



EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want

Frances Moore Lappé

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In *EcoMind*, Frances Moore Lappé—a giant of the environmental movement—confronts accepted wisdom of environmentalism. Drawing on the latest research from anthropology to neuroscience and her own field experience, she argues that the biggest challenge to human survival isn't our fossil fuel dependency, melting glaciers, or other calamities. Rather, it's our faulty way of thinking about these environmental crises that robs us of power. Lappé dismantles seven common “thought traps”—from limits to growth to the failings of democracy—that belie what we now know about nature, including our own, and offers contrasting “thought leaps” that reveal our hidden power. Like her *Diet for a Small Planet* classic, *EcoMind* is challenging, controversial and empowering.

EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want Details

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From Reader Review EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want for online ebook

Linda says

A call to work together to save our planet rather than spending time calling out those who are abusing our world. It is truly only everyone working together that will solve our problems.

Julie says

Refreshing perspective on our current environmental crises. This book was way more optimistic than other 'green' reads. Recommend it!

Linda Harkins says

Excellent research. Utopian ideas. Not as revolutionary, in my opinion, as her Diet for a Small Planet.

Nilagia says

This book was fascinating, and the lessons it teaches are useful just not for discussing how we can go about tackling the numerous environmental crisis the planet faces, but also many social ills. Through a combination of stories about environmental advances in other countries that one hardly ever hears about in the news, and an analysis of the "thought traps" that lead many people to feel there's no way the U.S. can change it's direction, she imbues the reader with a sense that all may not be quite lost -- if enough people wake up, real change in environmental policy can happen.

This book is also great at connecting the dots between economics, politics, the environment, sociology, and psychology. Just one example: many people in the U.S. lament the fact that green energy just can't get a fair shake because of the influence of big oil -- and they so shrug off any thoughts that another way may be possible -- or they assume that the only way that they can exert any power is as a consumer. Moore Lappe insists that what this really demonstrates is that many in the U.S. have given up on the possibility of a real democracy. When we start thinking that the only way we can vote is with our pocketbooks, and that politicians just won't respond to our demands, we have in effect given up on our duties as participants in a democracy. She sites several example, both in towns in the U.S. and abroad, where concerned citizens have come together and made real changes.

Interestingly enough, she also discards many of the tropes coming from the environmental movement that often discourage people from taking action -- we're all consuming too much and need to stop, we'll have to sacrifice the progress that's been made, we need to transition to a no-growth economy, etc, to save the planet. She argues that scolding people is no way to get them to change their behaviors, and yes, while some changes in behavior may be needed, many people in this country are already doing without, and blaming the average person is no way to create a positive change. Instead we should focus on how we can grow smarter,

make our communities greener, and focus on the positives that a green lifestyle can bring.

Overall, a very rich book full of original, thought-provoking ideas.

Ahmed says

An excellent book if judged by what it is and not what one would have wished it to be. It is about possibilities, possibilities that open up only beyond the current binary thinking that plagues most current discourses regarding politics and the environment. Many want a book with prescriptions and concrete "solutions"; that is not what this book offers nor what one should ask any single writer, scientist, or activist to formulate. Lappé correctly points out that big v. small gov, left v. right, growth v. sustainability, vegetarians v. omnivores, are misleading dichotomies that only stifle our creativity in meeting the new economic and ecological challenges. She then offers some examples of several communities who have thought creatively and constructively to both become more sustainable and more prosperous, not as specific prescriptions to imitate but as examples to follow. For these alone it deserves a read.

Regina says

It is so nice to find a book dealing with climate and politics that doesn't seek to blame and offers positive solutions.

Emily says

Well, she's good at reframing the argument, but the author offers few concrete solutions and this book reads more like a wishy-washy book of spirituality. Yes, let's focus on community and creativity, but give us more to go on. I skimmed this book instead of reading it because I found little to sink my teeth into.

Friederike Knabe says

For quite some time, Frances Moore Lappé has been a household name among those concerned with the global crises around food, poverty, and the environment. Her book, *Diet for a Small Planet*, published in the nineteen seventies, became a world-wide success. Since then, climate change has emerged as an additional, if not all-encompassing, crisis. Among the many authors writing on this range of topics, Lappé, award winning author with eighteen books to her name, educator and activist, stands out not only for her thorough and broad-based and cross-cutting analysis of the roots of hunger, poverty and environmental crises but also for her engaging reflections on solutions that are emerging worldwide through what she calls "Living democracy", initiatives that are based in and growing out from communities - from the bottom-up. In her new book, *EcoMind*, she presents, among other concerns, a convincing case that "world hunger is not the result of food shortages" but of a lack of sustained access by poor and marginalized people to the means of adequate food production and/or food supplies. Her central argument is that "solutions to global crises are within reach [...] the challenge for us is to free ourselves from self-defeating thought-traps so that we can bring these solutions to life."

EcoMind is structured around seven "thought traps" which the author discusses in turn, providing numerous examples that give context and depth to her arguments. The traps, Lappé finds, hold "widely held environmental messages and related ideas - some of them largely unspoken assumptions - that now shape our culture's responses to the global environmental and poverty crises." They range from "no growth" as the only way forward, to the inherent problems of our "consumer society", to the limits of the earth's resource capacity, to "it is too late" for meaningful action. For the author, these perspectives are not helpful in tackling our current world crises, in fact they have a "negative and defeating influence on us, preventing us from seeking solutions." How to reach real and meaningful solutions is Lappé's primary interest and motivation.

Quoting Anais Nin's "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are." as a starting point, Lappé posits that our minds cannot see "any unfiltered reality". We see our world through "a largely unconscious mental map, made up of the big ideas orienting our lives." The outcome is that among all our experiences we also fit our perspectives on the current global crises into the existing mental map. Lappé encourages us with her book, and in particular with the many positive initiatives in problem solving and local solutions, to challenge our mental map into new ways of seeing and understanding. Each chapter on one of the thought traps ends with a series of positive examples for change that she summarizes under the heading "thought leaps". Lappé strongly argues that it is possible to change the way we think about problems that appear unsurmountable. Understanding problems as challenges we can reframe them in ways that enable us to break them down into manageable parts and that enable us to act. EcoMind is full of encouraging initiatives. For example, on the subject of NO GROWTH vs. GROWTH, the author argues that rather than accepting no growth as a necessary future strategy for our economies, we have to move towards growth that "enhances the quality of our lives and our ecosystem." We have to understand humanity as part of the ecosystem and not outside it, in fact, we individually and together need to develop "ecominds" and think as an ecosystem, learning to view the challenges we face from that overriding perspective.

The fundamental question then remains is whether we can remake our mental map. Lappé brings many examples where this is already happening, whether among the farmers in India or West Africa or among our own societies. We are motivated to follow suit. For some readers, the author may sound too optimistic in this regard. However, her arguments are compelling and show a way forward that is worth serious consideration and participation. If nothing else, even for the sceptic this is a book rich in food for thought.
[Friederike Knabe] [Comments \(9\)](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Most recent c](#)

Morgan says

EcoMind is about how using systems thinking can change the way people approach environmental issues. The author seems to be writing half to current environmental activists and half to the general public.

To the environmental activists, the author explains that many of the tropes common in talk about the environment make it more difficult for the general public to join in. To the general public, the author describes a lot of concrete ways that a shift in thinking can generate new ideas about how to make an impact in environmental issues.

The book is very hopeful, without avoiding the dire straits that the world is in. While the book acknowledges that it's too late to prevent a change in climate, it argues that we can still impact how the world develops and make things as good as they can be. The book also argues that living in an environmentally sustainable manner can be just as (if not more) satisfying as our current way of life. We don't have to give up creature

comforts in order to improve our world.

Seven common myths about the environment are presented. These myths are mostly based on ideas of too much vs not enough. Too much carbon, too much consumerism, not enough oil, not enough food. According to the book, the main issue is how the systems of the world are organized. It's not that we have too much carbon going into the atmosphere, it's that the input doesn't match the output. It's not that we don't produce enough food, it's that the food isn't well distributed and there's a lot of waste. By thinking of these problems as a system within a specific context, it's easier to find solutions to problems that make everybody better off. Many specific examples of people solving these problems on small and large scales are presented.

Jennifer says

I finished the book this week and went Lappe give a book talk about this book on Thursday evening in Brookline. I have been a Frances Moore Lappe fan for a long time and was very happy with this book. Now I'd like to read more from other authors (philosophy or psychology or economics) about the importance of "frames of mind" -- how the way we think affects the world around us. I like the concept of frames of mind (which I first encountered in her book "Getting a Grip" and would like to apply it to more areas of work.

I agree with the idea that the fear of scarcity can be an unproductive thought trap -- the fear that there can't be enough food or land or resources to take care of everyone, or the fear that there aren't enough options to address climate change, or many other not-so-productive fears - can create a state of inaction.

I loved the last chapter about "thinking like an ecosystem." I recently noted to a friend that the "voluntary" things we might do, like conserving energy or buying fair trade products, will have positive impacts on the world (or lack of action can have negative impacts) that can come back to directly impact the taxes we pay, the job market we face and other direct connections to our own lives.

Nurete says

This is really a very strange book. There was no logic to it until I realized that this is a book about branding not a book about environmentalism.

The author talks about "thought traps." The first "thought trap" is that No Growth is the answer. So, first she says that "no-growth" is a depressing message, then she proceeds to explain all the reasons why we can't grow our economy anymore and then concludes with - therefore we don't need to talk about "no growth" anymore.

Then she does the same with consumerism. She calls it a "thought-trap" to talk about consumerism being a problem. Then the entire chapter is about all the multiple ways in which consumerism really is a problem although she also says it goes much deeper than consumerism. Meaning, it's our whole economic system that's the problem (which I agree with), not just consumerism. Thus - she concludes - it's not consumerism that's the problem.

Like I said, the logic of the book escapes me.

But her point about the messaging of environmentalism is well taken. If we depress people too much, they will just give up all hope and eschew activism.

Kate Lawrence says

Scientists are telling us a lot of depressing news these days about climate change, species extinction, overpopulation, and dwindling resources. Plus, we have unrestrained corporate power, vast wealth disparity, and workers in crisis. It can seem hard to stay hopeful and engaged--until, that is, you encounter Lappe', who has taken on the role of cheerleader to show us positive signs. The book is a litany of new ideas small groups of people all over the world have implemented to achieve better outcomes. They're all small-scale now, but Lappe urges us to consider how they could be more widely applied.

What I liked about the book was the way Lappe' doesn't blame, but instead looks behind the disturbing statistics at how our current policies allowed these things to happen, and how those policies could be changed. She examines both the positive and negative sides of human nature, and considers ways to increase the helpful human qualities like empathy and cooperation, and decrease the destructive qualities like greed and violence. Whether or not the reader agrees with her approach, it is clear that Lappe's voice is not just more of the same, and that she has spent a lot of thought and energy finding and sharing positive outcomes.

Tasha Raymond says

6/12/12 - While I'm still reading EcoMind I had to put down some of my initial thoughts. It might seem cliche to say this, but this book has been eye-opening for me. Two of the concepts that Lappe has so far covered, the thought traps of no-growth being the answer and consumer society being the problem to our climate and pollution issues, were tings that I had never really thought about. I've always been iffy on the no-growth idea, and I had the mindset that consumer society was one of the bigger problems. In now reading and meditating on that last part, I have to agree with Lappe that it's not the consumer society but *what* is being consumed, how, and the means that it is created by.

6/20/12 - Finished this read a couple days ago. I have to say that there's a lot that will resonant with me and that I will be thinking about for a while now, especially how many people, including myself, feel that it's too late to save our planet and that it is this form of mindset that is really causing people to hold back from doing what they can as often as they can. Definitely a thought-provoking read.

Kelly Kole says

Great book great incite and as a group we should really be motivated by the change we can make on our planet. We are part of the human race but we are also part of the planet and nature and all that grows lives. This is a great reference to find out more then you think you might know.

April Dickinson says

For someone with eco-anxiety, this was just what I needed! This book is filled with not just hope, but with concrete examples of changes that people and governments have made to reduce their climate impact. Her research includes rural villages in India, urban California, and tribal communities in Africa. I love that she

didn't limit her view to a western concept of environmentalism. It's not all about solar panels and electric cars. I highly recommend this book if a need a strong dose of climate optimism!
