

V. P. J. Arponen

TWO PILLARS OF THE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE

Revisiting Capitalism, Science and Technology
in Modernity

[transcript]

V. P. J. Arponen
Two Pillars of the Human Relationship to Nature

Editorial

The book series **Philosophy – Enlightenment – Critique** aims to promote philosophical thinking dedicated to a future worth living for everyone in times of global crisis. Climate change, political and religious authoritarianism, and growing social inequalities – the manifold and interconnected issues of our time require a return to the power of reason. In the spirit of a new enlightenment, the series initiates a dialog between different philosophical schools and traditions that critically scrutinize the past and present and explore the ramifications of sustainable alternatives. This requires a re-examination, re-interpretation and revision of the philosophical canon. The series also reveals the emancipatory potential inherent in the interplay between philosophy and other disciplines such as technology or aesthetics.

V. P. J. Arponen is an interdisciplinary philosopher who works and teaches at the intersection of philosophy, social theory, and the human sciences at Kiel University, Germany. His writing is shaped by collaborations in various interdisciplinary research groups, bringing together perspectives from philosophy, anthropology, political economy, and environmental humanities. A central reference point is the Capability Approach, which informs his interest in the societal conditions and philosophical perspectives that enable individuals to lead active and meaningful lives. His work reflects a broader concern with the conceptual foundations of how the human condition is understood across disciplines.

V. P. J. Arponen

Two Pillars of the Human Relationship to Nature

Revisiting Capitalism, Science and Technology in Modernity

[transcript]

The research and writing of this book were conducted in part in the framework of the “Excellence Cluster ROOTS – Social, Environmental and Cultural Connectivity in Past Societies” with funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy – EXC 2150-390870439 and in part in the framework of the “Research Group Tolerance – The Difficulty and Possibility of Tolerance: the Manifold Challenges of the Concept and Practice of Tolerance” with funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Project number 493131063 – FOR 5472.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at <https://dnb.dnb.de>

2026 © transcript Verlag, Bielefeld

Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

The automated analysis of the work in order to obtain information, particularly concerning patterns, trends, and correlations as defined in § 44b (text and data mining) of the German Copyright Act (UrhG) is prohibited without the written consent of the rights holders.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover concept: Maria Arndt

Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839478066>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-8219-9 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-7806-6

ISSN of series: 2941-8151 | eISSN of series: 2941-816X

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

Contents

Preface of the Author7

Introduction9

1. The Spirit of Capitalism19

1.1 Dominated by the Making of Money 20

1.2 Society, Community, and Instrumental Values 22

1.3 Capitalism as a Private Property Regime 25

1.4 Alienation, Fetishism, and Class Struggle 27

1.5 The Cycle of Economy 29

1.6 Social Class 34

1.7 Social Reproduction and Material-Economic Values 35

1.8 The Culturalist Turn in Marxism 39

1.9 Culturalism Beyond Marxism 42

1.10 Paradigms, Structuration, and Genealogy 45

1.11 Culturalism: Some Contemporary Connections 51

1.12 Culturalism and Essentialism 54

1.13 Culturalism and the Environment 56

1.14 Consumerism, Status, and Identity 58

1.15 Contradictions of Capitalism 64

1.16 The Fourth Contradiction of Capitalism 67

1.17 Contradictions in Context

 Contemporary Populism 76

1.18 Economics, Culture and Tropiticity 84

1.19 Capabilities and Capitalism 87

2. The Mechanical Worldview	97
2.1 Mechanical and the Organic Worldviews	98
2.2 Some Philosophical Underpinnings	99
2.3 Politics of the Mechanical Worldview	102
2.4 The Organic Worldview	104
2.5 Feminism and Eco-Feminism	105
2.6 The Greatest Psychic Revolution	107
2.7 Modernity and Pre-Modernity	109
2.8 Sacred and Profane	113
2.9 Theory of Evolution and Cultural Evolution	115
2.10 Cultural Evolution: Some Connections	119
2.11 Cultural Evolution and Geopolitics	122
2.12 Cultural Evolution and Games	125
2.13 Original Affluent Society	126
2.14 Original Egoism	130
2.15 The Life History Approach	134
2.16 On Artificial Intelligence	136
2.17 Culturalist Value Orientation in Anthropology	138
2.18 The Anthropological Theory of Value	139
2.19 Ecological Modernisation and Green Growth	146
2.20 Decoupling and Progress	151
2.21 Abundance	152
2.22 Not the End of the World	154
2.23 Capabilities and the Mechanical Worldview	156
 3. A New Anthropocentrism?	 159
3.1 Changing Values	161
3.2 World Systems in Transformation	164
3.3 Environmentalism and a New War of Ideas	168
3.4 Unlikely Allies	171
3.5 The Capability Approach Again	175
3.6 A New Anthropocentrism	
Towards a Common Politics of the Values of Environment and Society	179
 Bibliography	 187