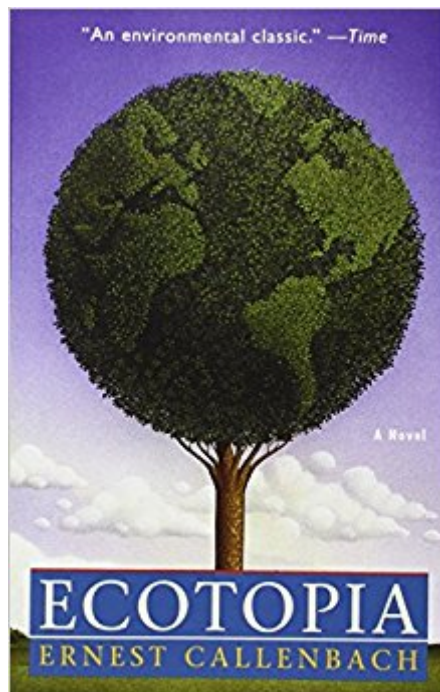


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Ecotopia



Synopsis

A novel both timely and prophetic, Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is a hopeful antidote to the environmental concerns of today, set in an ecologically sound future society. Hailed by the Los Angeles Times as the "newest name after Wells, Verne, Huxley, and Orwell," Callenbach offers a visionary blueprint for the survival of our planet . . . and our future. *Ecotopia* was founded when northern California, Oregon, and Washington seceded from the Union to create a "stable-state" ecosystem: the perfect balance between human beings and the environment. Now, twenty years later, this isolated, mysterious nation is welcoming its first officially sanctioned American visitor: New York Times-Post reporter Will Weston. Skeptical yet curious about this green new world, Weston is determined to report his findings objectively. But from the start, he's alternately impressed and unsettled by the laws governing *Ecotopia*'s earth-friendly agenda: energy-efficient "mini-cities" to eliminate urban sprawl, zero-tolerance pollution control, tree worship, ritual war games, and a woman-dominated government that has instituted such peaceful revolutions as the twenty-hour workweek and employee ownership of farms and businesses. His old beliefs challenged, his cynicism replaced by hope, Weston meets a sexually forthright Ecotopian woman and undertakes a relationship whose intensity will lead him to a critical choice between two worlds.

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Customer Reviews

"A classic of earth consciousness." — Denis Hayes, original coordinator of Earth

Day"Essential reading for all who care about the earth's future."--Fritjof Capra, author of The Tao of Physics and The Turning Point"None of the happy conditions in Ecotopia are beyond the technical or resource reach of our society."--Ralph Nader

"Callenbach gives us a vivid, comprehensive, positive vision of an ecologically sustainable world. essential reading for all who care about the earth's future."--Fritjof Capra, author of the Tao Of Physics and the Turning Point."A classic of earth consciousness."--Denis Hayes, Earth Day.Ecotopia was founded when northern California, Oregon, and Washington seceded from the Union to create a "stable-state" ecosystem: the perfect balance between human beings and the environment. Now, twenty years later, the isolated, mysterious Ecotopia welcomes its first officially sanctioned American visitor: New York Times-Post reporter Will Weston. Like a modern Gulliver, the skeptical Weston is by turns impressed, horrified, and overwhelmed by Ecotopia's strange practices: employee ownership of farms and businesses, the twenty-hour work week, the fanatical elimination of pollution, "mini-cities" that defeat overcrowding, devotion to trees bordering on worship, a woman-dominated government, and bloody, ritual war games. Bombarded by innovative, unsettling ideas, set afire by a relationship with a sexually forthright Ecotopian woman, Weston's conflict of values intensifies-and leads to a startling climax."None of the happy conditions in Ecotopisa are beyond the technical or resource reach of our society."--Ralph Nader

First read this nearly 30 years ago - I borrowed a copy from a friend and skimmed through it - I always wanted to reread it more thoroughly, but I sort of forgot about it. Reading that Ernest Callenbach had died put it back into my memory and I decided to see what 40 years would do to its vision. As anybody who has visited Portland can tell you, some of it has become real - and more of it should. Looking back, it seems funny that Callenbach has to explain what biodegradable means or that composting and recycling were once unknown. Though we are still learning that laws against victim-less crimes should be abolished.The "plot" to this story is largely superfluous - it follows that standard device of having a stranger going into an Utopia and describing it for people back home. This has been used as far back as Thomas Moores Utopia and in one of my favorite utopian novels, Island by Aldous Huxley. The stranger is usually converted to the utopian life. The story of how Ecotopia was created seems unlikely, but if you look at all the countries that have devolved since the mid 70s like the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and all the areas that would like to split away, like Scotland, Flanders, Catalonia and most certainly Kurdistan, then perhaps this is not so wild of an idea. A lot of people in Texas are always saying they want independence. At any

rate, what is important here is how a green society would work - Callenbach could have placed it on another planet for all the difference it would make (you know, like Pandora in Avatar). One of the things I like about Callenbach's proposed world is how it doesn't fit neatly into any currently existing political or cultural viewpoint. Or at least not any that will likely be allowed onto the pages of the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal. His ideas will resonate best amongst the outsiders and freethinkers across the social spectrum, whether they be left or right or neither. But before you laugh it off, remember; a lot of these things have happened or are happening now. Perhaps back in the early 70s, when this book was being written, they only seemed possible through secession, but now they are being implemented state by state. The next twenty years should be interesting - you can get a heads up by reading this book.

For anyone looking for books about a future that isn't dystopian (and those are rare books) *Ecotopia* is a good choice. Although it was written in 1975, the utopian description of a society in this book would still be considered a utopia today. And we have barely progressed during the last 40 years towards this utopian society. The writing style also makes it rich in descriptions of this society. Since it is written from the perspective of an outside journalist that is reporting back on how this society works, you'll find countless descriptions of how this utopian society works. It describes a society where sustainability is key. Sustainability is still key today.

Ah, but if we could actually build this society! *Ecotopia* is comprised of the States of Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. The California demarcation eliminates the southern part of the state. The new "country" actually builds walls and borders to keep others out, but since they are on the West Coast, they continue to have trade relations with the far east. They have corporate giants Boeing, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Apple, Intel, Weyerhaeuser, and Nike! They create a completely eco friendly society where everything is used, reused, recycled, or re-purposed. Even the paper money bio-degrades if it is dropped on the ground where microbes in the soil begin the process of degradation. The people are industrious, happy, healthy, and 100% committed to the eco friendly society. Trees are worshipped - And the President is a woman! Very well written, very fantastic, and very beautiful. A must read.

The author clearly had a lot of fun coming up with the details of the "utopia" described in the book. Many of the aspects of the society seem a bit unlikely-- and kind of inconsistent with human nature. But kudos to the author for coming up with something this detailed and more or less internally

consistent. Note that there isn't really much of a plot here. The book is really more of a set of "travel essays" and "diary entries" that discuss how the society work and that show the gradual shift of the main character from being a skeptic to a lover of the utopia.

Ecotopia is a novel for our times. With CalExit approved by about 30% of Californians it certainly illuminates a path to nationhood. This is a very enjoyable read.

I'm reading this book as a requirement for a class at UC Santa Cruz. Their guidance on what to focus on helped me enjoy the work much more. The handout read, "Utopias are never about a possible future; they are commentaries about the place in which the author has written". Therefore, Callenbach (indeed sometimes limited in his view), admires the various aspects of life in Northern California during the 1970's. However, one could narrow it to San Francisco, where much of the social/cultural attributes are outlined; One could also expand it to the entire range of Ecotopia (Washington border to Monterey), yet such homogeneity within so vast an area is, in my opinion, dubious. Obviously he isn't admiring everyone, so for sake of ease, I think I can narrow it down to the Progressives, the Hippies whose values parallel the native peoples, Conservationists, and the like. With this perspective on ways of living instead of focusing on the technology, the plot, and characters, the book shines as a dense collection of anthropological recording; which, when put together cohesively, creates Callenbach's ideal world. I don't advise expecting rich detail, moving characters, superb dialogue, startling plot, realistic circumstances, nor that everything is indeed perfect (ordinary people mess up, but Callenbach-confined to about 200 pages-leaves it out).

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