

There Are Solutions

Highlights from *The Environmental Solution* by Michael Wright (Dayananda)

The Environmental Solution challenges modern global culture and empirical science. It provides the foundation for a social manifesto. It appeals to those who agree that materialistic culture must be changed. It calls for collaboration on all levels—reviewers, supporters, sympathizers, writers, editors, proselytizers, organizers, video-producers, etc. Contact dayananda@msn.com.

Abstract:

New technologies, laws, and treaties are not sufficient to solve environmental issues. And the polarity between conservative and liberal political approaches is a distraction from real solutions.

Cultural change is the best solution. Vaishnava culture—750 million people—is far more harmonious with nature than modern, global culture. The contemporary idea of an advanced society is false. An advanced society does not threaten nature. Vaishnava culture is advanced. It has four essential aspects that control the addiction to consumption and guide society to become one with nature:

1. The view that life animates matter is the natural human perspective. Understanding that all life is equal creates a sacred barrier that helps to prevent the exploitation of nature.
2. Overconsumption is at the root of all environmental problems, and controlling it is the only real solution. That must be done through enjoyment that replaces the addiction. Traditional Vaishnava society has provided that enjoyment for millennia and continues to do so. Vaishnavas celebrate the pastimes and names of Vishnu in music, dance, drama, art, sculpture, architecture, private and public fetes, chanting, and home and temple festivals. Such celebration permeates society and provides enjoyment sufficient to replace overconsumption.
3. The traditional agrarian (local) economy was the natural vehicle that sustained societies worldwide for at least 10,000 years. The European Commercial Revolution gradually destroyed it. Agrarian economy is far more harmonious with nature than modern economies. Vaishnavas clung to it until the last sixty years when the global economy slowly overwhelmed it. Nevertheless, it still exists in pockets.
4. The joy of austerity is an essential part of Vaishnava society, along with tolerating the vicissitudes of nature. Societies that battle nature are bound to lose. Enjoyment is not found by resisting its cycles. Traditional societies propitiate nature and show indebtedness to its deities. Doing so creates a relationship of emotional warmth, intimacy, reciprocation, and devotion. Without such a relationship, nature seems cold and harsh, an adversary and a source of suffering.

The modern cultural flaws must be corrected to solve environmental problems. Vaishnava culture is an excellent model for doing that.

Main Article:

There are solutions to environmental issues. Perhaps not the ones you think.

Climate change, deforestation, soil degradation, ocean pollution, and species extinction are some of the environmental issues mentioned occasionally in the news. The problems seem immense and almost inevitable, but denial is not the answer.

Nevertheless, we cannot rely on new technologies and new laws for adequate solutions.

Some push for heavy restrictions on polluting industries and call for redistribution of wealth from rich to poor countries. Those are also not realistic in the long term.

There is currently a frustrating polarity in thought among world leaders and scientists that distracts from proven solutions.

Conservatives believe that the flow of the market (*laissez-faire*) is the natural way forward. They usually think that will be sufficient, along with new technologies and perhaps some reasonably mild government restrictions. The conservative position is reactive: When nature protests, businesses, governments, and economies can respond accordingly.

Liberals generally believe in more significant governmental restrictions, especially on businesses, to prevent pollution. They also think the wealthy countries that traditionally overexploit nature should be taxed, and more monies should flow to poorer countries. Their logic is that poor people are often forced to destroy nature to supply their necessities of life. The liberal economic position superficially appears to be more intelligent and moral than the reactive policies of the conservatives. Liberals want to scientifically understand how much nature can produce and fashion the economy accordingly.

In brief, those are the two significant polarizations when determining national and global policies.

In practice, the countries with the greatest power, militarily and economically, tend to enforce their position, which is the conservative one. The liberals take the moral high ground but are less successful. Anyone who feels sympathy for nature and the world's oppressed people is pushed toward the liberal position. Unfortunately, that position is only experimental and has not demonstrated its effectiveness.

There is another, a third approach, not often openly discussed among environmentalists—the traditional cultural one. Modern, global culture has devolved and is progressing toward a dystopia. Industries, technologies, most empirical science, and democracies have facilitated the overconsumption of the earth's natural resources. Technologies, laws, and treaties are not enough to bring it under control. Politics is not enough. Neither the conservative nor the liberal position will get the desired result.

Cultural change is essential. The traditional cultures were far more harmonious with nature before the European Commercial, Scientific, and Industrial revolutions. Even today, in many parts of the world, the desire to overexploit is restrained by traditional cultures. However, environmental

experts often overlook the power of culture and focus more on technologies, politics, NGOs, international treaties and conferences, and European values.¹

Culture is all-important.

Here we present Vaishnava culture, which has about 750 million people,² more than two times the population of the U.S.

Although the U.S. has a more powerful military and economy, the Vaishnava culture is more advanced. That is because the index of advancement is harmony with nature. Such a concept flies in the face of the modern definition of an “advanced” country. However, it is easy for an intelligent person to see: a country that overexploits nature to attain its so-called advanced status is primitive.

In society, many people are fascinated with gangsters, who obtain power and wealth through violence and defying the law. However, they do not truly represent society’s civilized, cultured aspect. Their behavior is primitive. Cultures are maintained and enriched by responsible, creative, inspired, and honorable people.

In terms of the world’s countries, the ones that destroy nature are uncivilized, like gangsters. Like gangs, cartels, or mafias who exploit through violence, the powerful nations of the world exploit nature. However, the U.S., European countries, Australia, and Japan have declared themselves advanced. They are not. They are the primitive, underdeveloped countries of the world. Moreover, other so-called developing nations are improving their ability to exploit and are thus becoming more primitive.

Reading the above paragraph, some will conclude that the greatest sin of the wealthy and powerful countries is their exploitation of other humans. Or they may see that the issue is peace among humans. That is not the point here. Liberals often think that human problems must be solved first, and then the issues with nature can be addressed. That is backward thinking.

Contrary to modern belief, ecocide is more destructive than genocide. Fighting with and destroying nature is more serious than ethnic cleansing. Any type of murder is evil; however, there are levels of murder: ecocide, genocide, serial killing, first degree, etc. Ecocide is the worst.³

Back to culture. An advanced culture does not overexploit nature. It does not fight with nature. Modern culture’s relationship with nature is one of defense or offense. In contrast, an advanced culture harmonizes with nature and tries not to oppose it.

¹ The traditions are too often viewed through the lens of modern European thought. Or some may admire traditional values, but do not know how to apply traditional culture to change modern behaviors.

² Johnson, Todd M; Grim, Brian J (2013). *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 400. “67.6% of Hindus identify as Vaishnavas.” As of 2022, there are estimated to be 1.2 billion Hindus; 67.6% is 811 million Vaishnavas. In other words, 750 million is a conservative number.

³ Although not identical, cultural mistreatment of nature is somewhat analogous to a psychopath who tortures animals. Such behavior is symptomatic of those who are indifferent to the feelings of others. In other words, the destruction of nature is a symptom of an aberrant social psyche. Unhealthy societies are callous toward the slaughter of billions of animals and the destruction of forests. It may not be possible to eliminate that attitude, but the destructive behavior must be controlled. When such behavior toward nature is restricted, violence toward humans may also be reduced. It is impossible to eliminate all violence in society or among nations; however, it may be controlled by first reducing violence toward nature. That means reducing the overexploitation of nature by making cultural modifications.

Vaishnava culture has four essential aspects that control the addiction to consumption and guide society to become one with nature:

1. The view that life animates matter appears to be the natural human perspective. The Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Islam) have fought for over 1,500 years to eliminate that concept. However, almost all pre-Abrahamic societies understood that nature was imbued with sacred life. And most non-Abrahamic societies today embrace that knowledge. In modern, global culture, the predominant idea is that only humans are sacred. However, nothing indicates that nature favors humans above any other organism. The view that humans have the right to excessively violate nature is biased and unscientific.

A society that considers all life equal creates a sacred barrier between humans and nature, which helps to prevent humans from crossing that boundary.

2. Modern global, formerly called Western, culture is characterized by overconsumption. The excessive use of fossil fuels and natural resources like forests, waters, and lands erodes the planet. Such use is accompanied by waste and pollution. Thus, controlling overexploitation is the only way to bring society back into harmony with nature.

And the only way to establish that control is to provide society with enjoyment that replaces addiction with consumption. Laws, lofty values, and restrictions will not work. They do not work with addiction. Adequate non-exploitative enjoyment is the only solution.

Traditional Vaishnava society has provided that enjoyment for millennia and continues to do so. It is demonstrable; it is proven to work. Vaishnavas celebrate the pastimes⁴ and names of Vishnu in music, dance, drama, art, sculpture, architecture, private and public fetes, chanting, and daily home and temple festivals. Such celebration permeates society and provides the non-exploitative enjoyment that substitutes the desire for overconsumption.

3. According to most modern scholars, the traditional agrarian economy was the natural vehicle that sustained societies worldwide for at least 10,000 years. Distinct from an agricultural economy that mass-produces staples for worldwide distribution, the agrarian system supports local villages and cities, with some exceptions.

About five hundred years ago, Europeans began a Commercial Revolution, destroying that

⁴ The pastimes of Vishnu, Rama, and Krishna, along with their consorts Lakshmi, Sita, and Radha, are called *lilas*. When the Supreme and His consort appear on earth, they enact dramas (*lilas*) for Their own pleasure. Such *lilas* are also for the enjoyment of their devotees and the public.

economy gradually, century by century. Unfortunately, the commercial, industrial, and technological economies that replaced it are unnatural in comparison. Although exploitative to a small degree, an agrarian economy is far more harmonious with nature than modern economies.

Vaishnavas clung to the agrarian economy until the last sixty years, when the global economy imposed and forced change. Still, some Vaishnavas refuse to conform with the destructive economies.

4. Cultivation of the joys of austerity and tolerance of the forces of nature: In most Eastern traditions, like Vaishnava, Shaiva, Buddhist, and Jain, the joy of austerity is a natural part of society. Austerity is also considered virtuous in some other traditions, like the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Islamic. However, in Europe, beginning in the 14th century, the concept of righteous austerity began to diminish. Modern society has nearly abandoned the idea.

Along with austerity that reinforces detachment from materialism, traditional Eastern philosophies also embrace the concept of tolerating the vicissitudes of nature, like the heat of summer, cold of winter, disease, old age, and death. Modern society fights with nature, developing defenses against its onslaught and offenses to exploit it. Vaishnava society abhors that perspective.

Societies that battle nature are bound to lose. Until scientists, politicians, and the public can see nature as a superior force, they will suffer under it. Enjoyment is not found by resisting its cycles; instead, joy is found in tolerating them.

Moreover, traditional societies propitiate nature and show indebtedness to its deities. Doing so creates a relationship of emotional warmth, intimacy, reciprocation, and devotion. Without such a relationship, nature seems cold and harsh, an adversary and a source of suffering.

The above cultural flaws must be corrected to solve environmental problems. Vaishnava culture is an excellent model. Modern societies must either adopt its essential practices or learn from them to save themselves from the reactions of nature. Doing so is advancement.

The above are highlights of a few themes of *The Environmental Solution*.

The 500-page book's first two sections are surveys of, or more accurately, selections from the world's knowledge schools and the cultures they affect. The third section summarizes a typical entry level environmental science course.

Thus, the book covers epistemology, cultural ecology, and environmental science from the Vaishnava-Vedanta perspective.



The Environmental Solution



Overconsumption
is
Misplaced Enjoyment

Michael Wright

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