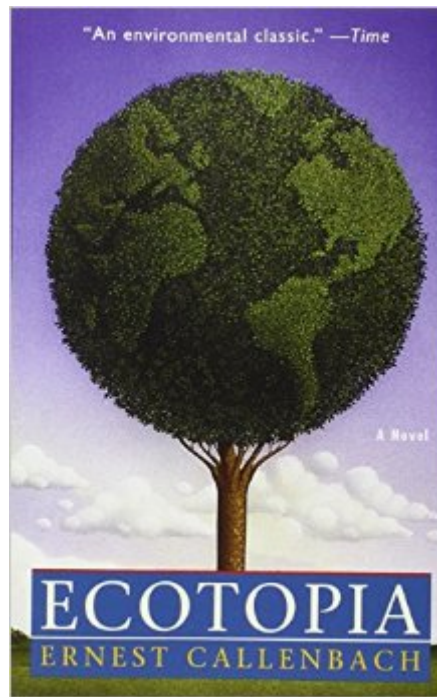


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Ecotopia



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.

Book Information

Paperback: 181 pages

Publisher: Bantam; Reissue edition (March 1, 1990)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0553348477

ISBN-13: 978-0553348477

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.5 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (111 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #82,771 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #173 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > United States](#) #254 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Conservation](#) #485 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Criticism & Theory](#)

Customer Reviews

This is one of those books that only a mother could love. This is one of my favorite books, but all the critical reviews are correct: the writing style flips back & forth between pretentious & wooden, the

characters either shallow or dopey (usually both). This book is no "A Tale of Two Cities." In fact, for this kind of story, Thomas Moore's "Utopia," Bellemy's "Looking Backward"--and probably everything written by Jules Verne are better stories....Way better (especially Moore, the grand-daddy of the genre). I still love this book, because of all that. When written during the 1970s, it was so "out there" for its time--that reading it now is terribly dated. It's almost like watching 1950s movies about space flight....But this book (in its own weird way) was an important book that helped inspire the environmental movement. No, it's not Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," but it reads a heck of a lot better than "Unsafe at any Speed." If you're in your forties (or older), and want a drift back to the "future" of 1970, or you're younger & want to know why your parents are so weird--Read this book. Or if you are an environmentalist, and want to know where your roots lie--this is a good book to read. But if you don't have any special interest, and are just looking for a ripping good yarn to pass a rainy Saturday afternoon....It's not this book, babe.

I read this book in the early 90's while living in Corvallis, Oregon. At that time you could see and experience bits and pieces of "Ecotopia" at Nearly Normal's restaurant, The Beanery, and New Morning Bakery. Callenbach takes communal eco-feminist ideas and extends them to imagine a new society based on them. I do not think I would like to live in Ecotopia. Parts of it appeal to me, parts of it don't. But it was well worth the visit. Ten years later I still think about this book, and recommend it. If you are an ideological literalist, don't go there. You won't like it. If you want to explore the consequences of ideas and values, you will find Ecotopia a useful place to think about the world as it is and the world as it could be.

This novel is a mixed bag, and it's stayed with me for some time since I first read it. On the plus side, I found the book an easy, wonderfully quick read, and a pretty good exercise of world-building. I also found much to like in Ecotopia's vision, such as its environmental policies and progressive educational system, etc. BUT...there is something decidedly specious about the ideals represented in the book, and in truth it was sometimes hard to tell if Callenbach was being sincere or satirical. Valid objections about the Ecotopian timeline aside, as well as its obvious hippy vintage, Ecotopia's almost enforced diversity--albeit in a non-bourgeois lifestyle--passive-aggression, and occasional totalitarian structure make even a tree-hugging, bleeding-heart liberal like me raise an eyebrow. Ecotopia sounds like a place that's better than Hell, but still ten floors below Heaven. Recommended, but with a grain of salt; definitely not a play-book for the perfect society.

This book has a fascinating history. Originally written as a news essay about the places to dispose sewage, it became one of the few viable utopian novels written since 1984 and Brave New World -- genuinely utopian, rather than anti-utopian. Of course, it's really about moving to Northern California in the 1970s, or Northern California as the Northern Californians hoped it would become. The internal combustion engine is outlawed, and babbling brooks flow down San Francisco's Market Street. Ecotopia's most engaging quality is the portrait that Callenbach provides of the golden young people of the counterculture, living the informal, thumb-your-nose- at-authority-but-build-a-world-together spirit that American culture had beaten down. (The spirit is mostly gone, but the novel remains.) Interestingly, Callenbach was a former Organizational Development consultant, and the corporations described in Ecotopia -- collaborative enterprises owned by the participants -- are not that different from the dot-coms of today.

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