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BOOK REVIEW

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ECOLOGICAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS: THE GLOBAL EMERGENCE OF RADICAL AND POPULAR ENVIRONMENTALISM

Bron Taylor, editor. SUNY Press, 1995.

The editor of this book promises more than he delivers. Bron Taylor, a professor of religious studies and social ethics at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, claims this book provides the first scholarly look at a selected sample of grass-roots environmental resistance movements using sociological and cultural perspectives.

Taylor, and his co-authors, attempt four goals. First "we set out to describe movement participants' own perceptions about the ecological predicament, their understandings of the cause(s) of their predicament, and their proposed prescriptive remedies," Second, the authors attempted to examine these movements in light of social-movements theory. Third, they discuss the philosophical and moral views articulated by some movement participants. And fourth, the authors attempt to assess the impacts and prospects of these movements.

Taylor claims that the essays in this book emphasize "careful description" based on a research method called "grounded theory." This method of research requires a dynamic interplay between description, interpretation, and theory. Proponents of "grounded theory" recognize that a researcher's perspective and social status colors his or her observations and interpretations. This approach to social research is more qualitative than quantitative and is based on a mix of direct observation, interviews, and dialogue with a non random sample of movement participants.

Taylor recognizes the difficulty of defining "popular ecological resistance movement." He acknowledges that "any single term of reference for the diverse movements explored in this volume will be problematic," but nevertheless he and his co-authors frame their analyses in terms of their own definition of "the movement" rather than the frames defined by movement participants.

The descriptive section of this volume includes case studies of popular resistance movements in the United States, Central America, Amazon, Thailand, India, Philippines, South Africa, Norway, Britain, and Scotland.

Based on his observations and those of his co-authors, Taylor claims that many participants in popular resistance movements use a deep ecology kind of narrative to justify their social activism, but that many other environmental resistance movements arose from anticolonial, national independence, antinuclear, Marxist, feminist and other perspectives that have recognized the importance of ecological issues to their political objectives.

Taylor's chapter on the Earth First! movement is based on field and documentary research on Earth First! since 1989. Taylor admits that the Earth First! movement is complex. The movement changed year by year and continues to

evolve. Many of the original founders and first generation of active participants in Earth First! ceased active participation under that name in 1990.

Taylor concludes that many Earth First! participants are motivated by nature mysticism, but he does not mention that some of co-founders of Earth First! including Dave Foreman, and many other supporters of Earth First! have been promoting conservation biology and scientific justifications for wilderness protection.

Taylor concluded that some Earth First! activists interpret resistance to industrial activities of loggers, miners, and oil corporations in Ecuador, the Amazon, Sarawak and other places, are part of a growing international environmental resistance. This interpretation, Taylor says is problematic. Narratives of local participants in these campaigns are based on maintaining local, traditional livelihoods rather than on conscious environmental resistance.

Taylor seems to confuse the complex interplay between strategy, rhetoric, and experiments in communicating deep ecology arguments in a variety of social situations and the motivations of activists. Activists in the United States, Australia, and Europe want to act in solidarity with resistance in the Amazon of Thailand or Sarawak because much of the destruction of forests in those countries is done by Japanese, Canadian and United States based corporations.

It is very compatible with the deep, long-range ecology movement to see people with diverse philosophical perspectives and social perspectives cooperating in specific political campaigns.

In a footnote, page 31, Taylor acknowledges the importance of Doug Tompkins and the Foundation for Deep Ecology in acting as a catalyst for visionary projects in the deep, long-range ecology movement, during the 1990s. Taylor makes no attempt to summarize or explore the relationship between philosophy, science and practice in the Ecoforestry Project, the Wildlands Project, the Sustainable Agriculture Project or other projects initiated and supported for several years by the Foundation for Deep Ecology.

The most serious problem I see in this book, however, is that Taylor and his co-authors are so intent on expounding their own interpretation of deep ecology that they don't allow participants to reflect on their own actions.

A second major problem with this volume is that although the authors claim they are not interested in what the "intellectuals" in the deep, long-range ecology movement are saying, Taylor and his associates make intellectual critiques of their interpretation as what some intellectuals in the movement have said about some aspects, but not all aspects, of deep ecology. For example, although Taylor and Stark and some other co-authors of this book, quote - out of context - from some of this reviewer's writings on deep ecology from the 1960s, they don't even mention the arguments and interpretations by this reviewer on the deep

ecology movement written during the 1990s and especially the social critique of industrial forestry and philosophical grounding for ecoforestry in *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry*. The social analysis by the International Forum on Globalization, supported by the Foundation of Deep Ecology is another body of literature that is ignored by Taylor and his co-authors.

Jerry Stark, a sociologist at University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, in his essay "Postmodern Environmentalism: A Critique of Deep Ecology", asserts that deep ecology is "not...a distinct philosophical position but rather...a variant of postmodern social thought (p. 25)." Stark continues the deliberate misinformation about the deep, long-range ecology movement begun by Murray Bookchin and George Bradford. Indeed much of Stark's "critique" of deep ecology begins with statements such as "as Bookchin concludes" or "as Bradford says."

Stark writes in the same kind of sarcastic tone as Bookchin and says that "in place of ethnical reasoning, deep ecology offers quaint spiritual assertions about nature (p. 270)."

Stark concludes that the path to "pragmatic foundations of rational discourse" as laid out by Habermas and other critical theorists "...poses a complex critical task, to be sure, but it is preferable to the misguided mysticism of postmodern environmentalism (p. 277)."

Stark presents a shallow, misguided, intellectual distortion of the deep, long-range ecology movement. Deep ecology is neither modernism nor postmodern. Both have been extensively criticized by leading scholars who are supporters of the deep, long-range ecology movement. For a scholarly review of the differences between the ecology movement and postmodernism, readers can read George Sessions' essay "Postmodernism and Environmental Justice" in the Summer, 1995 and Part Two of this issue of *The Trumpeter*.

Stark, and many other authors in this volume, simply ignore the fact that supporters of deep, long-range ecology movement have stated over and over again. Diverse, "first level" religious, philosophical, theoretical positions that differ enormously among themselves - nature mysticism, Christian, Spinoza, Taoist, etc. - can be used to derive a kind of deep ecology, "second level" position.

In conclusion, this reviewer cannot recommend this book either to college students, to movement activists who are interest in reflective commentary on their activism, nor to academic colleagues in the social sciences who are interested in the topic of ecological resistance movement.

Students, activists, and researchers interested in the literature on the deep, long-range ecology movement are better advised to begin by reading major anthologies published within the last year, *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century* ed by George Sessions (Shambhala 1995) and *The Deep Ecology Movement*,

edited by Alan Drengson (North Atlantic 1995). The Summer, 1995 issue of *The Trumpeter* also contains an important selection of recent articles on the theory and practice of the deep, long-range ecology movement.

Students who are interested in developing their own philosophical and activist perspectives for their own participation in the deep, long-range ecology movement are advised to consider issues addressed by Mitchell Thomashow in his excellent book *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist* (MIT Press 1995).

This reviewer finds more honest and revealing self-evaluations by activists in the Earth First! movement in Dave Foreman's book, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (1990) and Judi Bari's *Timber Wars* (Common Courage Press 1994).

Another excellent example of self-reflection by movement participants is found in *Witness to Wilderness: The Clayoquot Sound Anthology* (Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver 1994), and *Clayoquot and Dissent* (Ronsdale, Vancouver 1994).

Scholars would do better to read the original essays in the growing body of literature of the deep, long-range ecology movement, including books by Alan Drengson, Andrew McLaughlin, Arne Naess, Gary Snyder and Joanna Macy.

We are in the midst of an expanding, worldwide war on nature and a war on those who defend the integrity of natural communities and local, indigenous communities. This is documented in a book called *Greehbacklash Forthcoming from Pontledge*.

Researchers on radical, popular environmental resistance movements would do better to cultivate compassion for the suffering of those labelled "resisters" in this book, and compassion for the myriad of creatures who are threatened with extinction by industrial development on every continent.

SUNY Press has a tradition of publishing both excellent scholarly studies of environmental movements such as Lester Milbrath's *The Environmentalists*, and excellent books on social theory including Andrew McLaughlin's *Regarding Nature*.

This reviewer hopes that Taylor's *Ecological Resistance Movements* is only an aberration from the high standards that SUNY Press has maintained. All of us can hope that future studies of the deep, long-range ecology movement by social scientists will be more informed, insightful, accurate, and compassionate than this book.

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