

Deep Environmental Politics: The Role of Radical Environmentalism in Crafting Environmental Policy, by Phillip F. Cramer, Westport, CT: Praeger Books (1998). xvi, 238 pp.

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As the author notes in his preface, few books have been published to date that measure the influence of the Deep Ecology philosophy on the environmental movement, especially its influence on environmental policy. Unfortunately, by the time one has finished reading this book the temptation may be to conclude that the reason for this deficiency is the lack of influence deep ecology has had on the formulation of policy.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One provides the reader with an introduction to the Deep Ecology perspective. Cramer's overview is adequate, if uninspiring. He sketches for the uninformed reader the basic tenets of the philosophical tradition that inspired the Deep Ecology movement and provides a cursory overview of the fundamental canons of the movement. Thus, he sketches for the reader Deep Ecology's rejection of an anthropocentric environmentalism and its major paradigm shift to an environmentalism that is predicated on "ecocentrism" that attempts to create major changes in our perceptions, values and lifestyles. Stressing a harmony with nature and the intrinsic worth of all species, Cramer describes a philosophy that rejects the excessive human interference with the natural world and writes of the need for extensive societal changes that shun centralization and promote local autonomy. However, as with the rest of the book, the author's writing reads more like a tepid outline than a mature textual narration of the material.

The remainder of the book adheres to this tedious style. In Part Two, in which Cramer attempts to analyze Deep Ecology and its impact on contemporary politics, he examines environmental legislation, Congressional testimony and court decisions in his quest to investigate the influence of the movement. His approach to these subjects lacks the analytical rigor to which most social scientists are accustomed. His minimalist approach results in simply summarizing the evidence in such a way that he devotes superficial attention to such major and complex documents as the 1963 Clean Air Act.

Thus congressional legislation is tersely examined for a speck of influence or mere mention of deep ecology or any discourse that might be even remotely related to the movement. The reader is provided with no overview of the legislation or its purpose. The result is a run of seemingly unrelated paragraphs that tick through recent legislative acts one after another with no analytical connection or textual passage from one to another.

As a result, the book does not cohere, either within its respective parts, or in its overall aim of assessing the influence of Deep Ecology on American environmental policy. Setting aside its superficial analytical framework, the book lacks any connective tissue that allows the reader to make sense of the seemingly unrelated comments within any single chapter, let alone to make any sense of the book as a whole. This litany of near-miss analysis continues throughout Part Two as Cramer turns his eye first to Congressional testimony and then to the legal system.

At the conclusion of his survey of fifty-two legal articles, he states. "it would not be prudent

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to reach a make sweeping conclusions based on the small number of articles in this study” (p. 172). The same may well be said for his superficial analysis of all the texts that he employs in the book. When the author does make conclusions, they have a hollow ring to them such as the following: “The study found that the language of Deep Ecology is rarely used in Congressional hearings” (p. 221). As unsurprising as this is, Creamer is at a loss to make any analysis of why it is the case, or what effect, if any, is felt on Congressional policy. For that matter, Cramer is equally inattentive to the ways in which Congressional policy is distinguished because the influence of Deep Ecology appears to be altogether missing.

Part Three, “The Media Coverage of Deep Ecology,” maintains the same plodding approach as the author attempts to study 372 articles about deep ecology (how and why they were chosen, or why they are taken to be representative of the media is not clear). This review “substantiates” that the media coverage of Deep Ecology is “negative.” Cramer never makes clear whose whose claim is it that he “substantiates?” And as with much of the book’s material, we are never quite sure who is the referent, let alone who composes the Deep Ecology movement.

Setting aside the substance of the conclusions, the reader is forced to ask what this means, because the meanings and their implications for influence on policy, are left wholly unexamined and only at best inferred. Once again, in this altogether too brief chapter that purports to examine a sizable body of media texts, the author devotes sparse attention to media categories and thus, for example, a mere ten sentences suffices for a discussion of scientific magazines. Moreover, of the hundreds of articles Cramer examines, he never clearly delineates how many were scientific magazines, how many were U.S. newspapers, and how many from other media outlets. Furthermore, in his analysis he seems to conflate not only sources, but categories; thus he conflates book reviews along with newspaper articles, making an unwieldy mess of media evidence.

In his final media analysis chapter he employs what he terms an “admittedly subjective” method, which provides a statistical analysis of 372 articles spanning 15 years. While this time he does provide us with a breakdown of the media sources, he is merely concerned with whether the articles mention Deep Ecology in a negative or positive manner. What the ultimate meaning of his findings are for his investigation is left implicit and unclear. What after all, is the significance of some media coverage being positive, negative, mixed or unscorable? What relevance any of this has with the stated objectives of the book is left poorly underdeveloped.

In the book’s conclusion, which provides us with as little insight as the text, Cramer rather surprisingly states that “the book has attempted to illustrate how deep ecology and radical environmentalism have tried to reverse the engines of society and thus craft a new environmental policy.” This statement seems wholly out of keeping with much of what the book is about. It seems rather that the book has tried to measure how successful (as the intended objective stated at the outset) Deep Ecology has been instead of illustrating “how” it has tried to influence contemporary environmental policy. This lack of clarity of purpose serves only to underscore the confusion and futility of the disparate and superficial evidence that the author has assembled to conduct his study.