

Where does this leave us? On the one hand, we should not look to environmental cooperation for the promotion of interstate cooperation unrelated to natural resources use, or for the emergence of post-Westphalian modes of governance and political identity—particularly in regions where Westphalian states have yet to fully develop. On the other hand, several of the case studies indicate that *failure* to resolve highly salient natural resource conflicts may seriously obstruct efforts to resolve other issues. For the foreseeable future, then, the focus of “environmental peacemaking” should be making peace in environmental conflicts—a sufficiently ambitious goal in and of itself.

Kovel, Joel. 2002. *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing Ltd; and New York: Zed Books.

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Can The Leopard Change Its Spots?

In an era of media-spun promises of American-wrought liberty, economic growth and an “it-ain’t-so-bad-after-all” variety of anti-environmentalism, Joel Kovel’s *The Enemy of Nature* is a much needed counterpoint, an important attempt at truth-telling. His largely marginalized eco-political argument—that the ills of capitalisms and the ecological crisis are inextricably linked—is maybe not novel, but certainly worth repeating—and hearing.

The book’s fundamental argument is as follows: There is a growing amount of evidence for an accelerating deterioration of the Earth’s ecology. These deleterious changes are reaching global proportions and are likely to undermine the integrity of ecosystems and thus the very basis of life on Earth. The ultimate underlying cause for this ecodestruction is the now solely remaining economic system—capitalism—whose nature and goal is to grow and expand *ad infinitum*. Given this “cancerous” nature of the capitalist logic—carried out on the backs of workers turned into commodity—the system is fundamentally non-reformable and must be replaced if an ecologically viable foundation and human life with dignity is to be regained. The alternative is an essentially socialist society, whose members practice radical democracy, and value—above all—integrity of the ecological life world.

To make this argument, Kovel covers a lot of ground: instances of the environmental crisis, the prototypical industrial “accident” turned into ecological and human disaster, the false promises of capitalism, the nature of life and the question of human nature. He also reviews the fundamentals of Marxism, green and red philosophies, economies and reform movements less ambitious than his, the failures of “actually realized socialism,” and an odd garden variety of small enclaves of more or less successful evasions from the “capitalist force field.” That takes no small breath on behalf of the reader. Assuming good will—

it also takes considerable willingness to swallow sweeping scientific generalities and shortcuts through ecological complexities that occasionally amount to inaccuracies, as well as narrow, mono-causal historical explanations, and essentialist, sometimes unfair characterizations of philosophical and social movements. This, unfortunately, will create enemies where dialogue would be needed instead.

Thus, *The Enemy of Nature* falls short as an accurate scientific account, as a reliable history, and as a fair philosophical treatise. But is it at least good polemic? I choose three criteria to evaluate this question. First, does Kovel make a convincing case against the status quo and—if unchanged—its inevitable doomed trajectory? I tend to agree with his basic argument about the cancerous, ecodestructive, and exploitative nature of capitalism. What is far less convincing is that capitalism is non-reformable but socialism is, even though the alternative—ecosocialism—is as fundamentally different from the theoretical origins and the actually realized socialisms as it is from the actually realized market economy. The ultimate difference, after all, between the historically experienced and the envisioned future is a particular intentionality in people that shields them against the consumerist, profit-hungry, expansive tendencies fostered by the capitalist system (p. 194). If that is so, then Kovel is right that the new will be radically different from the old, but he maybe overshoots his case that the leopard can't change its spots.

The second criterion is whether his alternative vision, and the getting-there, are convincing. His ecosocialism is an internally consistent, logical derivative of all that he argues is wrong with capitalism. Pretty much every social ailment gets resolved and accounted for—from the exploitation of women to population growth to capital punishment to ecologically destructive behavior. But what about the transition to that society?! To be fair, who really can imagine a transformation (whether slow or revolutionary) of such magnitude? Kovel deserves credit for a fair amount of specificity regarding needed institutional changes, but he also displays a strange ambivalence about the role of religion, completely fails to discuss the monster's fierce resistance to its demise as rebellious forces rise and gather in strength, and—sadly—remains almost entirely silent about how people will change in those deep and fundamental ways (in their values, thinking, feeling and behavior) that is so essential to the transition and vision.

Finally, is Kovel's polemic work mobilizing or paralyzing? Maybe the answer here lies in the inherent leanings of the reader, much as his own confessions are those of a fundamentally optimist fighter for the higher good. One contradictory argument, however, is discouraging: on the one hand, for ecosocialism to not go the failed path of previous socialisms, people need to be fluent in the art of *Basisdemokratie* (e.g., pp. 200, 232f) by the time the revolution is to take place. Given the current state of media cooptation, political disenfranchisement, and—at least in the US—a largely bankrupt electoral system (something Kovel is clearly aware of), a flourishing bottom-up democracy will

certainly take considerable time to build. Time, however, and this is the contradiction, is the one thing he argues we don't have, if the ecological integrity of the life-support system is not to be eroded any further, possibly beyond repair.

And yet in the end I must agree with Kovel that despair is not a sustaining alternative choice. Simultaneously fostering radically different social and ecological alternatives seems a far better option than paralysis. "For what other generation has been given the chance to transform the relation between humanity and nature, and to heal so ancient a wound? What a fantastic challenge!" (p. 256).