

## Earthy Realism

Edward James April 2014

Reviewing:

*Exploring Earthiness*

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Anne Primavesi's latest book is a magisterial treatment of how humans have over history alienated themselves from earth and look set for their destruction. She analyses this sad history and sketches possible ways of recovery under twelve headings. I aim to provide a terse summary of her argument.

- *Resourceful Earth.* The earth is the only source of support for our existence. We are made from earth and continually repaired and renewed through it. Philosophers separated the earthy body from a purer and higher mind which controlled it, and so they desacralised the earth. To save the earth their ego-centric, utilitarian hierarchical attitude must be deposed.
- *Disdained Earth.* Philosopher John Locke defined it as a duty that white businessmen should exploit the whole earth in order to 'improve' it. He also justified their incidental acquisition of unlimited wealth.
- *Appropriated Earth.* But the idea of the permanent ownership of property by a family and descendants had begun in 8th Century BCE, and has 'gained ground' through Locke's 'logical' arguments until now.
- *Reformed Earth.* The former sense of union with the Earth and especially with special 'holy' places was attacked by misinterpretations of Christianity which separated the vile earth from the pure soul which inhabits the bodies of humans only. So the Earth was available to be exploited as required by these superior human souls.
- *Classical Earth.* Plato's first extensive and coherent body of speculative thought led him to replace the indigenous wisdom of the ages with an abstract idea of 'reason'. He contrasted the earthy and mortal responder to spoken performance from the pure thinker in abstractions, who had an immortal soul, while Homer's false idea of 'heroic' warfare led to the present military-industrial complex.
- *Colonized Earth.* John Locke's 'logical' views were particularly acceptable in the American colonies, where land was taken over and the original inhabitants enslaved, followed inexorably by the destruction of plant and animal species and the growth of rich/poor disparities. John Locke himself profited through a company which imported more slaves, stolen from Africa.
- *Monetized Earth.* Money, effectively eternal in the form of Gold, enables the indefinite buildup of wealth. The complex inter-fused environment

was split falsely into separate parts, which could be activated with money.

- *Devalued Earth.* Money when used as a means of exchanging goods required for life is useful. But money regarded as property to be increased through usury has led to most of our troubles. The accumulation of new money from deploying only previously-owned money is fruitless and unjust – an illusion of increase which destroys community.
- *Marketised Earth.* The price paid for a society where everything is up for sale devalues the earth to the mere state of a 'human asset class'. The valuing of earth solely as 'property' has led to the marketisation of every aspect of the environment, so devaluing the intrinsic value of our planetary interdependent life.
- *Peaceable Earth.* While all great empires have preached peace through military conquest and the destruction of 'enemies', there have always been those aiming for peace through collaboration between all peoples and the environment. Jesus asked his listeners to pray for those who persecuted them. But then later Christians came to expect a Messianic King who would return to violent conquest, and the adoption of 'Christianity' by Constantine finally brought back military values.
- *One Earth.* In spite of these pressures, among some people the idea of a sole creator presaging the unity of all things living together in a unified Earth has somehow been kept alive.
- *Living Earth.* Looking beyond our globe, the Earth is so different from its sister planets – it gives life to all organisms, species and plants. Earth is not our property – it is our life and all that we have. The *Earth Charter* from the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, provided in the appendix, makes this clear.

The foreword to the book, by the foremost feminine theologian Kwok Pui-lan, shows that the developments which have led to the current disastrous path of the environment are exactly those which have also led to the subjugation of women. And, what many members of the Science and Medical Network may not appreciate, our own setbacks in trying to introduce the sense of the spiritual into our scientific and medical activities are also due to the same misconceptions in philosophy as those cited above. For us, the idea that the specialised activities of science and medicine can be kept 'pure' and separate from the rest of our everyday experience is what has to go.

Anne Primavesi provides a wonderful summation of the causes underlying our current malaise with respect to the environment, the wrong directions in current world policy now being followed so slavishly, and the new ways in which we may recover. The problem is that the time needed to recover may have already run out.