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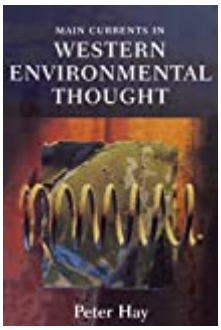

Peter Hay. *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002. x + 400 pp. $59.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-253-34053-5; $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21511-6.

Reviewed by David Duke (Department of History and Classics, Arcadia University)

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The Diversity of Environmental Thought

DDT, that bete noire of the environmental movement, seems to be making a comeback. Attempts have been made recently to remove it from the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants so that it can be employed more easily in its traditional role as an antimalarial agent.[1] Patrick Moore, one of the founding members of Greenpeace and a leading light of the movement in the 1970s, now argues very publicly in favor of genetically modified organisms, especially for their application in the developing world.[2] A recent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada upholding biochemical giant Monsanto's ability to exercise patent control over genes in canola–essentially transposing the legal concept of intellectual property to the biological world–promises to reverberate around the world for years to come.[3] Environmentalism and environmental movements seem to be facing multi-faceted challenges from many different quarters, and it is clear that, at the moment at least, the reactions of environmental movements say more about the movements themselves than about the challenges to which they are responding. Increasingly environmentalism seems fractured and divided. Some even claim that environmentalism faces a crisis of identity.

Peter Hay's *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* is therefore a welcome and very timely book. In a single volume Hay, Reader in Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania, explores the philosophical and intellectual foundations and composition of modern, western environmentalism. He was, he says, determined to "set out, fully and faithfully, what self-styled greens happen for better or worse to believe" (p. viii). This he has certainly done. Unfortunately, the result is not without problems; indeed, this is a deeply frustrating book. On the one hand Hay's description of the manifold inputs into modern green thought is comprehensive, and in most cases, outstanding. But on the other, the book is precisely just that–an overwhelmingly descriptive account of epistemologies and schools of thought that ends up being less than the sum of its parts.

The book itself is structured into ten chapters, the first and last of which contain the most interesting arguments and analyses. The first, "The Ecological Impulse," argues that the modern green movement is founded upon "a deep-felt consternation at the scale of the destruction

wrought, in the second half of the twentieth century, and in the name of a transcendent human progression, upon the increasingly embattled lifeforms with which we share the planet" (p. 3). In order to defend his claim for the late-modern origins of environmentalist movements today, Hay minimizes the impact of romantics of all stripes, both European and American (pp. 4-11), and privileges the effect of wilderness management advocates such as Aldo Leopold. Upon reading the first, intriguing chapter, it seems clear that Hay's argument is that the ecological impulse is real, and must surely be found throughout the intellectual threads that comprise modern environmental thought. The reader therefore expects to see this argument, or some variant of it, shot throughout the book.

This is not the case. Chapter-length discussions of ecophilosophy, eco-feminism, and eco-spirituality are followed by overviews of green criticism of reductionist science and an extended description of green political thought since the 1960s. An overall argumentative thread is absent in these discussions. It is true that on occasion throughout the chapters Hay does offer some fascinating insights and criticisms of the subjects under review. One such example is his dissection of the appropriation of the ecological spirituality and environmental knowledge of native peoples. Here he negotiates some tricky issues, such as cases when native people behave in notably non-environmentally–friendly ways (pp. 116-117). Another example of his insightful writing is his discussion of the critiques of modern reductionist science emanating from contemporary green movements in the west. Here, Hay accepts the premise that reductionist science is in trouble as it attempts to deal with the massively complex systems that are inherent in the ecosphere, and he agrees that the indeterminacy now central to quantum theory or chaos theory serves "to undermine reductionist science, for it can no longer be credibly held that knowledge resides in an understanding of the constituent parts of biophysical systems" (pp. 130-131). He continues by discussing the other claimants to the epistemological crown currently held by reductionist science: the holistic science of ecology; the teleological Gaia hypothesis; phenomenological investigations of the natural world; and the alternative epistemology offered by ecofeminism (pp. 131-145). Hay concludes that reductionist science may be on the cusp of a Kuhnian paradigm shift, as elements from each of the competitor-epistemologies come together in a coherent framework to challenge the dominance of reductionist science. Unfortunately–very unfortunately–he does not indicate how such a shift will occur, save to write that "much will depend on the resolution of debates within science itself" (p. 152).

This is, as indicated previously, the major problem with *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*. It is indeed a scintillating and highly readable review and discussion of the structure of modern western environmental thought. But from a writer of Hay's evident skill the reader can justifiably expect more: certainly there could be a more detailed critique of the schools of thought that comprise that structure, a critique that is largely absent. From a historian's point of view there is one other complaint: an insufficient attention to the process by which schools of thought within the green movement itself achieve dominance or lose currency. For example, in his discussion of the authoritarian impulse found in green thought in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as exemplified by an early Paul Ehrlich or Garrett Hardin, Hay deftly juxtaposes their views with those of classical conservative environmental thought. In this context, though, it would seem that the truly interesting point is not the nature of eco-authoritarianism or the small-"c" conservative ecological thought that emphasized the power of the individual or local community in effecting environmental change. Instead it is the way in which one apparently dominant mode of thought gave way, circa 1980, to the other. On the circumstances surrounding this revolution Hay is largely silent, beyond a somewhat laconic suggestion that it was the debunking of the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report that was the cause (p. 185). Nor is there any real sense as to why, for example, eco-feminism now holds what Hay calls "the predominant position within ecological thought" (p. 72). Even if this were true–and it is a debatable contention–a demonstration of the process by which eco-feminism came to dominate western environmental thought would have been welcome.

In short, then, more analysis and criticism was required both to contextualize and to strengthen the larger narrative offered throughout the book. Despite the absence of such reflection, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* is a meritorious and useful monograph. Hay has produced an excellent single-volume survey of a very large number of disparate philosophical and epistemological schools of thought that all nest within the rather large and diverse tent that we call "the environmental movement." It is pleasant to see an author who gives full rein to the disparate voices to be found within a particular perspective, as they criticize one another (although it would have enriched the experience still further to read *his* views on their criticisms). Furthermore, he writes in a highly readable and clear style, eschew-

ing the jargon that can all too easily creep into cross-disciplinary surveys. The book works very well as a review of environmental thought, deriving from a strongly political perspective. It is a useful guide to a complex and difficult subject as Hay leads the reader through (at my count) at least thirty different viewpoints held by at least some segment of modern western green movements. For that reason alone it is recommended. Still, Hay's writings have been described elsewhere as "provocative" and "revolutionary".[4] There are provocative flashes here; there are occasional indications that here is a writer who has thought a very great deal, and fruitfully, about the subject at hand, and it is a pity that Hay's own interpretations, analyses, and insights were not as apparent in the narrative as they might have been.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Tina Rosenberg, "What the World Needs Now is DDT," *New York Times Magazine* , April 11, 2004.

[2]. Drake Bennett, "Eco-Traitor," *Wired Magazine* 12, no. 3 (March 2004). Available online at `http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.03.`

[3]. "Biotech Giant Wins Supreme Court Battle," CBC News Online (May 21, 2004). Available online at `http://www.cbc.ca/stories/2004/05/21/canada/schmeiser_monsanto040521.`

[4]. Natasha Cica, Review of Peter Hay's *Vandemonian Essays*, *Online Opinion* (June 3, 2003). Available online at `http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=389.`