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Earthy Realism - *The Meaning of Gaia*
ISBN 9781 8454 0080 4
Imprint Academic, 2007, £8.95

The collection of essays in this book describes the damage we are doing to our world and suggests a way forward to a healthier re-ordering of ourselves and Mother Earth. At the heart of the short essays gathered in this book is the question: how to employ the powers of our advanced technology? This book combines pessimistic critiques - is it too late to repair the damage? - with optimistic strategies that might begin to heal our wounded planet.

Under-girding this collection of fascinating and alarming essays is the concept of GAIA- Mother Earth is alive! . "Perhaps the single, most important thing we can do to undo the harm we have done ...to our earth... is to fix firmly in our minds the thought: the earth is alive." The writers believe this Gaian concept to be one of the new, constructive visions that must replace the mechanistic Newtonian world-view, a view which has, for so long, framed our understanding of the planet. Earth, imagined as GAIA, has both a scientific and spiritual aspect. It deals in a variety of energies and "webs of connection", not separate items to be connected. Gaia is the name of an ancient Greek mother-goddess. The use of this personification challenges the notion that our physical world is inert and lifeless. We learn that the use of the name Gaia, personifying the earth as it does, makes it hard to perceive our planetary home as nothing more than a "miscellaneous heap of resources". GAIA understands mother earth as a self-monitoring system which acts as a whole. It can, then, be injured and it is vulnerable; prone to sickness or health. And because we are totally dependent on it, we are vulnerable too.

The essays contain cautions and suggestions; predictions of disasters and hopes for preserving our world for a viable future. At its heart, I found these critiques to be deeply Franciscan in their recognition of the inter-dependence of all living beings, indeed, the vital intertwining of all that exists. Our Sisters, the Rivers, arteries of the world. Our Brothers, the Trees, breathing out a wholesome atmosphere. A myriad of living beings who, along with us, are nurtured by Mother Earth.

In the essay 'Gaia and the Sacred Feminine', we read "...we cannot save what we don't love. In order to love, we need a sense and an image, and to feel this 'other' as part of our extended self."

The writings in this book call us to re-discover our collective relationship with GAIA.

Catherine Joy CSF