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As I sit down to write the preface to this book, having finished the main text a few weeks ago, I'm reflecting on a peculiarity of book-writing. The preface of a book is usually the last section an author writes, even though it appears at the book's beginning. This may seem an odd practice—to end by beginning—but I believe it to be a sound one. At least, the practice seems very appropriate to one of the main messages of this book: Social and environmental interactions are best understood as a kind of ecological dialogue, a never-ending conversation in which one interchange leads to another, and every ending is a new beginning.

Given the current difficult state of our environmental affairs, I find hope in this open-ended sense of potential. We *can* change, particularly if we act as a *we*, as a community that invites into the conversation all its social and environmental constituents. Thus the title of my book: *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*.

The title is also drawn from an engaging little volume that appeared over thirty years ago—Peter Berger's *Invitation to Sociology*. Check the sociology section of nearly any used bookstore in North America, and a battered paperback copy is almost sure to be there. (Some students, of course, sell back *all* their course books, good and bad.) In that book, Berger sought to extend "an invitation to an intellectual world that I consider to be profoundly exciting and significant," and over three decades of sociology students have accepted that invitation. In this book, I try to extend a similar invitation, but to an intellectual world that is at once more specialized and far more encompassing than sociology: environmental sociology. My prose, I fear, is not as engaging as Berger's, and I know this book could not be described as "little." Nevertheless, my intent has been to offer a work in what I hope is an equally welcoming spirit. We all need to be involved in this great, though often troubled, conversation of environment and society.

It has been a rare pleasure to work with a publisher like Pine Forge Press that supports both engaging and challenging writing. Many textbooks try to present the "medium" view of an academic field—or worse, a smoothed-over view—in an effort to create a text that goes down easy. Scholarly works, although they may take a strong and novel position, are generally written in language accessible to only a small

club of experts. Neither approach inspires broad public interest and participation in the life of the mind. Pine Forge Press, through the *Sociology for a New Century* series and other publications, supports authors who seek to transcend the traditional boundary between the textbook and the scholarly monograph, offering works that are readable and accessible to students but nonetheless original and intellectually challenging syntheses of academic fields.

In other words, while I hope my book is accessible and interesting to students, I also offer it as a work of scholarship. The principal scholarly contribution of the book is the concept of ecological dialogue, a concept that I believe can serve as one useful framework for understanding environmental sociology. But I do not present ecological dialogue as the last word on the subject of environmental sociology. Rather, I can only hope that the concept stimulates students and other readers to consider closely the issues of environmental sociology and to contribute to reasoned discussion about them. That will be enough. Let the end of this book lead to many more new beginnings. Thus we may find that changing social and environmental interactions is not only possible, but that we've already done it.

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This was not an easy book to write. When Wendy Griswold, one of the two editors of the *Sociology for a New Century* series, first approached me about writing, I had just finished teaching a course on environmental sociology in the spring of 1995. The course had gone well, and I had detailed lecture notes field-tested in the heat of the classroom. Putting together a book should be a matter of little more than writing up those notes in a more coherent form, I thought. Six months should do it. Two years later . . . As many have discovered, the more closely one considers the issues of environmental sociology, the more one realizes one has not considered them closely enough. Seeking guidance, I read through hundreds of books and articles. (The literature on social and environmental interactions is huge, as befits the scope and importance of the topic.) In the end, many of the chapters bear little resemblance to what we covered in that spring, 1995 course.

But through all the delays and deadlines stretched to the breaking point, Pine Forge's visionary publisher, Steve Rutter, remained a rock of gently prodding patience. I owe an enormous amount to his guidance, encouragement, and sense of what this book could be. I feel lucky to have worked with him. Thanks, Steve.

I am also grateful for Wendy Griswold's confidence in asking me to write this book. As well, her critical eye (and gifted tongue) guided me into making many improvements over my first tentative draft, and also gave me the self-assurance to try again. Thanks, Wendy.

These two made the most central contributions, but many, many others lent a hand at various crucial moments. I was fortunate enough to have from Pam Ozaroff the most detailed and thought-provoking critique imaginable for what was then the first two chapters of the book. Becky Smith gave the entire manuscript a detailed reading at a later stage and made many helpful suggestions. Copy editors terrify me, but Stephanie Prescott went through the manuscript with as sensible and sensitive a pencil a writer could wish for (if I may dangle a preposition at her). Jennifer Rezek did a marvelous job, I think, in creating illustrations with character and presence. And Windy Just, the production manager at Pine Forge, handled with good cheer and unwavering aplomb my many delays and dribbled mailings of illustrations and re-edited manuscript. Thanks Pam, Becky, Stephanie, Jennifer, and Windy.

Much of the book was written while I was a visiting fellow at the Centre for Rural Economy of the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the fall of 1996. The Centre's staff—Eileen Curry, Philip Lowe (the director), Chris Ray, Hilary Talbot, Rachel Woodward, and Martin Whitby—provided me with peace and intellectual stimulus in just the right proportions. But that fellowship (in every sense of the word) would not have been possible had not my department chair back at Iowa State, Will Goudy, worked a bit of magic to get me the necessary leave from my normal duties. Thanks Eileen, Philip, Chris, Hilary, Rachel, Martin, and Will.

There are still others to acknowledge. I had the privilege of working with three undergraduate research assistants at various times while I was writing the book—first Lucas Rockwell at Iowa State, then Kate Entwistle at the University of Newcastle, and finally Jake Peterson back at Iowa State again. Lucas in particular went way beyond the call of duty, bringing me articles I hadn't known to look for and critiquing an early draft of chapter one. My good friends Ram Guha and Eric Pallant (who, unfortunately, have never met) read chapter one as well, and helped me avoid some dangers I had gotten into. Pine Forge also arranged for six anonymous reviewers of the manuscript at various points in its genesis. They are: Marilyn Aronoff, *Michigan State University*; Richard Coon, *Carroll College*; Anne Martin, *Edmonds Community College*; Valerie Gunter, *University of New Orleans*; Ted Napier, *Ohio State University*; Robert Schaeffer, *San Jose State University*. I thank them heartily for their constructive comments.

And then there are my students in that spring 1995 course in Environmental sociology, as well as Margaret Mundaye, my splendid teaching assistant in the course. All these—and more—can find the influence of their words and spirits in these pages, and I am thankful for their generosity and insight.

But my greatest thanks go to my family. My wife Diane Bell Mayerfeld proved to be, once again, an invaluable editor and my closest intellectual colleague. Whenever I was stuck on a passage or confused about the argument

I was trying to make, raising the problem with Diane almost always led to a ready solution or redirected my thinking such that I discovered one soon enough. She also provided far more emotional support than any spouse could reasonably expect. I honestly cannot imagine how this book ever would have been completed without her many-splendored presence in my life.

And thanks as well to Sam, our son, who with generally good humor put up with several missed rides in the skiff, the grouchiness of a dad who stays up too late, and a sense that time was becoming a commodity we spend instead of a river in which we dabble our toes together. Our family could do with a lot more toe dabbling. And now that this book is complete, I think we'll find ourselves doing just that. I can hear the splashing already.

MMB

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