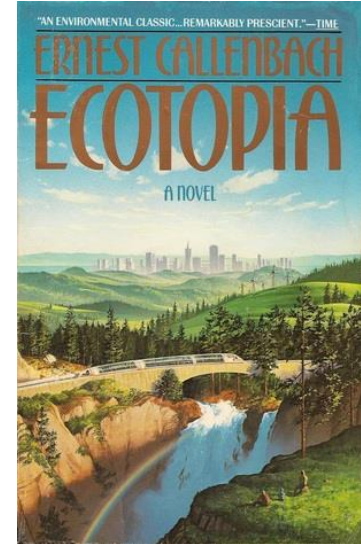
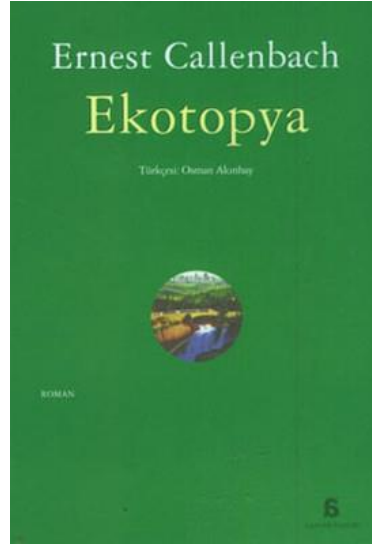


An Introduction to Callenbach’s Ecological Utopia: *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*

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Callenbach E. Ekotopya. Çev. Osman Akınhay. 2.

Basım. İstanbul; Agora Kitaplığı: 2010. p. 230.

“There are a lot more things about Ecotopia that the rest of the world needs badly to know.

Maybe I can help in that.” (pp. 230)

Ecotopia is a utopian novel written by Ernest Callenbach in 1975. Although some call it the first ecological utopia, some other works on which ecological topics and concerns were mentioned can be detected: William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) for example. The author, Ernest Callenbach (1929-2012) was a writer, film critic, editor and simple living advocate. Having connections with the green movement of his age, he was interested in green philosophy dealing with sustainability, renewable energy, conservation biology, ecology, etc. He also wrote a prequel of Ecotopia, *Ecotopia Emerging* (1981) in which he explains how Ecotopian society

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came into existence. Ecotopia made its author famous thanks to its international appeal. It is discussed by few that whether there is such a genre as ecotopia, the book can also be seen as ecotopian fiction as a subgenre of utopian fictions. However, it is not my aim here to delineate the conceptual or typological complexities of utopian writing, I only aim to make an eminently lucid statement to encourage the readers to be interested in the book. Hopefully, all the detailed conceptual, methodological, philosophical and social dimensions for this and many other books will be discussed in my thesis.

I read the book within the scope of a pilot study of my incoming thesis about animal ethics. I had the intention to seek out any implications or any considerations about the animals. Putting my aim aside, the book is very intriguing and delightful to read.

Ecotopia is set in 1999 and includes the daily writing and official telegraph reports of journalist William Weston. Events take place 25 years advance in the future, from the publication date of the book (1975). Weston is the first American journalist allowed to investigate Ecotopia after its separation as an autonomous country from America. At first, Weston had many prejudices sourcing from his fellow Americans that Ecotopians are barbarians and it is not safe to go there. A taxi driver, who drives the Weston to the Ecotopia border even mentions his fear to go near there. Weston is depicted as a so called typical materialist American who only consumes but produces very little/appreciates less.

Seen from his reports and diary writings, we learn the lifestyles of Ecotopians from many perspectives. As understood, Ecotopians, mostly sharing the same objectives with their decentralized government, aim to create a sustainable environment and a balance between themselves and the nature. They do not reject the use of high technology, as long as technology is in harmony with Ecotopian order and objectives. They regard any kind of technology as means to their ends. They have for example, a highly developed global video conferencing system that allows them to communicate on a mobile device. This is a big step for their age.

Weston gives detailed information about the social structure and contexts of their lives. They have a very advanced sewage system that almost recycles and redistributes all the waste. For

them, recycling and renewability are the core values. Their philosophy is that any material used should be recycled or should create little residue. They mostly make their homes from wood or recycled/recyclable materials. As they value the nature as itself, they do not prefer to paint their homes, use natural colors but not synthetic colorings.

They have a simple yet practical transportation system. Gasoline powered vehicles are mostly abandoned. Private vehicle ownership is limited. Although private cars are restricted, people do not prefer to buy cars or use high speed vehicles anyway. They prefer the handy magnetic train or electrical bus system. If it is convenient, they just prefer to walk.

In terms of their food choices, they don't seem to be vegetarians or vegans. They hunt and eat animals. However, they have a deep sense of gratitude towards all creatures, trees, animals etc. They hunt animals for food, fun, or to nourish their animal instincts. Their sportive mentality is far different than Americans of their age. They are not fanatics of any sport and do not watch basketball, football or hockey. Their sports mostly are kayaking, skiing, camping, fishery, jogging, swimming, sailing, tennis and chess. They look physically and mentally fit. They are chatty and friendly. Maybe it is due to the legalization of marijuana use, social relationships are loose, they have complete physical, social and sexual freedom.

On TV's, there are news, documentaries, discussion programs and some commercials. In Weston's words, Ecotopians value the idea and discussions on TV, not some cheap reality shows, soap operas etc. A 10-year-old in Ecotopia, *knows how to construct a shelter; how to grow, catch and cook food; how to make simple clothes; how hundreds of species of plants and animals live*. They teach surviving and craft skills along with classical curricula. Thanks to their labor system, they mostly prevented income injustice and were able to reduce their shifts to 4 hours in a day. Gender equality seems to be acquired; people see their biological sex as a gift of nature and gender roles are totally equalized. Their prime minister is a woman, even their leading political party is women led.

I would like to reserve an isolated paragraph for their health system. They have their Ecotopian style in healthcare. Their hospitals are generally small places unlike big modern hospitals in the

rest of the world. However, they do not lack any necessary equipment. They have x-ray units, operation rooms, anesthesia devices with all the others. Hospitals are clean and tidy. Nurses are specialized in particular areas, some are in therapeutic massage for example. Ecotopians are provided with a -from cradle to grave- insurance system. They feel confident that they will have the needed healthcare beyond economic doubts. Ecotopians have a determinist approach to death. Just like their American Indian ancestors, they value dying and die peacefully with their ecological religion. Their medical system prioritizes preventive medicine. All citizens have regular check-ups and none is hesitant to go to the hospitals of economic reasons. It can also be inferred that their healing practices might include sexual stimulation too, as observed from Weston's nurse in the hospital. However, this finding should be thought with their lifestyle in general. They have complete sexual freedom and non-monogamous relationships are welcomed.

From my readings with the animal ethics colored glasses, I concluded that Utopians seem not to be aware of animal ethics concepts such as like awareness, indirect/direct duties, autonomy, interests, respect, dying, consciousness, moral status, pleasure, pain, sensibility, inherent value, being subject of life, etc. However, not to be unjust to them, they have a deep sense of ecological balance. They even value trees, even though I didn't see any part that Ecotopians value animals, I can justifiably deduce that they also give "a" type of value to them. Characteristics of this "value" is not certain and described clearly though. They freely hunt and eat animals. However, it surely deserves a deeper look that they have some practices of animal welfare. It is important to understand their justifications in treating well to animals. I guess, for the animal ethics discussion, we have to go a little bit further for the animals from the state of "being ends in themselves" or "means to ends" for Ecotopian thought. I sense a scale of stands -not like white and black- in terms of valuing animals.

Ecotopia indeed is an interesting piece of work. I guess, what makes it exciting to read is not its literary style, but its imagination of an alternate world. A world where people seem to be happy. I understand happiness as a positive concept here as long as it is balanced throughout a lifetime. Ecotopians seem to find that balance within life. Their surroundings help them a lot in

sustaining that. Main values can be extracted from Ecotopia are that environmental and social stability, creativity, gender equality, freedom, protection of natural resources, health, discussion, joy, sustainability and balance. These are some but not all of course, these are the ones that I was able to deduct. More sophisticated readers surely would find many other connections and values.

Let's call it a happy ending: Weston falls in love with a Utopian woman, Marisa. His love for Marisa and Ecotopia encouraged him to stay there. In the end, he wrote back to his friend in *Times-Post* saying that he found his home and won't come back. I will leave the details of their romantic affair to the potential readers.

Utopias are alternative ideal designs. Writer's imagination of a perfect world could light the way to a better society, not for just humans, for all creatures too. I believe that Ecotopia can be read as an ideal of an alternative world to create a balance between people and nature. Although Americans are represented as materialist, consumerist and unfavored, I see no reason to limit these issues to mere nationalism but have plenty to extend it to a global supranationalism.