

Note-Taking Tool

In Episode 4, John and Ellen explore how shifting ideas about humanity's relationship with nature connect to the development of capitalism. John summarizes his conversation with Australian scholar Kate Rigby this way: "These thinkers...provided people...the go-ahead for their exploitative, wealth-building projects. A green light that would have been harder to find in the prevailing values of European culture a few centuries before."

Think about John and Kate's discussion. (It may be helpful to listen to [Episode 4, 10:46-16:56](#), or skim the [Episode 4 transcript, pp. 10-14](#), to refresh your memory. You can find these resources under "Listening Guides" at <https://sceneonradio.org/capitalism-educator-resources/>.)

Then, examine sources to consider how European views of nature shifted during the Scientific Revolution, analyze how these shifts may have served as a "green light" for capitalist projects, and consider whether different views of nature might inspire different relationships with nature today.

Part 1 Shifting Views of Nature

What do the sources suggest about how European views of nature changed during the Scientific Revolution? Take notes about each source in the first part of the chart. Then, consider the questions in the second part of the chart to synthesize your understanding.

Reading Notes			
Thinker	How does this thinker describe nature?	What does the thinker state or imply about the relationship humans should have with nature?	What words or metaphors stand out?
Pliny the Elder (23 AD–79 AD)			
Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)			
René Descartes (1596–1650)			
Francis Bacon (1561–1626)			
John Locke (1632–1704)			

Synthesis & Reflection

Both Kate Rigby and John suggest that Scientific Revolution thinkers gave people a "green light" to use land and natural resources in new ways to build wealth. To what extent do these sources support that idea?

The ideas Rigby and John share are connected to the writings of ecofeminist philosopher and historian of science Carolyn Merchant. Originally published in 1980, Merchant's book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* examines how "the mechanistic world view" of the Scientific Revolution "sanctioned the exploitation of nature." Read the brief excerpt from Chapter 1:

The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother had served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings. One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold, or mutilate her body, although commercial mining would soon require that. As long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it.

[...]

Society needed these new images [of mastery and domination] as it continued the processes of commercialism and industrialization, which depended on activities directly altering the earth – mining, drainage, de-forestation, and assarting (grubbing up stumps to clear fields).

- Merchant argues that earlier images of Earth as a living organism or nurturing mother acted as a "cultural constraint." What does she mean?
- According to Merchant, what changed during the Scientific Revolution, and why?
- How does Merchant's explanation build on or complicate your understanding of the earlier sources?

Part 2 Nature as Kin

Read Robin Wall Kimmerer's essay, "Nature Needs a New Pronoun: To Stop the Age of Extinction, Let's Start by Ditching 'It'." According to Kimmerer, how does language shape people's relationships with the natural world? Take notes about this essay in the first part of the chart. Then, consider the questions in the second part of the chart to synthesize your understanding.

Reading Notes

Kimmerer notices that English speakers often refer to humans differently than they refer to other living things. What distinction does she notice?

According to Kimmerer, why does this difference in language matter?

What relationship between humans and nature does Kimmerer invite readers to imagine? How does she believe changing our language could help bring about this relationship?

Synthesis & Reflection

What do Merchant and Kimmerer both suggest about the relationship between ideas and human behavior?

In Episode 4, John suggests that Bacon, Descartes, and Locke provided a "green light" for new ways of using land and natural resources to build wealth. If Kimmerer's ideas became more widely accepted, what kind of "green light" might they encourage instead?

In Episode 1, Ellen says that capitalism is "so pervasive, so much the water we swim in now, that we can have trouble seeing where it begins and ends, in our world and in our lives." After examining the sources in this investigation, what features, parts, or aspects of capitalism feel more visible to you than they did before?