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Earth in the Balance

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EARTH IN THE BALANCE

By Senator Al Gore

New York, New York, Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1992.

Pp. 407. \$22.95, hardcover.

It is quite remarkable that the author of *Earth in the Balance* is about to become the Vice President of the United States of America. This author did not mince words about the magnitude and the impact of the global ecological crises of today. This is an honest, unrestrained, at times highly personal account woven into a not-yet popular call to action on a worldwide scale to save the planet and our own species. The author is not afraid to inject his personal experience and inner spiritual search that has brought him to the realizations and the recommendations of *Earth in the Balance*. Indeed, in the introduction he states that his reason for writing the book was "to fully search my heart and mind about this challenge to which I feel called—and in the process to summon the courage to make a full and unreserved commitment to see it through." This level of honesty in itself makes a book a success and worth reading.

In Part I, Senator Gore outlines the major current threats to the environment of the Earth. In each instance an exhaustive understanding of the facts and issues involved is demonstrated. From descriptions of environmental disasters such as the total loss of the Aral Sea, once the fourth largest inland sea in the world, to graphs clearly depicting the accelerating rate of carbon dioxide increase in the atmosphere and geometric population growth in the world, Gore weaves a compelling and readable picture of the shockingly damaged condition of the planet's biosphere. Senator Gore's accounts are often personal experiences from travels worldwide to witness firsthand the monumental environmental problems and the solutions being attempted. Particularly fascinating is Chapter 3 outlining a history of the impact of climate changes on civilization. It seems that major wars, migrations and downfalls of civilizations may have been caused by minute temperature changes or droughts to the magnitude of the current California and African droughts.

Each chapter presents additional material on the extent of the ecological crisis. Species loss, global warming, loss of genetic plant diversity and CFC's are some of the issues covered in detail. The reader is assaulted with example after example of events and facts that illustrate the loss of natural resources and species throughout the world. One longs to be finished with the ordeal, to close the book and to turn away. But in his recommendations for action, Senator Gore lays out specific solutions and

realistic proposals for action in surprising detail. There is hope after all, if action can be taken on a global scale.

There is a truth that rings throughout this book that cannot be ignored. Even if all of the scientific facts mentioned—and there are many—are not totally accurate as some critics have argued, the reader is presented with sufficient warning on so many different levels of environmental concern, that one is left with the inescapable conclusion that our planet is on a fast accelerating collision course with disaster.

The historic analysis in Part II of how our civilization has evolved so that we as a species have become totally disconnected to the earth is particularly fascinating. Gore uses examples from philosophy, history, and religion to make his point that it may be historic accident that we have lost our respect for nature and its wealth, and that we have lost sight of the long-term environmental impacts of our actions.

In Part III, Senator Gore presents five discrete and detailed recommendations for global action: First, stabilize population growth, which is essential for the planet to support our species. Second, there must be rapid creation of environmentally appropriate technologies to sustain economic growth without destroying the environment. Third, there must be a change in the economic measurement of the impact of our actions on the environment. Fourth, negotiation and approval of new international agreements must begin to carry out a global protection plan. Fifth, a cooperative plan for education all people about our global environment must be established. Finally, there must be overall a general goal of establishing social and political conditions must conducive to sustainable societies throughout the world.

Incidentally, the infamous page 304 that was in contention during the Vice Presidential debates does not recommend that the United States fund global cleanup at a cost of \$100 billion. That dollar amount was referred to in comparing the post-World War II Marshall Plan cleanup costs to what they would cost in today's dollars. In fact, on the previous page 303, Senator Gore states: "Today, of course, the United States cannot conceivably be the principal financier for a global recovery program and cannot make the key decisions alone or with only one close ally."

Senator Gore's thorough recommendations for action in essence promote adopting a series of global paradigm shifts that leave the reader breathless. Are these truly the penned soul-searchings of an American politician?

If each of us looks within, beyond the emotional scars of our life experiences, beyond the distractions and tasks that every day presents, and beyond the moods and thoughts that fill our heads each day, there is an unmistakable inner core of wisdom and calm. This is the wisdom of the ages, of nature and life and directions wider than we can readily fathom,

that we must tap into to move forward and make the global changes that Senator Gore promotes. It is a movement into a kind of courageousness and global leadership that each of us must personally assume, notwithstanding our religious, social or party affiliation.

The hope that this book raises in the reader for the future of the planet is worth its reading, even though the immense global problems are set forth at an unrelenting pace and with palpable force. It is a call to arms for everyone to step forth out of the self-indulgent 1980s and become part of an international effort to save the fragile biosphere of this orb each of us calls home. Never has a challenge to a species been greater; never indeed has it been so exciting to be alive on this Earth.

One must hope that Vice President-elect Gore will stand by the words of this visionary work, and that he will be heard and heeded by the new President. As the world's most powerful nation, the United States must accomplish much in a short time by providing leadership, by education, by acknowledging the environmental problems and by acting. It is, after all, the very Earth that now lies in the balance.

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