
Book Reviews

Earth First! agenda for scorched earth

by Margaret Sexton

Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization

by Christopher Manes

Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1990
277 pages, hardbound, \$18.95

Confessions of an Eco-Warrior

by Dave Foreman

Harmony Books, New York, 1991
240 pages, hardbound, \$19.95

Christopher Manes of Earth First! has written a chilling book. Chilling, because if everyone adopted his philosophy, millions of people, starting with those who are darker-skinned and living in poor countries, would be condemned to death, in the name of saving the Earth from "environmental degradation." Earth First! is the U.S.-based environmental group known for its philosophy of "ecotage," or acts of terrorism such as tree-spiking, or bombing high-voltage towers, that are supposed to stop man's destruction of the Earth. To Earth First!, this means also locking up hundreds of millions of acres of "wilderness," in a bizarre, Soviet-style "collectivization." The philosophy expressed by Manes in *Green Rage* would not save the Earth from pollution, mismanagement of natural resources, or problems of industrialization. Solving environmental problems requires a scientific understanding of the biosphere and how it interacts which scientists are beginning to understand, but few environmentalists have grasped. If Manes's political agenda and philosophy were enacted as envisioned in *Green Rage*, most of us would go back to the Stone Age.

At the core of Manes's philosophy is the view that no one should have any faith that technology created by man might solve our environmental problems. He also explicitly repudiates the words of the Book of Genesis, that man should "subdue the earth."

He argues for "Deep Ecology," a term coined by the Norwegian Arne Naess, which Manes says has a "fundamental antipathy" with New Age thinking. Deep Ecology is defined as a "prephilosophical sense of identification with the natural world." Although the New Age described by Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy* seems deeply rooted in occultism and other irrationalities, Manes equates the New Age with its "patriarch" Teilhard de Chardin (a Jesuit theologian), who, Manes says, espouses that "humankind's purpose on Earth is to be the 'steward' over evolution, creating a humanized landscape without the imperfections of free nature brought about by the Fall. . . ." Deep Ecology requires a belief in "biocentrism," displacing "anthropocentrism": Man's "cultural achievements may not be the center of the biosphere after all, may in fact be no more important from the perspective of evolution than the simplest bacteria in a mud puddle," Manes writes.

From there, he attacks what he calls reason: "a cherished principle of the Enlightenment . . . the pretensions of the major religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Institutional Buddhism." This also leads Manes to condemn less "radical" environmental groups, such as the National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, and Greenpeace: "On what grounds humans have the right, much less the obligation to control the planet remains a question largely unexamined by these thinkers. They usually place great emphasis on the uniqueness of human consciousness and reason, but why the possession of consciousness as opposed to the possession of feathers or poison fangs . . . bestows planetary hegemony as a matter of right is a consideration left to dangle."

For Manes, the "reason" argument comes from Kant and the Enlightenment. He finds no difference between reason and "ethical systems," or reason as defined and practiced by Plato, versus Kant. Thus, for Manes, reason "became a justification for exactly the kind of indignities to individuals it was intended to prevent. In its wake, the Nazis could fabricate an 'ethical system' that condoned persecutions and murders of Jews and other minorities by defining them as *Untermenschen*, subhumans, half-animals, bereft of the glorious rationality of the master race. . . ."

This also fits right in with Manes's views on "authoritarianism," a code word of the so-called Frankfurt School philosophy, to which Georg Lukacs and Michel Foucault, both favorably cited by Manes, adhere. He comments that "it is unpleasantly obvious that in today's corporate society, the monolithic, authoritarian form of technology predominates. Nobody asked society at large if it wanted nuclear power or DDT or asbestos insulation." Nobody asked society if it wanted euthanasia, deliberate famine, or AIDS, either.

Earth First! and natural law

Manes's philosophy seems to be a setup for his espousal of Earth First! and "ecotage." For example, Manes quotes William Ophuls, author of *Ecology and the Politics of Scar-*

city: "In a situation of ecological scarcity . . . the concept of inalienable rights, the purely self-defined pursuit of happiness, liberty as maximum freedom of action . . . all require abandonment if we wish to avoid inexorable environmental degradation and perhaps extinction as a civilization."

Having muddled a philosophical definition of reason, mis-defined the New Age, and denied man's unique role in creation, including St. Augustine and the Bible, Manes then justifies a "biocentric civil rights movement" with civil disobedience of the Earth First! sort. He cites the "necessity defense, which allows a person who breaks the law to be considered innocent if his or her actions were carried out with the reasonable expectation of preventing harm to others. The theory of natural rights was incorporated into the traditional civil rights movement, though purged of its Augustinian origins in the belief that reason was the key to discerning natural law."

For Manes, "ecotage also responds to principles higher than secular law in the defense of place."

He concludes by condemning the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, and industrial society, for alienating us "from nature and from each other." For Manes, the solution is "the deconstruction of civilization." "Our culture," Manes writes, "finds it all but impossible to face up to the terrible fact that a large percentage of humanity . . . may be subject to this kind of ecological redundancy. . . . Mass starvation is not a pleasant thought. But recognition that human populations are subject to the same ecological limitations as other living beings is necessary."

Or, as Earth First! would say, "Back to the Pleistocene!"

Declaring war on humankind

Then we have "eco-warrior" Dave Foreman, one of the founders of Earth First! (in 1981), who in his auto-philosophical book, talks about World War III: "the war of industrial humans against the Earth." Although Foreman seems less rabid than Christopher Manes, he makes it clear that he also considers Earth's fundamental problem to be "human overpopulation"; that the human race has exceeded "the carrying capacity of its habitat."

And to make sure that the "carrying capacity" remains limited, Foreman calls for locking up hundreds of millions of acres of land in the U.S. (to say nothing of Malaysia and other countries of the Third World, recent targets of Earth First!), including allowing land that has been "developed" in some fashion, whether that be a road traversing it, a dam, or national park, to "revert" to a former condition where the hand of man has not touched it, and won't be allowed to in the future.

He never discusses what the loggers in the Pacific Northwest will do to support their families when logging is stopped to save the spotted owl; or what people in the desert Southwest will do for water and electricity now provided courtesy of Glen Canyon Dam; or what people are going to eat if the livestock industry in the U.S. is shut down by prohibition of

grazing on public lands, or what will happen to the U.S. economy if no minerals are allowed to be extracted.

This is to say nothing of the effect on the economy of a nation like Malaysia, which is heavily dependent on timber harvesting, and whose people do not have a standard of living or quality of life nearly as high as the U.S.

For that matter, Foreman presents no scientifically based plan for how "endangered species" of animals, plants, etc. are going to be restored to newly designated wilderness areas. Or does he think the grizzly bears are going to organize the ecology?

Although Foreman states that he, being a "Deep Ecology" conservationist, has split from the group, he nevertheless spends quite a few pages defending Earth First!'s most loathsome practice, "monkeywrenching."

Monkeywrenching can be loosely defined as acts of vandalism in defense of the wilderness, and is supposedly not directed at humans: "Monkeywrenching, ecological sabotage, ecotage, ecodefense, or 'night work'—these are all terms for the destruction of machines or property that are used to destroy the natural world."

Since he states (with some truth) that "our system is far from democratic—owing to the excessive power wielded by wealthy corporations to influence politicians through campaign donations, and outright bribes," he then justifies monkeywrenching, especially tree-spiking. He defends tree-spiking in general, recounting what he says is the only instance that resulted in human injury: the Cloverdale, California sawmill incident in 1987, in which George Alexander was hit in the face by pieces of a saw blade that struck an 11-inch spike embedded in a redwood log. Foreman blames it on Louisiana-Pacific Lumber, which owned the mill, for not replacing a defective saw blade!

Foreman states that "those who support ecological sabotage in principle hold biological diversity and life in higher regard than they do inanimate private property." Apparently, he also holds this "principle" higher than human life itself. Like Christopher Manes in *Green Rage*, Foreman defends monkeywrenching and such activities as responding to the "higher values" that "conflict with the laws of a political entity."

He likens such sabotage to civil disobedience, e.g., the Boston Tea Party, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, or Mohandas Gandhi, these examples of trying to change laws which govern man. (He ignores that King and Gandhi were willing to die, and in fact did die, for their principles of nonviolence against the mankind Foreman abhors.) But because Foreman does not agree with anti-abortionists, whose stated goal is to preserve human life, Foreman won't allow their efforts to shut down abortion clinics to be counted as civil disobedience. To Foreman, saving the lives of unborn children and those living in poverty and misery, and just cleaning up our environment merely means that there will be less wilderness for the grizzlies and wolves to enjoy.