Interdisciplinary approaches to climate change for sustainable growth. Springer, 2022. ISBN 9783030875633. 386 pp., EUR 160.49.

This reader is an edited collection of contributions by an international panel of academics on the main scientific, juridical, and economic aspects of climate change’s mitigation and adaptation processes. The volume is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the book’s central concepts: climate change and sustainability, well-being, and mitigation and adaptation. The second part presents the scientific understanding of climate change. It explores some of the more pressing issues driving policy development, such as the melting
of the glaciers and the impact on coastal areas. The third part discusses significant experiences in the environmental policies both in the European Union and in the USA. The last section explains possible approaches to climate change by exploring the legal and economic aspects of adversarial and more lenient policies towards a more sustainable world.

Hendrik Wagenaar and Barbara Prainsack: The pandemic within: Policy making for a better world. Policy Press, 2021. ISBN 9781447362234. 180 pp., GBP 24.99.

Like other crises before, the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to severe challenges that are not external to our societies but arise from within our current polit-economic order. This involves inequalities, the self-interest of business and ideology-driven governments, and the climate crisis and working conditions. A central focus of the book is on several conceptual tools, namely the role of complexity, hegemony, utopian re-imagination, and the metaphor of gardening to understand human flourishing on the earth. Taking utopia as a method, the book takes the reader through an analysis of different elements that might enable policymaking for the better. It thus outlines different imageries to overcome prevailing defects while giving examples of practical solutions in policy contexts such as housing, finance, and climate change.

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