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Wilderness and the American Mind

By

RODERICK NASH

New Haven: Yale University Press. 1967. Pp. viii, 256, \$6.50.

Man in the Landscape

By

PAUL SHEPARD

New York: Knopf Press. 1967. Pp. xxv, 290, \$6.95.

Ten years of guiding graduate studies in the conservation of natural resources, plus many more years of writing, lecturing, and practical experience have served to crystallize for me certain axioms, aside from the obvious one that conflicts of interest are inevitable. The basic problem is less a matter of techniques, or even of political action, than of intangibles; the key word is *cherish*. Cultures, like individuals, take care of what they respect and love, however this situation may be rationalized.

Clearly, too, there are many approaches that lead to the same justification, despite the convenient disparagement so often used to confuse sober concern with irrational enthusiasm. Whether one begins his analysis with history, ethics, esthetics, science, or economics, he cannot escape the fact that mankind is now custodian of the planet, responsible for its future capacity to sustain the good life, or perhaps even life itself. This, of course, rules out scientism masquerading as science as well as any crude form of price-tag economics.

It is a happy circumstance that both books appear in the same year. They complement each other handsomely. They are also opportune, with 1967 marked by increasing concern over environmental quality, as distinct from immediate utility.

Roderick Nash is a professional historian, Paul Shepard a trained naturalist who has become a student of esthetics. Both men have written books that are eminently readable. Both trace the cultural origins of American attitudes toward landscape, culminating in the present, Shepard in the greater detail. Both make clear the limitations of the utilitarian values inseparable from a highly industrialized, urban society such as our own, exemplified by Nash in the conflict between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot as to the meaning of

conservation, despite the latter's apotheosis as a founding father.

Nash begins by discussing the concept of wilderness—no small undertaking as anyone who is familiar with both *Exodus* and the publications of Sierra Club and Wilderness Society can testify. As befits an historian, he then unfolds the record in terms of personalities and politics, yet surprisingly (to me) has more to say of Aldo Leopold and his profound statement of the conservation ethic than does Shepard.

For his part, Shepard compensates for this by his critical discussion of Albert Schweitzer. The range of his interest is attested by sixteen pages of references following his text which is by no means confined to the western hemisphere. Essentially, his approach is psychological, beginning with the way in which man perceives landscape and going on into the way group attitudes have developed and in turn shaped appraisal of landscapes.

Each author in his own way makes clear the basic role of cultural values, and of conflicting values within cultures as they influence action. Shepard discusses the influence of the Mother concept of Earth, the role of garden and park and the very real influence of "nature haters" which, along with narrow views of economics, complicates the problem of establishing natural areas for both scientific and esthetic reasons. His final chapter on the American West, which he knows well, is particularly good.

I trust both books will get the wide reading they deserve at this time of growing interest in the intangible values of the American landscape.

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