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es by Andrew Dobson

*Political Thought*

*o the Politics and Philosophy*

*i Ortega y Gasset*

# THE GREEN READER

ESSAYS TOWARD  
A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

EDITED BY ANDREW DOBSON

FOREWORD BY DAVID GANCHER



MERCURY HOUSE, INCORPORATED  
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## Contents

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Murray Bookchin : *Social Ecology*  
Ted Trainer : *Third World Poverty*

### ***The Green Society***

The Ecologist : *Decentralization*  
Kirkpatrick Sale : *Bioregionalism*  
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## ✓ Women and Nature

Feminists and others in the Green movement have long been pointing out that women and nature have common cause. Historically, but particularly since the scientific revolution, women and nature have been seen as inferior to men and culture, respectively. Women and nature are said to possess similar qualities, and these qualities are held to be less worthy than those possessed by men and by culture. The Green movement has called into question the notion of a dumb, subordinate nature and, likewise, some feminists have sought to celebrate, rather than denigrate, the relationship of women to nature. On the one hand this has led, for Greens, to the notion of the 'feminine principle', which is tender and nurturing, and by which they claim we ought to live; and, on the other, for feminists, to 'ecofeminism'.\* Carolyn Merchant is an American professor of philosophy and her book *The Death of Nature* is central to this debate. In the three extracts below she illustrates the common interests of the women's and ecology movements, the connected subordination of nature to culture and of women to men, and how when the earth is seen as a living mother a miner can be accused of matricide.

From Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) pp. ixx-xxi, 143-4, 32-3.

Women and nature have an age-old association – an affiliation that has persisted throughout culture, language, and history. Their ancient interconnections have been dramatized by the simultaneity of two recent social movements – women's liberation, symbolized in its controversial infancy by Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963), and the ecology movement, which built up during the 1960s and finally captured national attention on Earth Day, 1970. Common to both is an egalitarian perspective. Women are struggling to free themselves from cultural and economic constraints that have kept them subordinate to men in American society. Environmentalists,

warning us of the irreversible consequences of environmental exploitation, are developing an ecology that recognizes the interconnectedness between people and nature. The goals of the two movements can suggest new social structures, based not on the domination of nature and resources but on the full expression of both and on the maintenance of environmental balance.

New social concerns generate new intellectual challenges. Conversely, new interpretations of traditional values on the present and hence the power of nature. Feminist and ecological consciousness can challenge historical interconnections between women and nature developed as the modern scientific and ecological movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shaped and pervades today's mainstream values.

Feminist history in the broadest sense is a re-examination of history with egalitarian eyes, seeing it anew not only of women but also of social and racial justice in the environment, previously ignored as the 'other' in which western culture and its progress have been measured. History from a feminist perspective is to tell the story from the bottom up and to re-evaluate values. An egalitarian perspective accords women their place in history and delineates their impact of sexual differences and sex-linked ideology and the use of male, female, and androgynous have important places in the new history.

The ancient identity of nature as a woman has been reconnected with the history of the environment and change. The female earth was central to the premodern world and was undermined by the scientific revolution and the male-oriented culture in early modern Europe. This reconnection has reawakened interest in the values and ethics of the premodern organic world and its associated ethics make possible a free alternative to the rise of modern science in the modern world. The cosmos ceased to be viewed as an organismic machine.

Both the women's movement and the ecology movement are sharply critical of the costs of competition and the alienation arising from the market economy's values and society. Ecology has been a subversive force in the

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warning us of the irreversible consequences of continuing environ- mental exploitation, are developing an ecological ethic emphasizing the interconnectedness between people and nature. Juxtaposing the goals of the two movements can suggest new values and social structures, based not on the domination of women and nature as resources but on the full expression of both male and female talent and on the maintenance of environmental integrity.

New social concerns generate new intellectual and historical prob- lems. Conversely, new interpretations of the past provide perspec- tives on the present and hence the power to change it. Today's feminist and ecological consciousness can be used to examine the historical interconnections between women and nature that developed as the modern scientific and economic world took form in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – a transformation that shaped and pervades today's mainstream values and perceptions.

Feminist history in the broadest sense requires that we look at history with egalitarian eyes, seeing it anew from the viewpoint not only of women but also of social and racial groups and the natural environment, previously ignored as the underlying resources on which western culture and its progress have been built. To write history from a feminist perspective is to turn it upside down – to see social structure from the bottom up and to flip-flop mainstream values. An egalitarian perspective accords both women and men their place in history and delineates their ideas and roles. The impact of sexual differences and sex-linked language on cultural ideology and the use of male, female, and androgynous imagery will have important places in the new history.

The ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother links women's history with the history of the environment and ecological change. The female earth was central to the organic cosmology that was undermined by the scientific revolution and the rise of a market- oriented culture in early modern Europe. The ecology movement has reawakened interest in the values and concepts associated his- torically with the premodern organic world. The ecological model and its associated ethics make possible a fresh and critical interpret- ation of the rise of modern science in the crucial period when our cosmos ceased to be viewed as an organism and became instead a machine.

Both the women's movement and the ecology movement are sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and domi- nation arising from the market economy's *modus operandi* in nature and society. Ecology has been a subversive science in its criticism of

the consequences of uncontrolled growth associated with capitalism, technology, and progress – concepts that over the last two hundred years have been treated with reverence in western culture. The vision of the ecology movement has been to restore the balance of nature disrupted by industrialization and overpopulation. It has emphasized the need to live within the cycles of nature, as opposed to the exploitative, linear mentality of forward progress. It focuses on the costs of progress, the limits to growth, the deficiencies of technological decision-making, and the urgency of the conservation and recycling of nature resources. Similarly, the women's movement has exposed the costs for all human beings of competition in the marketplace, the loss of meaningful productive economic roles for women in early capitalist society, and the view of both women and nature as psychological and recreational resources for the harried entrepreneur-husband. . . .

Women's place in the order of nature. At the root of the identification of women and animality with a lower form of human life lies the distinction between nature and culture fundamental to humanistic disciplines such as history, literature, and anthropology, which accept that distinction as an unquestioned assumption. Nature-culture dualism is a key factor in western civilization's advance at the expense of nature. As the unifying bonds of the old hierarchical cosmos were severed, European culture increasingly set itself above and apart from all that was symbolized by nature. Similarly, in America the nature-culture dichotomy was basic to the tension between civilization and the frontier in westward expansion and helped to justify the continuing exploitation of nature's resources. Much of American literature is founded on the underlying assumption of the superiority of culture to nature. If nature and women, Indians and blacks are to be liberated from the strictures of this ideology, a radical critique of the very categories *nature* and *culture*, as organizing concepts in all disciplines, must be undertaken.

Anthropologists have pointed out that nature and women are both perceived to be on a lower level than culture, which has been associated symbolically and historically with men. Because women's physiological functions of reproduction, nurture, and child rearing are viewed as closer to nature, their social role is lower on the cultural scale than that of the male. Women are devalued by their tasks and roles, by their exclusion from community functions whence power is derived, and through symbolism.

In early modern Europe, the assumption of a nature-culture

dichotomy was used as a justification for k place in the established hierarchical order were placed below the men of their statu against the disorder in nature symbolized b not only at lower-class witches, but at the q who during the Protestant Reformation see the order of nature. . . .

An allegorical tale, reputedly sent to Paul S at Leipzig about 1490–5, expressed oppositi ments into the farmlands of Lichtenstat in area where the new mining activities were de niscent of Alain of Lille's *Natura* and her tor of the force of the ancient strictures against allegorical vision of an old hermit of Lich dressed in a tattered green robe and seate Jupiter, is represented in a court case by ' who charges a miner with matricide. Test several of nature's deities:

Bacchus complained that his vines were the flames and his most sacred places des that her fields were devastated; Pluto th miners resound like thunder through the so that he could hardly reside in his own that the subterranean waters were divert dried up; Charon that the volume of the had been so diminished that he was unabl Acheron and carry the souls across to Pl Fauns protested that the charcoal burners forests to obtain fuel to smelt the miner's

In his defence, the miner argued that the mother, but a wicked stepmother who hides in her inner parts instead of making them a

The final judgment, handed down by For deign 'to mine and dig in mountains, to ter in trade, to injure the earth, to throw away Pluto and finally to search for veins of metal their bodies ought to be swallowed up by t its vapours . . . intoxicated by wine . . . a remain ignorant of what is best. These and proper of men. Farewell.'



rolled growth associated with capitalism, concepts that over the last two hundred years have been treated with reverence in western culture. The movement has been to restore the balance of industrialization and overpopulation. It has been within the cycles of nature, as opposed to the mentality of forward progress. It focuses on the limits to growth, the deficiencies of resources, and the urgency of the conservation of all human beings of competition in the meaningful productive economic roles for society, and the view of both women and recreational resources for the harried

order of nature. At the root of the identification of nature and culture fundamental to human history, literature, and anthropology, which is an unquestioned assumption. Nature-culture in western civilization's advance at the expense of the unifying bonds of the old hierarchical European culture increasingly set itself above nature was symbolized by nature. Similarly, in the nature dichotomy was basic to the tension at the frontier in westward expansion and continuing exploitation of nature's resources. Nature-culture is founded on the underlying assumption of culture to nature. If nature and women, to be liberated from the strictures of this view of the very categories *nature* and *culture*, in all disciplines, must be undertaken. It is pointed out that nature and women are both on a lower level than culture, which has been associated historically with men. Because women's roles of reproduction, nurture, and child rearing are closer to nature, their social role is lower on the scale of the male. Women are devalued by their exclusion from community functions and, through symbolism. In Europe, the assumption of a nature-culture

dichotomy was used as a justification for keeping women in their place in the established hierarchical order of nature, where they were placed below the men of their status group. The reaction against the disorder in nature symbolized by women was directed not only at lower-class witches, but at the queens and noblewomen who during the Protestant Reformation seemed to be overturning the order of nature. . . .

An allegorical tale, reputedly sent to Paul Schneevogel, a professor at Leipzig about 1490-5, expressed opposition to mining encroachments into the farmlands of Lichtenstat in Saxony, Germany, an area where the new mining activities were developing rapidly. Reminiscent of Alain of Lille's *Natura* and her torn gown and illustrative of the force of the ancient strictures against mining is the following allegorical vision of an old hermit of Lichtenstat. Mother Earth, dressed in a tattered green robe and seated on the right hand of Jupiter, is represented in a court case by 'glib-tongued Mercury' who charges a miner with matricide. Testimony is presented by several of nature's deities:

Bacchus complained that his vines were uprooted and fed to the flames and his most sacred places desecrated. Ceres stated that her fields were devastated; Pluto that the blows of the miners resound like thunder through the depths of the earth, so that he could hardly reside in his own kingdom; the Naiad, that the subterranean waters were diverted and her fountains dried up; Charon that the volume of the underground waters had been so diminished that he was unable to float his boat on Acheron and carry the souls across to Pluto's realm, and the Fauns protested that the charcoal burners had destroyed whole forests to obtain fuel to smelt the miner's ores.

In his defence, the miner argued that the earth was not a real mother, but a wicked stepmother who hides and conceals the metals in her inner parts instead of making them available for human use.

The final judgment, handed down by Fortune, stated that if men deign 'to mine and dig in mountains, to tend the fields, to engage in trade, to injure the earth, to throw away knowledge, to disturb Pluto and finally to search for veins of metal in the sources of rivers, their bodies ought to be swallowed up by the earth, suffocated by its vapours . . . intoxicated by wine . . . afflicted by hunger and remain ignorant of what is best. These and many other dangers are proper of men. Farewell.'