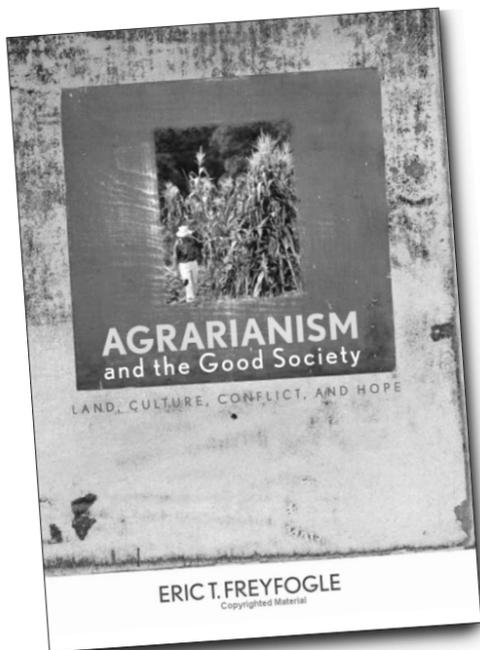


REVIEWS



Agrarianism and the Good Society: Land, Culture, Conflict, and Hope

Eric T. Freyfogle
Lexington, KY:
The University Press of Kentucky, 2007
182 pp., \$30.00, hardcover
ISBN: 978-0-8131-2439-1

I read environmental publications like *Voices from the Earth* or *Utne Reader* from time to time, but normally I would not read a book with a title like *Agrarianism and the Good Society: Land, Culture and Hope*. I sometimes feel inadequate when delving into the environmental movement world because I have not kept up on the latest piece of legislation, scientific announcement, or economic incentive. But *Agrarianism and the Good Society* sounded metaphysical enough for my mature tastes, with nuts and bolts for daily decision making...it was this and more.

After being thoroughly and honestly welcomed by author Eric T. Freyfogle into each of the worlds he calls chapters, I learned that my perceived lack of confidence in understanding the state of our land, air, and water is false. My moral pain is common as we reflect on our planet, our mother, our earth. According to Freyfogle, it is this morality that should be redefined and put in the forefront of environmental work, and that scientific facts of doom and gloom will not energize this calling. To sustain and revitalize our communities, which are made up of people and nature together, is moral and the "right thing to do" — the nature of a "good society."

Freyfogle marries literature and non-fiction, art and politics, to convince us to change our ways of thinking. He displays the many ways culture (literature and people) and nature (changes) try to tell us how and why to do the good thing... the right thing. Chapters vary with themes of community land health, private property being almost in our DNA; individualism; putting people back in the nature, the conservation equation, and tips on how to persist in environmental work.

Agrarianism discusses these reoccurring themes using cues from literature — Huck Finn, Jayber Crow, and *Cold Mountain*. He exposes some beautiful and painfully well-designed truths in these stories. He compares the characters of Wendell Berry and Mark Twain, in that both focused on adventure, liberation and individualism. But it was Jayber who chose to return home to his community, even if his silence is not enough for Freyfogle or his community. Freyfogle memorialized the agrarian novel *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier, dissecting the acts of Ada, Inman, Veasey, and Ruby as nature guides for healing, rebirth and community building.

His criticism of the history of organizations in the conservation/environmental movement is that there has been much division.

Groups push in different directions, competing for dollars and supporters. Rarely do they speak with a common voice. Most troubling is the movement's lack of an overall goal, a clear vision for how people ought to live so as to respect nature adequately. We hear about clean air and clean water; we hear about the need to protect rare species and the wisdom of health food. But what about the land itself, the working landscapes where people live?

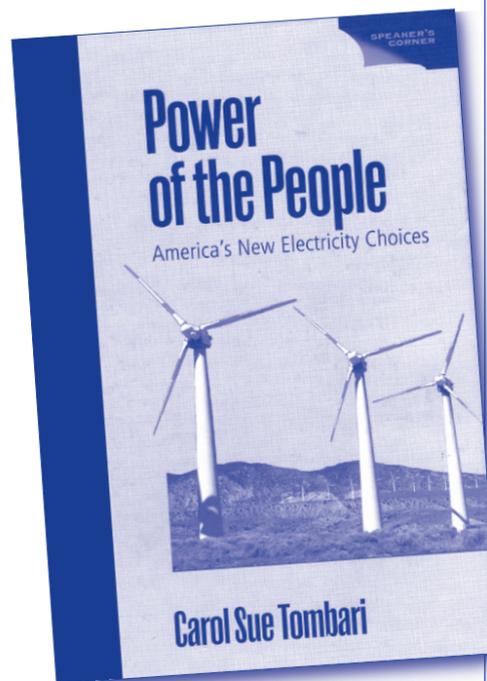
Yet perhaps one more criticism that Freyfogle does not mention is the effect of environmental disasters on poor communities with disproportionate numbers being people of color — environmental racism and injustice — with the Hurricane Katrina disaster being just one incident.

Agrarianism and the Good Society is full of reminders and guides calling the people of the United States to awaken to their environmental predicament in its ecological and cultural complexity. It stimulates a yearning for better ways of dwelling on land and living with one another, provoking more love and more democracy.

Freyfogle is relaxed, informed, and confident in his gift to us. He is realistic when saying that opponents to community land health movements cannot be seduced by moral arguments of integrated wholes (holistic approaches). He suggests we pursue and view information on environmental problems, cultural beliefs, land use practices, free market, science, public governance, higher education, and private property as all important traps and distractions from our real goal: responsibility to the context, the community, the self. *Agrarianism and the Good Society* is a reminder that our goal is to move from Homeland Security, to Homeland Health. It is the freedom that we have to act together.

— BEVA SANCHEZ-PADILLA

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Power of the People: America's New Electricity Choices

Carol Sue Tombari
Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008
195 pp., \$14.95, paperback
ISBN: 978-1-55591-626-8

Carol Sue Tombari works at the U.S. Department of Energy National Renewable Energy Laboratory and previously worked on state energy policies, so she is familiar with current energy policies and developing technologies. This readable book first focuses on describing the present electricity situation in the U.S., what the author calls a "large expensive, complex, stressed, and aging electricity system" that has not adapted to changing times and needs. The last third of the book discusses how to bring about the "urgent evolution" of having renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies play increasingly larger roles in providing electricity. She envisions that in 30 years or less many people are living in homes with photovoltaic arrays on the roof, driving a hybrid or fuel cell car, with community scale wind turbines nearby, having a hydrogen underground storage tank, and still a connection to a utility grid, which sometimes provides electricity and sometimes gets power from the house.

Regarding the current electricity situation, the author discusses the good and bad of the three major sources — coal, nuclear fission, and natural gas — that provide 90 percent of the power. She makes the important point that while renewables provide power intermittently, coal and nuclear base load plants are wasteful because they operate 24 hours a day, even in the night time "valleys" when much of the electricity is not used. Coal will continue to provide the massive amount of base load electricity "well into the twenty-first century"

because there are "no immediately available, affordable, and reliable alternatives." She writes that the nuclear power bottom line is whether "the benefits of nuclear power outweigh the risks and costs? The verdict to date in the United States has been no." Natural gas will continue to be costly, but she believes that blending it with renewables to address its intermittent nature "should make economic sense."

Tombari's conclusion: "The technologies and resources exist for us to use energy efficiently and to start the switch to clean, domestic, renewable energy resources. These alternative technologies are affordable. Moreover, if we accounted for all of the costs of today's energy technologies (e.g., military costs to secure supply lines, environmental and health costs associated with coal, and so forth), the alternatives would actually be cheaper than the conventional choices. The bottom line is that we need to start thinking — immediately and seriously — of the cost of not changing our energy ways."

Tombari writes that the future change requires "a combination of policies, markets, and technologies. All three will be necessary.... My own sense is that, given our current situation, forward movement will start with property aligned policies, both public and private....in order to jump-start markets that will stimulate, support, and sustain further technological innovation and development."

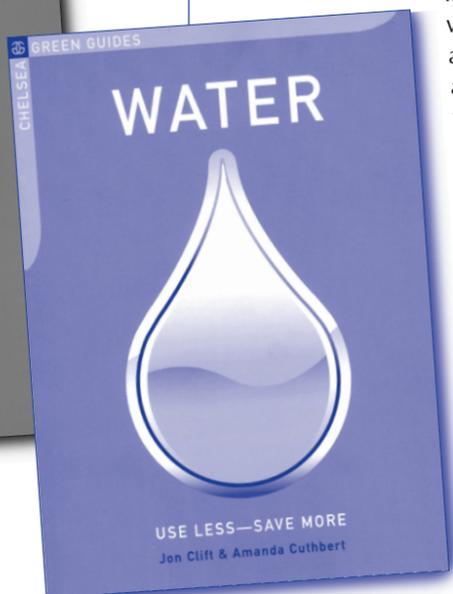
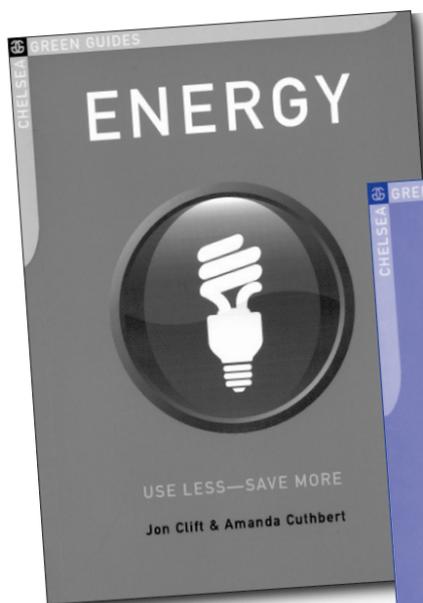
She notes that past public policy has made a huge difference in why renewables are not more advanced in the U.S. In 1981, President Reagan slashed federal spending for solar research and development, other technologies, and state energy offices that had a goal of reducing dependence on foreign oil and diverted funds "to another national security objective: outspending the Evil Empire in the arms race."

Like other experts, Tombari emphasizes that energy efficiency is the quick, affordable resource now. And she urges people to get involved in changing their own behaviors to use less energy, to be involved in regulatory decisions, and to urge legislative changes.

The author writes knowledgeably, except when she briefly writes about nuclear waste, which she does not know well, and mistakenly states that the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant nuclear waste disposal facility is related to commercial power waste and that it has been open for 20 years. It is only for nuclear weapons waste and opened in 1999.

— DON HANCOCK

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Chelsea Green Publishing introduces us to saving energy in our homes with their new *Chelsea Green Guides*. Two of their guides, *Energy* and *Water*, are probably the most important books in the series for those of us in the Southwest. With the costs of energy going up, and water a very precious commodity, conservation is a very logical goal.

Energy begins with a mini energy audit, giving the energy usage breakdown of many common household appliances. While a low-energy light bulb (i.e. compact fluorescent) only uses on average 11 watts used per hour, a conventional light bulb uses 100. But did you know your dishwasher averages 1,000 watts, and if you are feeding a crowd and have an electric stove and are using every burner and the oven, you are using 11,500 watts per hour?

But this book shows you how to save energy, broken down into 100 different tips. The tips are sorted by chapters/subjects: Home and water heating, lighting, cooking, washing dishes, etc. The majority of tips in the book cost no money, but save you money in the long run. Doing things like turning down the thermostat by 2°F in the winter, adjusting the thermostat of your hot-water tank (140°F works just fine), waiting until your dishwasher is full before running, and turning off chargers to cell phones

and laptops when not in use. Other tips cost some money, but you will see the benefit in your energy bills. Insulation — in walls, ceilings, along baseboards and outlets — will decrease your energy use, saving you money when heating and cooling. Even insulating your hot-water tank and any plumbing related to hot water saves money. And remember, when it comes time to replace your appliances —

even your hot-water tank — consider buying energy efficient models. Saving money and conserving energy should be something each of us strives for. In addition, *Energy* gives some basics on renewable energy options, advice on rebates and incentives for homeowners to insulate their homes, and a list of resources if you would like more information.

Did you know that 95% of the water used in the homes goes down the drain? And that only 3% is used for “drinking.” It’s no wonder that water use has gone up 127% since 1950. And this is only going to rise as our population (especially in the arid Southwest) increases. Many communities in the Southwest are already feeling these pressures, beginning summer water rationing plans to help conserve this precious resource. Some cities, like Santa Fe, NM, even banned outdoor watering during severe drought conditions.

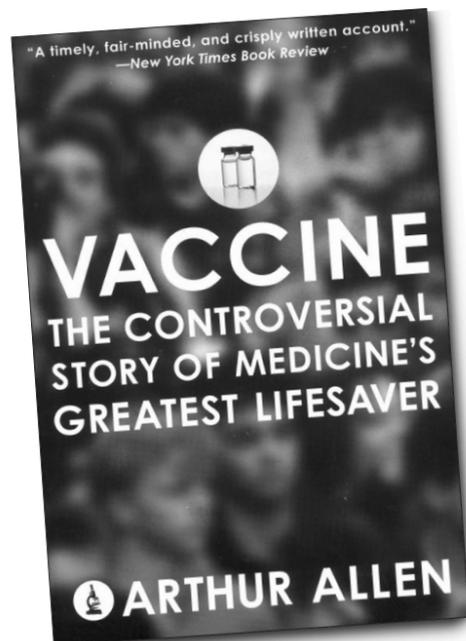
The *Water* guide was written to help us change these trends. It is also broken down into 100 different tips. It is designed to help us save money (for those who pay for their water), and conserve water (forestalling water shortages, water rationing, and reductions to our groundwater levels). Think of all the places you use water: the kitchen, bathrooms, toilets, gardens, cars, and more. *Water* gives you conservation options. Some of the tips are simple: never leave a tap running, store drinking water in your refrigerator to keep cold, take a shower instead of a bath (conserving 20-30 gallons), collect rainwater for use in your garden, and (if you must) wash your car at home rather than at a carwash. Others require some additional effort (but are still quite doable): using grey-water (use only on flowering plants, never fruits and vegetables), replacing your toilet with a dual-flush or low-flush toilet, composting kitchen scraps, and mulching your garden. Lastly, *Water* asks you to take a global view of water. In many parts of the world, water is extremely scarce. While many in this country take for granted the easy access of water, global climate change may change this picture for all of us. Also, many do not see the water

“wars” that go on in this country — states, especially in the West, are struggling to make sure that they have enough water for the ever-increasing populations. These efforts could get much worse if we do nothing to change our outlook on water.

These *Chelsea Green Guides* are excellent, easy to use primers on conservation. These guides would be excellent gifts for new homebuyers, and helpful basics for those who want to learn to save money and save the planet at the same time. Another great strategy would be for realtors/housing developers who specialize in green building to give these Green Guides as gifts to home buyers — the perfect way of practicing what you preach.

— ANNETTE AGUAYO

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Vaccine:
The Controversial
Story of Medicine's
Greatest Lifesaver

Arthur Allen
New York: W.W. Norton, 2007
523 pp., \$17.95, paperback
ISBN: 978-0-393-33156-1

Vaccines have both a lifesaving, and a life-destroying, connotation today. There is a debate going on over the necessity to immunize children. On the pro side many fear that without vaccinations, once deadly childhood diseases will make a comeback. While those on the con side fear that it is the vaccines that are causing newer, more devastating illnesses. The debate rages on the internet and in national publications, each side sure in its beliefs. In *Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver*, Arthur Allen looks at the history, and politics, of this procedure.

Vaccine is divided into three sections: “Origins” (discovery and development), “Golden Age” (vaccines for all manner of diseases), and “Controversy” (current battles against vaccines). Origins reports that in the early 1700s in Britain and the U.S., a technique started called “variolation,” which was used millennia earlier in Asia. Vaccination as we know it began in 1800 when Edward Jenner, an English country doctor, became intrigued with an old rhyme about milkmaids and how they avoided getting smallpox by getting cowpox, a milder form. Jenner developed what he called vaccination that utilized cowpox, a technique that he viewed as similar, but better than variolation.

The Golden Age began in the post-World War I years. Soldiers were vaccinated, and trust in science and medicine was at an all-time high. It was patriotic to vaccinate — protect our home front as our boys were overseas protecting our country. Allen looks at the other scientists and doctors involved in the battle for a better vaccine — Jonas Salk, Albert Sabin, and others. He also discusses the fact that, at that time, manufacturers were not often “clean” places, and that many vaccinated people were essentially guinea pigs, because safety and testing procedures are a relatively new phenomenon.

Finally, Allen dissects the controversy of mercury (thimerosal) in vaccines and autism — while early studies showed a link between vaccines and autism, recent studies show little relationship. He also supports more legal protections for vaccine developers as more parents join the anti-vaccine movement.

While I enjoy reading just about anything in the health arena, I had a love/hate relationship with this book. I loved reading about the history of vaccines, even though Allen made it difficult to follow by jumping around from era to era. But it was Allen’s descriptions of the anti-vaccine people that stopped me. Allen should have focused more on the factual information to counteract their views — the new outbreaks of whooping cough and measles and the fact that autism numbers are rising even though thimerosal is no longer being used (except in flu vaccines).

Instead, he resorted to belittling descriptions of parents who truly feel their children were harmed. Allen states in his introduction that: “...this book makes an assessment that is as fair as I can make it ...I do, however, bring personal agendas to this book.” These “personal agendas,” some of which he describes, made it difficult to read the Controversy section. I wonder if there are other studies/cases he left out that may be contrary to his “agenda.”

— ANNETTE AGUAYO

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