



Thinking like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature (MIT Press)

By Steven Vogel

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Environmentalism, in theory and practice, is concerned with protecting nature. But if we have now reached "the end of nature," as Bill McKibben and other environmental thinkers have declared, what is there left to protect? In *Thinking like a Mall*, Steven Vogel argues that environmental thinking would be better off if it dropped the concept of "nature" altogether and spoke instead of the "environment" -- that is, the world that actually surrounds us, which is always a *built* world, the only one that we inhabit. We need to think not so much like a mountain (as Aldo Leopold urged) as like a mall. Shopping malls, too, are part of the environment and deserve as much serious consideration from environmental thinkers as do mountains.

Vogel argues provocatively that environmental philosophy, in its ethics, should no longer draw a distinction between the natural and the artificial and, in its politics, should abandon the idea that something beyond human practices (such as "nature") can serve as a standard determining what those practices ought to be. The appeal to nature distinct from the built environment, he contends, may be not merely unhelpful to environmental thinking but in itself harmful to that thinking. The question for environmental philosophy is not "how can we save nature?" but rather "what environment should we inhabit, and what practices should we engage in to help build it?"

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Editorial Review

Review

Can there be environmental philosophy after the end of nature, a philosophy without romantic idealization of an authentic natural order? Steven Vogel's brilliant new book, *Thinking like a Mall*, offers just such a philosophy. It is the environmental philosophy for our time.

(Andrew Feenberg, Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of Technology, Simon Fraser University; author of *Between Reason and Experience* and *The Philosophy of Praxis*)

A quarter-century after Bill McKibben published *The End of Nature*, our society remains stubbornly committed to the idea that 'nature' can be something both completely independent from, and a guide for, human action. In *Thinking like a Mall*, Steven Vogel offers a systematic elaboration of a 'postnaturalist' environmental philosophy. Vogel's compelling and accessible argument for an environmentalism that is more self-conscious and democratic deserves to be widely read.

(Andrew Biro, Professor, Department of Politics, Acadia University; author of *Denaturalizing Ecological Politics* and *Critical Ecologies*)

A veritable tour de force, Steven Vogel's lucid and provocative *Thinking like a Mall* challenges environmentalists to drop their nostalgia for nature and get to work saving the actual postnatural environment that we inhabit. This major contribution from one of environmental philosophy's leading lights offers a timely and incomparable guide not only for how to think about the world, but also how to change it.

(Ted Toadvine, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies, University of Oregon; author of *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*)

This powerfully executed book is a Rorschach test. It will divide environmentalists between those who will find it outrageous and those who will see it as compelling -- finally offering a way out of the frustrating illogic of appeals to 'nature.' The heart of this book, however, is a story of hope. For Vogel, like it or not, the world is what we have made of it. We must bear that responsibility. The fate of the Earth must be settled through democratic politics and concerted, cooperative, action.

(Andrew Light, University Professor of Philosophy and Public Policy, George Mason University; former Senior Climate Change Adviser, U.S. Department of State)

About the Author

Steven Vogel is Professor of Philosophy at Denison University and the author of *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*.

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Holly Hughes:

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Meredith Bailey:

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