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Confessions Of A Recovering Environmentalist And Other Essays



Synopsis

A provocative and urgent essay collection that asks how we can live with hope in “an age of ecocide.” Paul Kingsnorth was once an activist—a can ardent environmentalist. He fought against rampant development and the depredations of a corporate world that seemed hell-bent on ignoring a looming climate crisis in its relentless pursuit of profit. But as the environmental movement began to focus on “sustainability” rather than the defense of wild places for their own sake and as global conditions worsened, he grew disenchanted with the movement that he once embraced. He gave up what he saw as the false hope that residents of the First World would ever make the kind of sacrifices that might avert the severe consequences of climate change. Full of grief and fury as well as passionate, lyrical evocations of nature and the wild, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist* gathers the wave-making essays that have charted the change in Kingsnorth’s thinking. In them he articulates a new vision that he calls “dark ecology,” which stands firmly in opposition to the belief that technology can save us, and he argues for a renewed balance between the human and nonhuman worlds. This iconoclastic, fearless, and ultimately hopeful book, which includes the much-discussed “Uncivilization” manifesto, asks hard questions about how we’ve lived and how we should live.

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Customer Reviews

“Kingsnorth writes with undeniable love: for the planet, for locations and histories, and for

people. . . . The overall effect is necessarily grim, but often remarkably uplifting as well. In a world on the brink of collapse, Kingsnorth offers humor, compassion, humility and wisdom. [Shelf Awareness](#) “A brilliant and sobering collection recommended for anyone, liberal or conservative, concerned about the runaway train of climate change. [Booklist](#) “Kingsnorth is a talented, engaging writer. . . . Every essay provides food for thought and given a chance, can rearrange the way you view things. . . . It could even change the way you decide to live. [The Ecologist \(UK\)](#)

Paul Kingsnorth is the author of *Beast and The Wake*, which was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize. He is cofounder of the Dark Mountain Project, a global network of writers, artists, and thinkers in search of new stories for a world on the brink.

The book is recently released, but written as a series of essays over time as Kingsnorth reflected on what our relationship to earth and its ecology really means. Kingsnorth’s novels are much more popular. So far this book is obscure. One reason is that he raps the shallowness of much of what passes for environmental activism. The book title suggests that Paul gave up being an environmentalist to happily frolic with prime polluters. Not so. He began to think about the environment systemically, coming to the conclusion that much of what passes for environmental action is grossly inadequate. We are deluded that if we just fix one major environmental problem, like excess CO2 emissions, all will be well. It won’t. We’re damaging the ecology in too many other ways. Loren Cole’s *Ecosystemology* brought Kingsnorth to mind. Major polluters come in for little excoriation. Kingsnorth shoots his arrows at environmental reformers still mesmerized by technical and economic progress. We have to work past some big delusions – that if we substitute clean energy for dirty energy we can continue merrily on our way. Or if we learn to recycle all materials, we can resume enjoying an ever-growing cornucopia of goodies. Kingsnorth concludes that the root of wild goose chases after geo-engineering miracles is a fundamental belief that drives technical civilization, from the coal mines of West Virginia to the “technium” of Silicon Valley – faith in never-ending progress in some form. Kingsnorth finds the myth of progress to be so pervasive that few environmentalists or ecologists can shake it. We have to believe in something, in some “better” tomorrow, in a future more pleasant than the present, in a less violent form of civilization where we all get to do more of what we think we want. Paul holds that civilization is tightly tied to the concept of progress. Breaking that

tie would force us to think about “uncivilization.” The book closes with Kingsworth’s Eight Principles of Uncivilization. They boil down to stepping outside the urbanized human bubble and engaging with the non-human world. The book leads up to Paul founding the Dark Mountain Project in 2009. The project is writers and artists dedicated to Uncivilization in the sense of changing the dominant narratives of industrial society. It began with a manifesto, a brash, clanging manifesto embellished with poetry. Only with new narratives will we find our way in world beset by damaged ecologies everywhere. The artists have not found narratives zingy enough to penetrate mainstream narratives yet, but they are working on it. A few people, here and there, are experimenting with less cushy, convenience-laden ways of living and more important, with a less progress-driven concept of what it means to be human. As if to illustrate the difficulty of escaping commercial thinking, I noted that the introduction of the book warned readers to beware of copying lest they infringe on intellectual property. Writers have to earn cash somehow, even if they live close to nature trying to be frugal and self-sufficient.

A great series of essays, especially for someone who is in the midst of re-discovering his own environmentalism. None are especially poignant or earth-shattering, but they are deep reflections of current issues we face in the world: technology, agriculture, forestry, population . . . I highly recommend this book for anyone who already has their feet in the waters of environmentalism, conservation, and preservation. Don’t expect to have a sharp shift of focus after reading the book, but do expect to have your beliefs challenged, and to think more deeply about your passions.

Read this engaging collection of essays then walk into a nearby forest, sit down and take hold of the Earth.

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