



On Nature and Power

Interview with Joachim Radkau

by Gabriella Corona



Joachim Radkau is Professor of History at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. His books include *Die deutsche Emigration in den USA, 1933-1943* (1971), a dissertation on German refugees after 1933; and *Deutsche Industrie und Politik von Bismarck bis zur Gegenwart* (with George W.E. Hallgarten, 1974). His research areas include the history of nuclear technology (*Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Atomwirtschaft*, 1983); the connections between forest history and technological developments from the 16th to the 19th century (*Holz: Ein Naturstoff in der Technikgeschichte*, with Ingrid Schäfer, 1987; second edition: *Holz: wie ein Naturstoff Geschichte schreibt*, 2007). In *Technik in Deutschland - vom 18. Jahrhundert bis heute* (1989, second edition 2009) he discusses the influence of regional environments on technological paths. He subsequently made an excursion into psycho-history and body history, investigating patient records of neurasthenics between 1880 and the 1st World War (*Das Zeitalter der Nervosität*, 1998). During the same period, he wrote his global history of the environment (*Natur und Macht*, 2000, revised American edition: *Nature and Power*, 2008). He thereafter wrote *Die Leidenschaft des Denkens* (2005), a 1000-page biography of Max Weber whose central focus is Weber's relationship with nature, and the connection between Weber's views on naturalism in the social sciences and Weber's own nature, not the least his

sexuality. On the whole, over the last thirty and more years Radkau's research has been moving within a triangle formed of environmental history, history of technology, and history of medicine.

In your interview with Frank Uekoetter in the issue of October 2008 of *Environmental History*, you describe the path that led you to devote yourself to environmental history: the history of modern Germany, the industrialization process, the transition from wood to fossil fuels, the energy question, and the nuclear question. And you also do not deny receiving inputs from the environmentalist movement and the influence that this had on your historiographic approach. But if this is the path that led you to environmental history, what is the path that led you, instead, to *global environmental history*? When and why did you decide to write *Nature and Power*?

When I investigate my subconscious, I discover a premature influence of Arnold Toynbee who described the rise of cultures over the whole world history as a succession of successful reactions to the challenges of nature. In 1958 my mother gave me an abridged German edition of Toynbee's *Study in History* for my 15th birthday, and I was fascinated by his vision of world history. Of course, I lacked any critical knowledge about the arbitrariness of his interpretations. From that time onwards, I felt a deep desire to unite (or better reunite) history and nature, and thereby proceed towards global history.

For more than 30 years, however, I suppressed that desire. Therefore your question is justified, as for a long time I was sceptical about overly ambitious projects in environmental history. In order to become a well-founded science, eco-history first had to abandon the path pointed out by Lynn White's pioneering Christmas essay of 1966 on the "historical roots of our ecological crisis", which went all the way back to Jahweh's dominium terrae commandment in the Old Testament. Back then, in my opinion environmental history needed first and foremost to engage in regional studies based on solid historical research.

But it is precisely while doing research on regional forest history in the Eighties that I became aware that the regional approach is not enough. I

realized more and more that most regional studies on forest history were constructed around generalized images of history and therefore looked suspiciously similar. You need a wide horizon to identify the peculiar features of a specific region and deconstruct traditional stereotypes of history. In 1981 I aroused a controversy when I challenged the old Sombart thesis that capitalism was at the brink of collapse in the 18th century as a consequence of deforestation. This controversy has been going on to this day, sometimes turning into a ping-pong game with always the same arguments being bounced back and forth.

In this situation I realized that a sidestep towards non-Western societies would have been of strategic usefulness. It would have allowed me to demonstrate that the huge mass of complaints about the dearth of wood were not in itself a sign of destructive deforestation; on the contrary, they were a sign of the rise of an awareness that was preventing a truly catastrophic destruction of woodlands. In premodern Western history there was a major turning point in forest policy: territorial rule originally established itself through the clearance of woodlands, later on, instead, through the protection of forests. My title *Nature and Power* refers to this important turning point, whose consequences still affect environmental policy today. It was on a Himalaya trip in spring 1996, when I had literature on Indian and Nepalese forest history in my rucksack, that I decided to write *Nature and Power*. Hiking at an altitude of four thousand meters or more gives you the seductive illusion of having a view of the whole world.

***Nature and Power* is a compelling book. I see it as a reflection on the interpretive categories of environmental history, the meaning of the historian's work, and the deep reasons for his or her interest in the environment. But, apart from this, it is a critique of the stereotypes of environmental history and of certain clichés that have been taking hold in historiography over the last decades: deforestation cycles, the effects of irrigation systems on salinization, the depauperation of natural resources as a result of population growth, a dichotomic view of common vs. private property, etc. On the other hand, in the last part of your book you say that it is one of the historian's tasks to expose certain ideological myths exploited by politicians,**

to keep them from becoming a deceitful instrument of propaganda and electoral consensus building. Many of the “myths” you criticize are the very same ones that American ecological thought created; for example, that there existed a golden age, a beneficial and harmonious nature, in many colonized countries – such as India – before the arrival of the Europeans. What role did a polemic against the concept of “wilderness” play in your book?

In European countries and other countries with old cultures, the wilderness concept is an intellectual dead end which hinders creative and well-thought environmental history. (To be sure, I think even Don Worster, whom I like and whose pioneering work I admire, would not deny this today!) Certainly it is fully justified to criticize the ruthless deforestation of America in the 19th and 20th centuries, but it is senseless to describe all of human history as a history of deforestation with a constant reproachful undertone. Of course, everywhere in the world over the millennia humans have cleared forests because we are not woodworms: we cannot eat wood, we need agriculture.

But maybe criticizing the wilderness concept today is preaching to the converted (at least on a theoretical level). Even in the United States, where environmental history originated from Western history, in more recent times the discipline received strong impulses from new urban history (see f.i. William Cronon, Martin Melosi, Joel Tarr). Moreover, the combination with history of agriculture is extremely promising. The traditional Italian landscape we all like is obviously no wilderness, but a very old cultural landscape. Even leading protagonists of nature protection – such as, in Germany, Wolfgang Haber, the doyen of Bavarian *Naturschutz* – are beginning to realize that “conservation of nature”, correctly understood, means conservation of culture. This approach brings additional arguments in favour of environmental protection, but we need more environmental historians to take advantage of such an excellent opportunity to exert practical influence!

As to your remarks with regard to my “critique of stereotypes”, you are certainly right. As far as I’m concerned, I want to contribute with my work to make environmental history a critical science. To be sure, it should be inspired by “eco” movements and environmental politics,

but it should not be a mere instrument of present political interests, nor offer a mere background or a mere historical appendix to topical themes of today. Otherwise environmental history will be nothing more than a transitory fashion, like so many other intellectual trends of our time.

I think we should move away from simple backward projections of present-day perspectives onto the past. Real historical science begins with the endeavour to understand past times by their own view of things. We should analyze them from the standpoint of whether they solved their own environmental problems, not whether they were able to solve our modern problems in advance. My book is based on the conviction that there are few general truths as to what is right and what wrong over the millennia. History is a good antidote against dogmatism. I have no general answer to the question whether Garrett Hardin's argument about the "tragedy of the commons", one of the most influential theses on the roots of environmental problems, is right or wrong; on the contrary, I think it is important to realize that there is no general answer.

The same holds true for the "Population Bomb". John McNeill starts his fine and well-balanced article "Population" in *the Encyclopedia of World Environmental History* with the statement: "The relationship between human population and environment, contrary to popular belief, is anything but simple." I think he is right. Therefore the great American controversy of the 1970s between Barry Commoner and Paul Ehrlich – two charismatic environmentalists – over the "Population Bomb" seems to me rather misleading, in that it suggests that there is a general truth with regard to population growth which excludes different theses. For example, agricultural terraces which conserve the soil need a high population density in order to be maintained and get neglected when the population dwindles. Still, there is no lack of historical examples where Malthus is right. Maybe in the long run Malthus has turned out to have been even more right.

In a forum published in the second issue of *Global Environment*, which saw the participation of scholars from different places and cultural traditions, two interpretations of global environmental history were offered. On the one hand, it is seen as a method for the study of the same his-

torical phenomena in different parts of the world at any historical time. On the other, it is regarded as history of the environmental implications of globalization and how different countries have responded to it. What is global environmental history in your opinion?

It is interesting how you identify two interpretations of global environmental history among the different statements in the second issue of *Global Environment*. I confess I am a somewhat hesitant as to how to classify myself. I feel a certain dislike to the consideration of phenomena outside of their historical context. But perhaps we cannot avoid it. To be sure, I think there exist some fundamental phenomena and basic patterns of human existence within nature, and of human use and misuse of environment. I tried to describe them in the second part of *Nature and Power*, in the chapter entitled: "Primeval Symbioses of Humans and Nature".

In this context, it is an important point that these symbioses stand at the beginning of human environmental history but are not wholly outdated by modern evolution and processes of globalization; rather, they have continued until modern times. Even in the 20th century, many people survived in times of need by resorting to the old subsistence economy, whether at an individual or local or regional level. Today I think I was subconsciously influenced by Max Weber's *Economy and Society*, and more specifically his chapters on *urwüchsige*, primordial types of *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung*, generative processes of community and society, which were not wholly overcome by modernization, but permeate the whole history of culture and society.

As to globalization, certainly the rise and growth of global networks is a historical mainstream, in a certain sense even since the late middle ages. But counter-reactions to globalization belong to the leitmotifs of history, too. I presume that the need for a limited environment, natural as well as social, is an element of human nature. We cannot live in a "global village". I find it symptomatic that the term "global village" was invented by Marshall McLuhan, who is best known today for his slogan "the medium is the message"; a statement I can accept merely as a joke, not as a philosophy. The material reality of our earth is not dissolved by the Internet.

To be sure, if you often travel by airplane from one climate conference to another and hear the same discourses everywhere around the world, you may indeed think we live in a “global society”. But if you travel on foot or by bicycle, you discover the infinite variety of the world. I prefer the latter, though I wrote a global environmental history, and for me not the least value of the global outlook consists in gaining a better appreciation and a sharper knowledge of our little worlds. I believe many secrets of environmental history may be hidden in these microcosms. Even when we adopt a global approach, that is something we should never forget. Piero Bevilacqua is right: there is a dialectic relation between the investigation of analogies worldwide and the investigation of differences. Not only the naturalist, but also the historian should have a sense for biodiversity.

Perhaps the best contribution that global history can offer is the mutual elucidation of different cultures, which is useful for a better understanding of environmental movements in foreign countries. And by looking across frontiers, we put new questions to the environmentalism of our own country. Only by international comparison I discovered the issue I am presently discussing with French colleagues: Why was the nuclear controversy in West Germany more violent than anywhere else in the world? Even today, there is surprisingly little knowledge among environmentalists of environmental issues and struggles outside their respective national boundaries. “Think global, act local” is an environmentalist slogan; but “think global” usually means: “Project your own imaginations onto the rest of the world.” Though I like paradoxes, I don’t like the term “glocal”. It conceals the problems. Vandana Shiva may be right when she complains that the concentration on global environmental problems in fact frequently narrows our horizon. The modern construction of “developing countries” (which means “underdeveloped countries”) is even worse than the old “Orientalism” denounced by Said, with its construction of a magical East which at least aroused amazement and curiosity.

There is no master history of globalization; on the contrary, it is a fundamental experience of the age of ecology that there are different paths into modernity, at least to a certain degree. An arid country needs a type of modernization different from that of a country which is rich

in water. Unfortunately, many arid countries have long refused to realize this. Will they eventually draw the consequences? Environmental history is a history with an open end, a history before an uncertain future. An environmentalist does not envision an “end of history”.

In your conception of environmental history, you attribute special significance to the relationship between man and nature, and especially to the history of man as nature. In your book you recognize the importance of the rise of branches of environmental history such as urban environmental history and the study of health and illness. Don't you believe that these aspects of environmental history are destined to develop more than others because they are easier to accept for generalist historians, and especially historians of the contemporary age?

You are absolutely right, there is no “splendid isolation” for environmental history; on the contrary, we must strive to move into the mainstream of history, even more: to establish ourselves as a new mainstream of history, under the motto “greening history”. In order to succeed, we need alliances. I hesitate to recommend a given hierarchy between different branches of history: agrarian history, urban history, history of technology, medical and mental history; all of these may be equally important. There are many possibilities, and there is still much to be done.

In Germany, environmental history started about 1980 as a secession from the history of technology, mainly under the impact of the nuclear controversy; but it was important not to remain frozen in that orientation. As to myself, I made a jump into medical history for several years. During the 90s I wrote a history of nervousness based on patient records from Imperial Germany. John Muir thought of “nerveshaken people” as his natural allies for the protection of the wilderness. There is an intimate connection between nature and nerves!

As to “history of man as nature”: yes, I think we should rediscover this old extended concept of nature. A hundred years ago, the German term *Natur* still included human nature. As I see it, this extensive acceptance of the term “nature” was well-founded. In my biography of Max Weber I tried to demonstrate the intimate and changing interrelation between Weber's experience of his own nature and his relation

to the nature outside of him (of course, I thereby aroused the wrath of several mono-sociological sociologists). I admit it is not easy to introduce human nature into environmental history, but it is a very promising path, and I venture to say, quoting Obama: “Yes, we can.”

Can you tell us about your dialogue with some of the main authors in international environmental history, such as Clive Ponting, Richard Grove, Alfred Crosby, John McNeill, who are often cited in your book? How do you believe that these books have contributed to the rise of this historiographic trend, and do you believe their theses to be still valid today?

Indeed, I learned more from Anglo-American than from German historians. It is mostly from Anglo-Americans, not just historians, that I gained the confidence that it is possible to write global environmental history. Of the four historians you mention, I know in person only Richard Grove, Alfred Crosby, and John McNeill. As to Clive Ponting, his *Green History of the World* was a real challenge for me when I started my work. (I also admired his courage when he risked his government position during the Falkland War by revealing the truth about the sinking of the *Belgrano*, thereby undermining the British legitimation for war.) At the time, his book was the only detailed survey of global environmental history, and I found its critical study very stimulating. It is certainly a pioneering work, whose main problem in my opinion is that it conveys the impression that everything that transpired in environmental history over the millennia is well-known to us. In fact, there are not so many solid and undisputable environment-historical truths, and a lot of work therefore lies ahead for future environmental historians. As to the alleged ecological suicide of the Sumerians or the inhabitants of Easter Island, Ponting’s pessimistic paradigms for global environmental history, we had better be cautious about such imaginary tragedies: the sources are actually susceptible to different interpretation. The same is true of Jared Diamond’s bestseller *Collapse*, which, to be sure, is always stimulating, but likewise gives the impression that the author knows all about the ecological decline of cultures. It is a similar problem as with old Arnold Toynbee.

As to Bill Crosby, I learned a lot from his *Ecological Imperialism* –

especially the combining of environmental history and historical epidemiology: certainly a promising alliance – but even more from his earlier book *The Columbian Exchange*, which attracted less attention. I find that in *Ecological Imperialism* environmental history is too intertwined with political history. Actually, ecological influence between the Old and the New World went both ways. Richard H. Grove's *Green Imperialism* – in some ways a reply to Alfred Crosby – opened my eyes to new and unconventional dimensions of environmental history. I have argued against some of his theses, but I drew many ideas from his work.

John R. McNeill's magnificent *Mountains of the Mediterranean World* was in my rucksack during several Mediterranean hikes, and I enjoyed it. It is an admirable combination of fieldwork with a local flavour and historiography on a grand scale. His book *Something New Under the Sun* appeared too late for the German edition of my *Nature and Power* to take account of it; but I did use it for the American edition. Sometimes John's approach and mine have been contrasted, as representing materialism vs. constructivism. But in this regard I feel misunderstood: I, too, aim at a materialist environmental history. For me, the analysis of discourses is surely revealing, but it is merely a means, not an end in itself.

In *Nature and Power*, Marx and Weber appear to be your theoretical landmarks, and their writings the interpretative vantage point from which you look at the vicissitudes of humans in the history of the world. In what measure, then, is their thought still valid today for the definition of the historiographic paradigm of what we call “global environmental history”?

Actually, in 1968 I was not a zealous Marxist; on the contrary, I found the Marxist monomania of leftist circles rather annoying. On the other hand, Marx seems to be undervalued today. I agree with Donald Worster that capitalism is a focus not only of economic, but also of environmental history, though I would emphasize that there are fundamental differences between the respective environmental impacts of 15th-century Venetian capitalism and 20th-century American capitalism. But one can work well with certain Marxist categories such as *Gebrauchswert* (use value) and *Tauschwert* (exchange value).

The marginalization of subsistence economy by market economy is a landmark in environmental as well as economic history. It opens the door for recklessness. The “limits to growth” have to be rediscovered.

Part three of *Nature and Power* owes much to Karl August Wittfogel and his theory of “hydraulic society”, which based society upon its natural environment. In former times I was fascinated by Wittfogel – with whom I came into contact through my dissertation on German refugees after 1933 – because of his way of highlighting the nature substrate in Marxist as well as Weberian theory. He has been a violently contested scientist; but Mark Elvin, the environmental historian of China, once wrote to me: “KAW’s ghost cannot be exorcized.”

As to Max Weber, as I told you, I tried to show that nature is the generator of tension in Weber’s life and work. From my point of view, one can work with Max Weber surprisingly well in environmental history in several respects. When I revised *Nature and Power* for the American edition, I accentuated the Weberian elements. In order to write global history, we need ideal types, but it is important not to mistake them for full reality. Environmental history should not strive to become an absolutely value-free science in the Weberian sense, but on the other hand we should not be too quick with our judgments: it is often not so clear what is “right” and what is “wrong”.

The famous “Weber thesis” on the affinity of Protestantism and capitalism offers an appropriate paradigm for the interaction between economic interests and spiritual driving forces within the human relation to nature. In March 2007 I held a lecture at the World Bank in Washington on “Protestantism and Environmentalism: In Quest of a Weberian Approach to Eco-History”. To be sure, that was a trial balloon. The title of my paper suggested that perhaps we need a counterpart of the Weber thesis for environmentalism. Many historical experiences indicate that powerful movements require both a solid grounding in material interests and a vision transcending daily life, one that can inspire and stimulate powerful emotions. The strongest impulses are often generated by a hybrid fusion of selfishness and selflessness. Therefore, though I consider myself to be a rationalist, I have some sympathy for spiritualists within the green movement and even for some crazy eco-fighters (as long as they are not too crazy!).

Weber asked the key question: By what means did capitalism become sustainable? (We find the term “*nachhaltig*”, “sustainable”, more than fifty times in Weber’s work, to be sure in an economic sense!) His answer: Not only through social systems, but even more by being rooted in human nature. A naturalist argument rarely understood by sociologists until today!

You say that the environmentalist movement lacks historical awareness and that one of the main problems in the dialogue between environmentalists and environmental historians is that the former refuse to admit some uncomfortable and “politically incorrect” truths. You mention as an example that environmentalists have trouble admitting that anti-immigration politics and closure against “strangers” have historically served as an ecological measure aimed at preserving one’s territory. How, then, can this apparently insurmountable gap be bridged?

To answer this question, I can only refer to the German Greens. It is extremely difficult to get an overview of environmentalism all over the world (for several years I have been under contract with a publisher to write a book on that subject, but until now I have not been able to fulfil it!). American environmentalists certainly have an acute awareness of their own history, if sometimes a tad uncritical. They proudly look back to John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, although for the following period their opinions begin to diverge: Barry Commoner or Paul Ehrlich? Or Amory Lovins, James Lovelock, Jeremy Rifkin? A true gallery of heroes! German environmentalists lack such a gallery.

In my review of a revealing 1137-page documentation of the founding years of German Greens (*Global Environment 2*, 2008, p. 220) I found the “Greens’ lack of history” mentioned as a well-known fact (but the very recurrence of this remark actually bears witness to a growing awareness of a deficit!). It is precisely this lack of history that causes a tendency to anachronism. In 1991, Antje Vollmer, later Green vice-chairwoman of the German Bundestag, confessed: “We have always lived here as in a hostile land [*wie in Feindesland*].” There was a widespread feeling within post-1968 groups that the Germans were innate Nazis, and that the more foreigners came to Germany, the better. It is true that in the 1960’s many

former Nazis were in leading positions, but no more in the 1980s; at this time, instead there were abundant signs of a “greening” of the German population. But many Greens persevered in their old radical in-group mentality. They had lost contact with their social environment.

I presume this to be the main cause for the peculiar multiculturalism of German Greens. Superficially, it was an adaptation of American multiculturalism. In the U.S.A., however, multiculturalism meant the appreciation of old-established American subcultures, notably those of Native Americans, Afro-Americans, and Latinos. It reflected a demand for fairness and the protection of human rights. On the other hand, among German Greens the opening of frontiers for a constantly growing immigration into a densely populated country was a position with quite different implications; and, in the situation of the 1980s and 90s, clearly an unwise one. I think everybody who had contact with inner-city elementary schools (as I have had for nearly forty years) had known this very well for decades (though most did not dare to say it in public – I was attacked when I did). But many intellectuals have no direct contact with schools, and sometimes mistook realism for racism. To be sure, however, immigration policy today has become a purely pragmatic issue and no longer a terrain for dispute for neophyte ecologists!

Today the “insurmountable gap” you mentioned no longer exists. Since September 11, 2001, the “clash of cultures” has become fashionable everywhere – sometimes even too fashionable. Among German historians, my famous colleague Hans-Ulrich Wehler gave the first signal by choosing to celebrate his 70th birthday on September 11. But from the historian’s perspective – Christian Meier, the biographer of Caesar, has reminded us of this – Islamic fundamentalism has no deep roots in old Islam, but is rather a poor imitation of Western political fanaticism. Perhaps a “greening” of history would be a good antidote for an overly culturalist view of history, too obsessed with conflict and clashes. Arguing in this direction, I made an appeal for a “Green Revolution” in the teaching of history (*Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, Nov. 2003). I participated in a lively study project on old watermills and their rivers around Bielefeld with a half-Turkish fourth year school class. During my research on Max Weber I worked well with a young German-Turkish woman.

Many Greens begin to get a sense of history when they grow older. In 2002, I led a conference on “Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus” together with Jürgen Trittin, the then Green federal minister of environment. The conference was held in Berlin and had a wide echo in the German media. Our main objective today must be drawing the interest of the young generation. That is why I have always been engaged in teachers’ education and even wrote the first German school textbook on environmental history (*Mensch und Natur in der Geschichte*, Klett, Leipzig 2002). In 1993, two young Swiss historians (Jan Hodel and Monica Kalt) wrote a provoking essay for an anthology entitled *Umweltgeschichte heute* with the title: “Why is environmental history boring?” For them it was nothing more than present-day Green political correctness applied to history. I think our environmental history is no longer boring today, and we should all always try hard to make it amazing every time. It is the best way to bridge old gaps.

What do you think of environmentalism today? Do you think that its political ideas and political approaches are adequate to cope with today’s environmental issues? Do you believe that environmental historians can help to promote a less abstract and velleitarian, more pragmatic and “scientific” environmentalism, one that is less bound to the interests of political groups and more aware, instead, of its public role?

Well, historians are generalists. They are experts of the time factor in human affairs and collective aging processes, but also of regeneration processes. They should be artists in concrete and multi-perspective thinking, and should develop a certain flair for detective shrewdness. I think all these qualities can be of practical use for environmentalism. Moreover, unlike traditional historians we should try to bridge the gap between Snow’s two cultures: that of the human sciences and that of the natural sciences. Overcoming this gap is essential for the future of environmentalism!

“The Greens are greying” has been an often heard ironical comment in Germany for several years. It is undeniable that the first Green generation is greying, myself included. But we historians should be well versed in changes through time and hence not too

bewildered when we realize that young people have different ideas than their elders. Environmental awareness has gone through many metamorphoses in history. We should be able to anticipate its future metamorphoses. During a conference on environmental education on the Mainau Island in Lake Constance, a traditional location for Green meetings, teachers remarked that *Umwelt*, “environment”, is “mega out” among the youth, but independently from the term “environment”, tangible environmental problems and scandals still exert a mobilizing effect upon young people. Thus, the historian’s realistic thinking may be of practical use in this context.

The same holds true for the historian’s multi-perspective approach. Different scientific disciplines generate different conceptions of environmentalism. Sociologists usually consider it to be a social movement – the NSM concept (New Social Movements) was previously fashionable, later on that of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) –; political scientists focus on environmentalist political parties and institutions; philosophers focus on man-and-nature philosophies; and lawyers focus on the development of environmental law. But it is misleading to isolate any single one of these analytic levels: environmentalism develops through an interplay of all these levels, and the historian’s holistic approach is needed to grasp this interplay.

Besides, regarded more closely environmentalism is not merely environmentalism; it is usually connected with various group interests. The German Greens are not merely green (one may even ask how green they really are). The historian with his or her multi-perspective approach is able to see the context and thereby come up with a realistic concept of what environmentalism actually is. It would be politically unwise to treat everything that is not “green” as a contamination of environmentalism. Several German Greens were deeply disappointed by their early experiences in politics because their conception of environmentalism was too idealistic, others because their conception was too one-sidedly ecological. The struggle for the conservation of old town structures has been one of the main pillars of the emergence of environmentalism as a forceful movement. Joschka Fischer should not be ashamed of his participation in the Frankfurt “Häuserkampf”. We should rejoice in environmentalism’s rediscovery of beauty! (Therefore

I am delighted by the design of the cover of *Global Environment!*).

As to Germany, it would be good if historians drew an authentic picture of Nazism. The *Faschismus-Knüppel* (fascism-bashing club) has frequently poisoned political discussions in Germany. Many Greens believed that love of nature and one's homeland (*Heimat*) was a Nazi heritage: a mistaken conviction that cut them off from a vital source of environmental awareness. The philosopher Hans Jonas – a refugee from Nazi Germany – wrote that the mother-child relationship is the model for environmental responsibility. In the Eighties, however, there was a discussion among Green feminists as to whether “mother” is a Fascist term! Only the post-Chernobyl mothers' movement put an end to this absurd discussion.

Will the alarm about global warming and the establishment of a global climate policy mark the end of an era: that of environmentalism as a movement? Rebekka Harms, a Green deputy at the European Parliament, thirty years ago a “*Baumfrau*” who occupied a tree to prevent the clearing of the Gorleben forest for a planned nuclear reprocessing plant, told me with a sad undertone: “There is no climate movement.” But will environmentalism as a movement be outdated forever? Who knows? Every historian, and especially environmental historians, should well know that we are not at the end of history. For decades, the “end of environmentalism” has been announced. Even shortly after Earth Day on 22 April 1970, there was a first wave of disappointment. But there is a German proverb: “*Totgesagte leben länger*”, “Whoever is declared dead while alive will live longer.” (Postscript: An American colleague suggests as an American counterpart the words of Mark Twain: “The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”)

Perhaps Max Weber's concept of charisma can help us to gain a better understanding of environmentalism: it is a movement with charismatic origins. Charisma is in itself unstable; bureaucracy is much more durable. But charismatic moments may return if we are open-minded. The sense for the endless stream of history will open our mind. Forty years ago, the refrain of an anti-Vietnam-War song began: “And it's one – two – three / What are we fighting for?” Whenever I am overwhelmed by the beauty and vitality of nature, I know what we are fighting for.