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Environment: A Challenge to Modern Society

By

LYNTON KEITH CALDWELL

New York: American Museum of Natural History,

The Natural History Press. 1970.

Pp. unknown, \$7.95.

This small volume examines a much needed focus for public policy, environmental administration. In nine chapters Professor Caldwell combines the skills and concerns of political science and public administration with the insight of the emerging sciences of ecology, cultural anthropology, and social psychology. The resulting work discusses the present and the future man/environmental relationship in terms of the management tasks necessary to assure the continued survival of a high quality human ecosystem on a frail and beleaguered earth.

The book is divided into three major parts of three chapters each, entitled Policy, Tasks, and Management. The chapters in the Policy section describe the difficulties in formulating public policies in relation to the human environment. This section develops the thesis: first, that a positive public policy to protect the quality of the human environment has now become a practical necessity; second, that a maturing science of ecology can provide the information basis for public environmental policy; and third, that the spaceship provides a simplified, dramatic, and persuasive symbol of man's environmental condition.

In the second section entitled Tasks, the thesis is advanced that despite the complexity of man/environmental relationships, one might define the tasks of society in relation to the environment in terms of the three ways in which man relates to the environment: first, in dependence upon the surrounding ecosystem for the support of life itself; second, in purposefully adapting the environment to better serve carefully calculated needs; and third, in shaping his cultures and thereby simultaneously reshaping his environment. Within these interrelated categories, general policies and standards can be developed to guide the specific options of men. This is the task of environmental administration.

In the section entitled Management, Professor Caldwell argues that until recently there has been no perceived need for general or comprehensive policies of environmental administration and control, and that management has extended only to specific aspects of the environment. He notes that an ecologically based environmental policy should be characterized by comprehensiveness of policy and control

with political acceptability and appropriate operative arrangements. He argues, quite perceptively, that rapidly worsening conditions in the public environment and an awareness of ecology are inducing the popular comprehension necessary to formulate a system of ethics regarding man/environment relationships that will add emotional enforcement to intellectual conviction. An ethic of man/environment is also an ethic of human relations, and can be based upon profound and genuine respect.

The book is in hard cover. The topics are well indexed, there are section introductions and chapter summaries in abstract form and the footnotes are an excellent source of annotated references to a wide range of relevant and current materials.

The major arguments presented by Professor Caldwell are well reasoned and supported by his examples and materials. His history of environmental concern from the doctrines of efficiency in the progressive era, through the birth of environmental awareness in the fields of public health and medical sciences to and including the present concern for the quality of the whole environment is synthesized and presented as in no comparable modern work. His concern for educating youth to politically shape a worthwhile world life space (p. 195) is further reenforced by his awareness (pp. 239-240) of a definite feminine influence upon environmental ethics.

For all these strengths, however, the thesis presented by Professor Caldwell has two relatively minor weaknesses. First, Professor Caldwell argues for operationalizing our concern with environmental quality by "... a single, tangible, and attention compelling symbol of man's ecological relationship . . ." the concept of Spaceship Earth. For Professor Caldwell, the analogue is strong for it images a,

... unified system dependent upon the coordinated and continuously functioning of interrelated systems and parts. It has surpluses, redundancy, and backup capacity, but its resources are nevertheless limited. Because of the carrying capacity of its limits, it must so far as possible recycle its resources unless it can obtain them at feasible cost from external sources. Changes in the system must be studied in relation to their total effects, because altered relationships among the parts, even intended improvements, may adversely affect the performance of the whole. Maintenance of the system and its subsystems must be watched for failure at any critical point could lead to the destruction of the entire enterprise. (pp. 80-81).

The argument, however that the relatively simple and obvious concept of a spaceship should operationalize the concept of environ-

mental quality is one that should be perhaps more rigorously proved before it is too readily assumed. Mechanical analogues are useful but limited for policy purposes for unlike the engineer, who designs a spaceship as a system completely controllable, the politician has to intervene in systems not controlled by him, with the limited object of making a course of action more acceptable or less repugnant to his human values. To operationalize a higher level societal value (environmental quality) as a sub-optimal appreciative analogue (spaceship earth) implies a growing disparity between the least policy that environmental administration demands and the highest quality policy that it can permit.

A second possible criticism of Professor Caldwell's work relates to his stress upon the goals of environmental policy with less attention paid to the process of making that policy. Professor Caldwell's book expands greatly a reader's appreciation of the necessity for an ethic in man/environmental relationship with the cultural and psychological boundaries within which that appreciation operates. It does not, however, present an equal appreciation for the policy-making process by which we get from here to there. Policy as a process involves the evolution and modification of the course, the norm, the standard, the governing relation which is inherent in every policy and the selection and ascertainment of the facts relevant to it. Professor Caldwell chose not to discuss the politics of the policy-making process in the specific institutional arena where that process occurs. It would be interesting and valuable to learn, for example, which politicians and bureaucrats strongly identify with the legitimatizing aura of environmental administration and why they do so, or how uncertainties in the environment are converted into decisional risk by boundary-spanning members of certain environmental institutions, or how certain policy-makers are isolated or buffered from the effects of organizational feedback and with what effect for environmental policy making, or, finally, how institutional or appreciative innovation based upon the man/environmental ethics of respect or a spaceship analogue would lead to better or higher quality environmental policy for the future. Perhaps what is needed is less a search for an environmental policy, a solid and unwavering star upon which to guide our policy-making, and more an appreciation of policy-making, including environmental policy-making as a regulatory process in need of a continuing metapolicy analysis. An ethic of appreciative change in environmental policy might better prepare us for an environmental future in which change as a process will be more obvious; whereas, concepts based upon the model of the passage of

policy from one stable state to another, creating an awareness of only stability at any point in time, might be less fruitful.

In total, however, these criticisms hardly detract from the overall strength of Professor Caldwell's book. He has approached his subject with broad insight and deep understanding. The weft and warp of his intellectual net encapture us in a greater appreciation for what he has done and for what yet remains to be done.

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