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Environmentalism, T. O'Riordan

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ENVIRONMENTALISM

By T. O'RIORDAN

London: Pion. 1976. Pp. 373.

As the author indicates, this book is an outgrowth of an earlier work entitled *Perspectives on Resource Management* (Pion, 1971). *Environmentalism* reflects not only the further development of the field since 1970, but also the maturation of a scholar of environmental affairs.

O'Riordan has produced a sophisticated text which may very well be the seminal work in the field. The book spans philosophical, political, economic, and legal thought and merges values and techniques in a survey of the literature which defines environmentalism along its philosophical, ideological, and design dimensions. Its strength lies in the breadth of coverage of the literature, its weakness in the apparent disjointed nature of the themes and subject matter presented.

The work begins with a review of the philosophical dilemmas inherent in environmentalist thought and tradition. Social values are dichotomized among ecocentric and technocentric modes. Ecocentric thinking incorporates values associated with nature and man's yearnings to be as one with his natural environment. Technocentric thought includes values which lead man to conquer nature and exploit its domain for individual and social material benefit. It is the inconsistency of these two value positions which has defined the framework for political action in environmental affairs during this decade. The incompatible nature of these doctrines is established as the primary dilemma of environmental and resources politics.

The second major dilemma presented is the "tragedy of the commons" doctrine, which reflects the breakdown of traditional institutions to husband scarce public resources in the face of individual competition for their use. This reflects the age old political dilemma of balancing individual freedom with social equity.

The rest of the work is a systematic review of the nature of the ideological debate between those who wish to preserve environmental values and those who wish to manage them for optimal individual and social material benefit. This review is followed by a consideration of the tools utilized to apply such philosophies and ideologies in the practical world of resource and environmental management. It is within the chapters on the measurement of environmental quality, environmental cognition, politics, and law that the author displays his scholarly command of a literature which spans many disciplines.

Yet, after this lucid presentation, one is left still on the horns of the philosophical dilemmas defined in the first chapter. The book ends at a beginning. An old beginning, perhaps, for O'Riordan, but a new one for us all who hope to express such a concern and commitment to man and his environment.

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