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## ***BOOK REVIEWS***

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Frank Fischer: *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

The sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe notes that book reviews can generally be classified in terms of those that assess the piece either for its “disciplinary” qualities or for its “new social movement” qualities.<sup>1</sup> Those employing the disciplinary (or academic) approach evaluate the book by considering the degree to which the piece advances a particular academic discipline. Those using the “new social movement” approach will make an evaluation on the basis of the “populist” appeal of the book, the degree to which the book might advance human welfare, especially in regard to the mobilization of people for the pursuit of good and just goals. Frank Fischer’s book, *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge*, deserves high marks from both camps. Those subscribing to either set of criteria find the work useful because Fischer effectively addresses an important dilemma. On the one hand, a fundamental principle of democracy is that ordinary citizens have the right to participate in those matters which affect them, including policy matters. On the other hand, how can ordinary citizens who do not possess technical knowledge effectively contribute and participate in policy decisions and policy formulations that require high levels of technical expertise? Fischer’s attempt to deal with this complex question forms the basis of the book.

The academic appeal of Fischer’s analysis comes from the fact that he draws from a range of social scientific theories that are not normally considered to be within the domain of policy analysis. Included are such theoretical approaches as the risk society thesis, the postpositivist perspective, and the politics of cultural rationality and local knowledge. By synthesizing elements from these theoretical perspectives, a persuasive rationale is built for a position that calls for greater citizen

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur L. Stinchcombe, “Reviews and Two Markets for Sociology Books,” *Contemporary Sociology*, 30, 1, 2000, p. 6

involvement in policy-making — particularly environmental policy-making. As a result of such an analytical emphasis, the field of policy studies is directed towards new and intellectually innovative directions that call for the academician to reconsider and revisit conceptualizations about the nature of public trust, of the nature of democracy, and of the relationship between experts and citizens within the context of the risk society. The academician is further compelled to consider the epistemological implications of policy formation in the contemporary context. A context very much influenced by the increasing public recognition that the technical knowledge and processes used to develop environmental policy and regulations cannot be apolitical, neutral and objective. Fischer therefore emphasizes the public recognition that policy formation as an exercise in social construction necessitates a new way of forming policy.

The academic analysis of citizen involvement in policy formation is then built upon in Fischer's practical suggestions for increasing such involvement, hence the appeal to those of the "new social movement" orientation. Fischer does not neglect the important practical dimensions associated with citizen involvement in policy formation and is well aware of the academic tendency to dwell on matters theoretical. For example, in the Preface (xi), Fischer notes that part of the difficulty in addressing the expert-citizen dilemma is that theorists tend to deal mostly "at the abstract level of the nation-state" while neglecting "the everyday aspects of deliberative politics, especially as they relate to ordinary people." Further, Fischer declares (xi) that, "In an effort to bring the question down to the level of the citizen, this book inquires into the *realistic* possibilities of meaningful citizen participation." The promise to adopt such an approach won particular favor with me because of my own emphasis on the need to connect micro and macro levels of analysis. Upon completion of the book I was pleased that Fischer's promise was indeed fulfilled.

The book itself is divided into four parts. The first two parts deal with the academic/theoretical components of his argument while the last two deal with the more practical elements related to greater citizen participation in policy decisions. The first part, "Citizens and Experts in the Risk Society," consists of four chapters that deal with such issues as the central role of experts and technocratic decision-making structures in policy formation and the possibility for real citizen participation in policy decisions. Fischer observes that the so-called "information society" of the contemporary period is in many ways informed by an ideological stance that celebrates technology, and by extension celebrates the technical expert. Technocrats therefore enjoy

positions of enhanced status that allows them to have “power” in policy circles that is based on the privileged status of technocratic reason and instrumentality. Fischer agrees with Habermas’s contention that the interaction between lay citizens and experts is a form of “distorted communication” because the technical language of the expert is seen to have greater legitimacy and power relative to the everyday language of the lay citizen. And because the technocratic approach is founded upon the positivist principle that attempts to separate “fact” from “value,” the work of the technocrat-as-positivist has traditionally been considered by many policy makers as purely an empirical exercise, free from normative influences or implications. Legitimated in this way, the increasing influence of experts in the modern era can be seen in the formation and proliferation of “policy communities” consisting of networks of policy experts, entrepreneurs, administrators, and researchers and writers who specialize in various policy domains such as health, welfare, environment and transportation.

In considering alternative conceptualizations of “power,” Fischer briefly reviews the work of Michel Foucault on “power/knowledge” in which power is exercised rather than possessed, thus countering the argument that power is the privilege of a dominant elite class who deploy its power over a passive subaltern group. For Foucault, power is not arranged hierarchically but rather exists in a “multiple” and “ubiquitous” form (and for this reason Foucault’s approach is sometimes referred to as “poststructuralism.”) Such an analytical emphasis has focused attention to the power of those on the margins (rather than the power of those on top of the conventional political-economic power pyramid), thereby opening up the analysis of “new social movements” such as feminism, environmentalism and other citizen movements that act outside of the normal institutionalized political arenas. Fischer notes that Foucault’s analysis “raises a host of fascinating questions for a reconsideration of the technocracy debate,” particularly in reference to the possibility of “local knowledges” to challenge the way things are done in the policy-making circles. However, Fischer does not pursue these analytical possibilities, noting only that Foucault himself did not address questions as to how critical discourse and local resistance might actually arise. I feel there was a missed opportunity here for Fischer to make some inroads with regard to new social movement theory. Fischer does refer to the role of new social movements at subsequent points throughout the book, but he does not really access the literature on movements in his analysis (although doing so may have benefited his analysis).

The second chapter deals with the issue of opportunity structures and citizen participation where Fischer makes the case that the trend towards interest group politics based on “advocacy research” falls short of genuine citizen participation. In the third chapter he moves on to a domain of particular importance with regard to expert-citizen relationships — environmental policy issues. Science and technical experts play a particularly important role in the environmental policy domain because of their central role in the identification, description, understanding and assessment of many contemporary environmental risks, usually leaving little room for laypersons to influence environmental policy formation. Here, Fischer uses Beck’s risk society thesis (also referred to as reflexive modernization theory) to demonstrate how the environmental crisis is not simply a physical crisis involving our surroundings, but also an institutional crisis. For example, consider the institution of science which in the face of inherent uncertainties based on an incomplete scientific knowledge base, must rely on imprecise quantitative/risk assessments performed by technocrats. Such risk assessments often fail to comfort an anxious public because members of the public often intuitively sense the limitations of the scientific findings and withdraw trust from the scientific risk assessment community. Consequently, citizens feel alienated from the decision-making process in place to deal with the risks they experience first-hand as victims (i.e., the risk assessment process). Ultimately, conflict results from the tension between the technical experts and lay citizens, and, as a consequence, the institution of science faces an institutional crisis of sorts. However, citizens may not necessarily retreat. Their reflexive awareness of the risks, and their raised awareness of the inability of science and the state institutions to keep their promise to protect public safety may in fact lead to a mobilization via social movements. Notably, part of the public reaction may involve a demand for greater opportunities to participate in risk decisions. Herein lies the potential impetus for participatory involvement for which Fischer calls.

Part I of the book then ends with a chapter that discusses how the policy debate should be seen through a social constructionist lens that recognizes that the arguments made are not merely “facts,” but are discourses based on deeper social and cultural factors that influence the technocrat-citizen interaction. In this light, Fischer argues for a “*postpositivist alternative*” that recognizes that social science offers only an *account* of reality rather than reality itself. With this approach, the debates in policy formation are not only about data per se, but also about the underlying assumptions that organize the debates. Furthermore, the postpositivist approach must necessarily employ a

range of multiple methods (rather than privileging quantitative methods) with the ultimate goal of restructuring the process so that analysts, citizens and policy makers are given equal voices in the deliberations about environmental risk. In particular, Fischer argues that the adoption of such a postpositivist approach will help ensure that the local knowledge of ordinary citizen is incorporated in environmental policies.

Part II of the book turns towards the subject of “Environmental Politics in the Public Sphere,” and focuses especially on the role of science in environmental policy-making. The existing technocratic approach to the environmental policy-making, including the development of environmental regulations, is critiqued for various reasons, chief among them being Fischer’s contention that the technocratic approach does not incorporate local knowledge or a “cultural rationality” based on case-specific local circumstances (as opposed to the “universal” technical rationality of the technocrat). By omitting such factors, the insights that cultural rationality can bring to the risk assessment and management process are not even considered in the environmental policy process. This is so because the technocratic approach views cultural rationality and local knowledge as impediments to an “objective” strategy to deal with risk.

In the third part of the book, “Local Knowledge and Participatory Inquiry,” Fischer discusses several case studies that illustrate various aspects of the citizen participatory approach he advocates. The first of these case studies involves the emergence of “popular epidemiology” where victims of chemical contamination in Woburn, Massachusetts, collaborated with technical officials to identify patterns of health problems in the locality by developing and implementing a “community health survey.” This is followed by a discussion of the case of “participatory resource mapping” in Kerela, India, where members of social movements, government technical experts and villagers joined together in a successful effort to conduct surveys of local areas in order to develop a series of maps that could more effectively address local development needs in the particular locale. Other cases discussed include the situation of collaborative research between local Andean potato farmers and agricultural scientists and collaborative efforts between South African government officials and local indigenous hunters to promote the preservation of national parks and to deter the poaching of rhino and elephant tusks by commercial poachers. These cases are used to illustrate the essential point that contextual and historically specific knowledge of local inhabitants is indispensable to the development of effective environmental policy. Fischer then argues that the best way to gain such local contextual

knowledge is through active collaboration between experts and lay people. Such an approach, however, is not easily accommodated by those imprisoned by a purely positivist ideology, who ignore the particular local circumstances of a situational context in favor of the positivist search for universal principles. A practical question then arises if one rejects the positivist model to expert-lay interactions and accepts the alternative postpositivist model. Namely, what types of institutional practices and professional conduct are required to foster a setting in which citizens can effectively collaborate with technical experts and policy makers? How can postpositivism flourish in the real world of policy making? Fischer turns to such practical questions in the final section of his book.

“Discursive Institutions and Policy Epistemics,” discusses Canadian Judge Thomas Berger’s groundbreaking 1977 Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. As part of the inquiry process the judge and a team of experts went to over sixty rural fishing villages so that each Native person could have the opportunity to personally participate in the inquiry. In this process, government experts learned of the community members’ local knowledge concerning their ways of life, their economic and social needs, as well as knowledge about their particular local circumstances and social values. A report was then prepared which challenged the government authorities and their plans to build an oil pipeline in the area, while drawing attention to the more pressing and relevant local needs of strengthening the subsistence economy of the locale and rejuvenating tribal governments. This was an early example of efforts towards the adoption of a more postpositivist approach.

A second case Fischer discusses is the consensus conference developed by the Danish Board of Technology in 1987, so that scientific experts, politicians and citizens could come together and form a consensus report on such matters as energy policy, air pollution, sustainable agriculture, food irradiation, chemicals in the environment, gene therapy and animal cloning. In both cases, Fischer explains the actual mechanisms which were developed and used in these efforts, and how these mechanisms became institutionalized. The role of the public official/expert is particularly important. Fischer argues that experts should be actively involved in the facilitation of the *citizens’* deliberations, instead of being part of an exclusionary and elitist technocratic group, as has traditionally been the case. Instead of just providing technical answers that bring political discussions to an end, the government expert-as-facilitator should serve as a “facilitator” of public learning and political environment so that citizens are assisted in

their efforts to examine their own interests and to make their own decisions. In this way, the level of “distorted communication” between experts and citizens will diminish, while at the same time trust will be built into the policy formation process. I fully agree with Fischer’s emphasis on active involvement of the government expert with the citizens because empirical case studies of environmental risk disputes that I have researched reveal that often, unless there is an *active* and *ongoing* collaboration between experts and citizens, citizens will feel that they are being co-opted and that their input is being responded to in a “lip service” manner.<sup>2</sup> In other words, citizens will feel that they are involved in a public relations ploy instead of identifying themselves as respected members of the policy formation process. Changing the role of the government expert to take on a more facilitating function may help to deal with the loss of public trust and address the problem of “distorted communication.” — **S. Harris Ali**

Daniel Botkin: *No Man’s Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision of Civilization and Nature*. Washington, DC: Island Press — A Shearwater Book, 2001.

Is there a way to know nature that avoids the paralysis of the nature versus civilization and civilization versus nature dichotomy? Daniel Botkin is confident there is and recommends a fresh analysis of Henry David Thoreau, especially his method of inquiry: “Thoreau’s life is a metaphor for the search for a path to nature-knowledge and a resolution of the questions inherent in humanity’s relationship with the rest of the natural world.” (xvi) What is so delightfully engaging about Botkin’s presentation is his facility with the voluminous writings of Thoreau, which he uses to reconstruct his life in such a way that Henry David speaks to us in a voice boldly classical but with contemporary relevance in its urgent timbre. *No Man’s Garden* is an inquiry into Thoreau’s approach to knowledge about nature and a claim that it can reconcile the extreme environmental positions of “wise use” and ecocentrism.

Professor Botkin begins his hortatory journey in the clutches of the savage wilderness of Mt. Katahdin, Maine, where Thoreau remarks of his surroundings that they were “made out of Chaos and Old night” and

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<sup>2</sup>S. Harris Ali, “The Search for a Landfill Site in the Risk Society,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 36, 1, 1999; and “Trust, Risk and the Public: The Case of the Guelph Landfill Search,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 22, 4, 1997.

that this sinister space was “no man’s garden.” This profile of Thoreau is unrecognizable as the foremost American nature writer, revered philosopher of nature and parent of environmentalism. From his mountain perspective “deep within the hostile ranks of clouds,” Thoreau feels no attachment or the slightest affinity toward untamed nature. Indeed, his insignificance borders on humiliating irrelevance. Is this the type of wildness Thoreau thought necessary for civilization? (“In wildness is the preservation of the world.”) Without giving away the ending too soon let me provide a hint. Botkin ends his journey in the familiar and settled surroundings of Concord, Massachusetts, thumbing through exacting details and summaries of physical events recorded by Thoreau over his lifetime.

Aside from Thoreau’s attitude toward wilderness just mentioned, the portrait unveiled by Botkin is a familiar one even if it is “modernist” in representation. Thoreau is readily recognizable puzzling over the minutiae of the world of nature, and the world he scrupulously investigates is one articulated through intimate contact with nature — *In minimis Natura praesstat*. (“Nature excels in the least of things,” Pliny, quoted by Thoreau in his lecture “Huckleberries.”) This is important for Botkin’s thesis that Thoreau represents a rational (anthropocentric) compromise between the increasingly polarized extremes of “wise use” proponents (anti-environmentalists) and deep ecologists (anti-humanists). Apparently, Botkin is convinced that we need to revisit Henry David because there are no viable conciliatory positions currently available. I think that in this he is wrong, but that doesn’t detract markedly from his thoughtful reconstruction of Thoreau as mediator; we can all use a little more Thoreau in our lives and policy judgements.<sup>1</sup>

On repeated outings to the Maine woods in 1846, 1853 and 1857 Thoreau developed a sobering antipathy toward nature-in-the-raw. We already saw his remarks about Mt. Katahdin penned during his first visit in 1846. Later in 1857, lost crossing the Umbazooksus Swamp, Henry David personifies the activities of a red squirrel, “It must have been a solitary time in that dark evergreen forest...I wondered how he could call any particular tree there his home...” (16) It was Thoreau that suffered aloneness and homelessness in the inhospitable wilderness of the swamp. What did the squirrel “know” about the wild that allowed

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<sup>1</sup>Bryan Norton’s work over the last decade provides one example of a viable alternative. On the topic of the convergence of worldviews see Norton’s book on practical ethics *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).



him to be at home there and prevented Thoreau a similar habitation? This question would occupy Henry for much of his life and his various responses provide the material for Botkin's solution.

Gradually we find out that the wildness that preserves civilization is not located in the wilderness of the Maine woods or on the windswept sands of Cape Cod, but at the edge of town. "A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it." (22) The intercourse between nature and civilization creates a place for both to pursue their ends under the balancing dynamic of a learned reciprocal guidance (a hybrid method). Calling on his earlier work in ecology and current ecological wisdom, which, incidentally, he helped to shape, Botkin sees in Thoreau's view of nature similarities with his own view; nature as an ongoing process of change, aptly captured by the rich metaphor "discordant harmony."<sup>2</sup> For Botkin the current environmental controversy is made increasingly intractable by adhering to the flawed view of nature as a stable self-regulating system that seeks equilibrium and static harmony. Accordingly, human intervention disrupts this inherent process and thus is viewed by some (deep ecologists) as the sole source of planetary pauperization. And, of course, there are those at the other extreme who would drain the swamp on the edge of town to build a mall in celebration of a type of harmony associated with economic development (wise use). Advocating a Thoreauvian response, one that embraces the dynamism and unpredictability of nature and change based, at least partially on human activity, Botkin remarks, "What he (Thoreau) really liked, then, was a combination of civilized — settled — countryside and some access to wilderness" thus "...he did not value wilderness or nature simply for itself." (23) Further on Botkin confesses, "I found little if any discussion in his writings of an intrinsic value of nature independent of the ability of human beings to benefit from it. Thus, of the...reasons to conserve nature, Thoreau would seem to have supported all but what is today called the moral." (54)

If unsettled nature cannot provide the spiritual and creative elements necessary for a civilized life how can a nature espaliered by human

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<sup>2</sup>Botkin sums up his position regarding natural processes: "A new awareness of biological nature is coming and is inevitable....If we persist in arguing that what is natural is constant and what is constant is good, then those of us who value wilderness for its intrinsic characteristics or believe that the biosphere must be maintained within certain bounds will have lost our ability to live in harmony with nature as it really is." See Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 191.

technology and plumbed by scientific categories do it? This leads Botkin to an illuminating discussion of Thoreau the scientist-surveyor, which complements his poetic-surveyor *persona* (“I am the monarch of all I *survey*,/My right there is none to dispute.”) In his capacity as “scientist,”<sup>3</sup> Thoreau was able to access the mysteries of nature with intensity and closeness equal to that of the naturalist who relies on informal natural history observations. One example, while at Walden, Thoreau noticed a common misconception on the part of his visitors regarding the depth of the pond (many saw in its depths the portal to the netherworld). Instead of following his neighbors in their groundless conjectures, Henry David *measured* the pond. Botkin finds this significant for two reasons. Quantitative measurement provides a new kind of understanding of nature one that can broaden and strengthen observation without eliminating intimacy. Botkin observes, “Thoreau instituted an iterative process that enhanced his scientific (i.e., outer) understanding of Walden and other ponds and, at the same time, must have altered his inner, spiritual relationship with them.” (67) Also, scientific knowledge can greatly affect people’s ideas of beauty and the ways in which they respond to nature. (80) As we will see, shortly, one important aspect of Botkin’s conclusion about Thoreau’s method of acquiring nature-knowledge is that it produces a new aesthetics with the potential to connect nature and civilization in one coherent value system.

Advancing the discussion of Thoreau’s scientific approach to nature-knowledge, Botkin spends a chapter on his pencil making activities. Pencil making was the family business and engaged much of Henry David’s time throughout the 1830s. Botkin claims, “...Thoreau’s involvement with the pencil and his engineering talent and success regarding one of the most important tools of writers is important in the context of this book: it touches especially on the theme of the connection between civilization and nature and also on the theme of how we learn about nature and make contact with it.” (91) What Botkin wishes to demonstrate with this example is how Thoreau was able to

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<sup>3</sup>Thoreau did not consider himself a traditional scientist. When applying for membership in the Association for the Advancement of Science in 1853 he declined to complete the formal application because, “I felt that it would be to make myself the laughing-stock of the scientific community to describe to them that branch of science which especially interests me, inasmuch as they do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law.” *The Natural History Essays*, edited by Robert Sattelmeyer (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1989), pp. xxi-xxii.

appreciate both nature and technology simultaneously.<sup>4</sup> It is no surprise that technology influences a person's perception of his relationship with nature. If we endorse technologies that isolate us from the natural world, then nature is "somewhere-out-there." On the other hand if, like Thoreau, we pursue technologies that enhance our contact and enlarge our understanding of nature (pond measuring for instance), then we are in a better position to construct values that apply univocally to both nature and civilization.

Part of the appeal of Thoreau's method of inquiry is his emphasis on local and direct experience, which creates a type of expertise necessary for the proper application of technology to nature. Botkin cites as examples of "experiential experts" Joe Polis, Thoreau's guide in the Maine woods, and the Wellfleet Oysterman of Cape Cod whose narratives guided Thoreau through the shifting sands of the Cape. Both characters are attuned to the dynamics of nature through the interplay of physical forces that war against the land and the contravening biological forces that tend to stabilize it. Their knowledge is local and direct, and when complemented by science and technology, complete — science alone is incomplete since it is unable to accurately characterize local *sense-of-place* knowledge. Botkin remarks, "Thoreau listened to both kinds of experts, experiential and professional, but he listened in a different way to each kind. From the local, experiential expert, he sought informal insights. From the professional expert, he sought insights and formal, sometimes quantitative, knowledge." (114) The type of scientist Thoreau aspired to and the model for Botkin's contemporary scientist is clearly spelled-out by Henry David himself, "The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience...It is with science as with ethics — we cannot know truth by contrivance and method."<sup>5</sup>

Beside Thoreau's endeavors in the family business there are some other satisfying iconoclastic moments in the book. Those who continue to think of Thoreau as an inveterate tree-hugger and anti-social recluse, in the service of moles not men, might be disturbed with Botkin's presentation. During a trip to the Maine woods in the summer of 1853 Thoreau came upon two "explorers" (today they would be called

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<sup>4</sup>Others have attempted to achieve this desirable synthesis. For example, Rene Dubos uses soil ecology and his pioneering work in antibiotics to build a bridge to the biosphere. For a useful introduction see, Gerard Piel, ed., *The World of Rene Dubos* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>Thoreau, *op. cit.*

exploration loggers). Henry David was taken with admiration for them and mused about their activities calling them “solitary and adventurous” and “the nearest to the trapper of the West, perhaps.” (116) Unlike the stock of environmentalists today, Thoreau had little trouble reconciling commerce and economic development with a healthy respect for nature. Indeed, he trusted those who maintained a close contact with nature (the loggers, fisherman, hunters, farmers) more than “the mealy-mouthed enthusiasm of the lover of Nature.” (118) Thoreau’s explorers embodied the sensitivity that allowed them to love nature and log a forest.

Botkin’s thesis dissolves the apparent paradox wherein the foremost American oracle of environmentalism condoned — even romanced — logging and other alleged mischief against nature. “...we must understand that for him (Thoreau), *wildness* was a *spiritual state*, arising from the relationship between person and nature, whereas *wilderness* was land or water unused at present by people and thus a *physical state of nature*.” (121) And as an unsettled state with no relation to humans, it lacked the articulation to provide inspirational values necessary for the advancement of civilization. This is the Thoreauvian compromise between “wise use” and ecocentrism based on his approach to knowledge of nature. Transacting with the natural world through observation and actions based on considered observation increases rather than decreases wildness.

Much of the remainder of the book takes up applying Thoreau’s method of inquiry to our current environmental situation. The major obstacle is one of scale: Is it possible to graft Thoreau’s approach on to global issues and issues of optimal size? This is the critical test for Botkin’s thesis, and whether or not he is successful the reader will have to determine. For this reviewer he makes his case though weakly. Yet, this is to be expected since he is surveying new territory and the map he returns with will be incomplete,<sup>6</sup> or as Thoreau might have said, “But the ground was comparatively unbroken, and we will not complain of the pioneer, if he raises no flowers with his first crop.”<sup>7</sup> I am convinced, though, that *the* case is there to be made and if I may offer a suggestion, mention of Thoreau’s particular brand of Transcendentalism might underscore and clarify his epistemic procedure.

On one central point Botkin is certainly correct. The “new” biological world-view as a dynamic system with inherent ambiguities, variabilities, and complexities requires new attitudes and values to

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<sup>6</sup>This is not entirely true; Botkin has scouted out similar terrain before. See Botkin, *op. cit.*, especially Chapters 11 and 12.

<sup>7</sup>Thoreau, *op. cit.*

replace those that supported the static “balance of nature” worldview. For Botkin, “the key...is that the beauty in the dynamics of nature can replace the beauty of the idea of stasis.” (239) Aesthetics is of foremost importance for Botkin. Understanding the value to people of the intangible qualities of nature is an alternative to the opposing positions of rejecting human intervention (ecocentrism) and embracing all and any human action (wise use). The intangibles are uncovered through a method of inquiry that is exacting, concise, and inclusive, taking into account both types of expertise, in short Henry David Thoreau’s method.

Botkin has written an important book for it offers a path that can lead to the compatibility of civilization and nature. But also he reestablishes Thoreau’s reputation in an area that has been much maligned by critics. In the opening pages of his “Introduction” to the *Natural History Essays*, editor Robert Sattelmeyer remarks “...Thoreau’s natural history writing and his abilities as a naturalist have frequently been denigrated...this aspect of his career is a puzzling paradox, most clearly evident in Sherman Paul’s pronouncement...‘In spite of his gifts for nature study, Thoreau was not a good naturalist.’” Daniel Botkin’s close reading of Thoreau has certainly remedied that. As you might expect, for the reasons Botkin applauds Thoreau others have criticized his blending of “poetics” and “science.” I like Botkin’s Thoreau because he allows and encourages us to consider seriously (scientifically?) “...the nonchalance of the butterfly carrying accident and change painted in a thousand hues upon its wings...”<sup>8</sup> — **Robert L. Chapman**

David Schlosberg: *Environmental Justice and the New Pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

David Schlosberg’s book is that rare thing — a combination of solid empirical social science research integrated with a critical theoretical framework. Based on the U.S. environmental justice movement, and analyzing it through what he calls “critical pluralism,” Schlosberg has produced an excellent critical introduction and examination of the grassroots, institutional character of the movement as well as a clear normative-theoretical analysis. Holding that environmental justice is about equity (in distributive terms) and about recognition (13), a central thrust of the book is about how both of these

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

aims can be achieved via participation in and creation of more critical pluralist forms of decision-making. While most readers of this journal will be familiar with the movement, Schlosberg's application of a "critical pluralist" perspective is unique.

For him, the advantage of using a pluralist perspective is that it challenges the absolutism and sovereignty of the state, and suggests a less state-centric view of politics and governance (including environmental decision-making). Dividing pluralism in the U.S. into three historical phases, Schlosberg claims the "non" or anti-state complexion of the new "critical pluralism" of the environmental justice movement (expressed in such features as its resolutely local focus, its antipathy to hierarchy, bureaucracy and centralized modes of organization) was also a central animating concern for "first generation pluralists" such as Follett, Laski, James. He views second generation pluralists, such as Dahl, as an aberration in some respects, given their mistaken focus on economic status and subjectivity rather than political pluralism, and their very "uncritical" acceptance of and focus on the centrality of the state and state institutions.

Building on the work of I.M. Young and William Connolly, among others, Schlosberg develops his critical pluralism by noting that the debates about and discourse around "difference" which prevail in much social and political theory can be seen as simply a new way of articulating the existence and desirability of pluralism. Above all, his concern is to stress the absolute importance of unity within the environmental movement not being premised on (or leading to) uniformity (or the domination of the grassroots activists by the professional, nationally organized big environmental groups); and that the unity and strength of the environmental movement as a whole comes from its variety and diversity. In opposition to hierarchically imposed unity/uniformity, he uses the metaphor of the rhizome from Deleuze and Guattari to argue for a view of environmental politics based on networking (creating a "net that works" in a memorable phrase), coalitions and alliances, and indicates an "economy of environmental resistance" based on different groups sharing resources, information, expertise and experience (based on "situated knowledges") horizontally rather than information and orders being exchanged vertically (110).

Schlosberg makes a good point concerning the appropriateness of this networking form of organization in terms of resistance to the dominant, existing socio-economic order. Given that capital itself has become more flexible, fluid, trans-national and less territorially defined, it is imperative that resistances to it also be equally flexible (134-35). This is what Schlosberg calls the "Lilliput strategy" — resistance to

both capital and the state constituted by a variety of inter-linked sites, issues and groups engaged in different forms of resistance, struggle, and communication, rather than organized in one single “counter-hegemonic” bloc. However, he himself sees some of the problems with this strategy, not least its defensive/reactive character in not articulating or presenting a coherent and attractive alternative, and the difficulty of maintaining resistance over time. Here it would seem that what “critical pluralism” needs is some “critical political economy” (not necessarily of a Marxist kind) in order to more fully flesh out its radical, critical potential, and to identify obstacles and counter-resistance.

A good example of why some political economy analysis would be useful comes in his discussion of the central importance of communication and communicative/discursive institutions to critical pluralism, where he talks about the issue of respecting industry at the negotiating table. For Schlosberg, “Approaching and questioning responsible parties in government and industry — engaging them directly in discourse — seems a better tactic for dealing with them than demonizing or confronting them with a closed state of mind” (177). Well...of course this all depends on the precise framework for participation, the procedures and rules under which it is conducted, and while in principle it is a good thing that critical pluralism expands the participants in the policy discourse, it is not the case that all voices are equal at the negotiating table. Structural, political economic considerations about the power and centrality of capital, need to ground any and all such (however well meaning) calls for more “inclusive” forms of decision-making, to enable environmentalists to make strategic and tactical decisions about when it makes sense to get involved in such procedures and when to pull out and deny “respect” to corporations and state agencies. This is particularly important when we look at real world examples of such deliberative, participatory, inclusive procedures and how they can be used to legitimate corporate or state decisions, and co-opt, divide or otherwise emasculate the environmental movement, especially if these inclusive “round tables” are charged with achieving “win-win” solutions/accommodations. While accepting the broad thrust of critical pluralism and the general acceptance of respecting different voices, structures and institutions which systematically undermine, silence and erode the lives, well-being and rights of different others, especially the vulnerable and marginalized, do not deserve respect, but resistance. Indeed, if the “critical” in critical pluralism is to have any real purchase on the real world of environmental politics and struggles, it cannot be that all views are or

ought to be in principle tolerated — after all, we do not tolerate the intolerant, and neither should we sustain the unsustainable.

Despite these concerns, with which I feel the author would largely agree, on the whole Schlosberg has produced an original, important and theoretically informed, critical book which deserves to be read by all those interested in developing an understanding of grassroots environmental resistance within a larger (critical pluralist) framework of non-state centered forms of environmental politics. — **John Barry**

