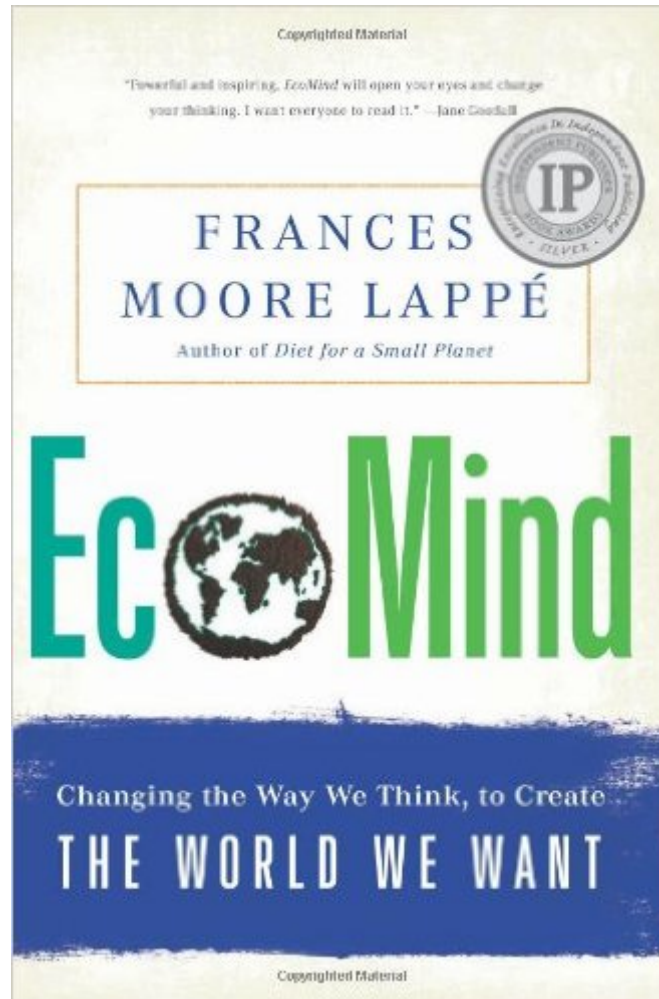


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EcoMind: Changing The Way We Think, To Create The World We Want



Synopsis

In *EcoMind*, Frances Moore Lappé—a giant of the environmental movement—confronts accepted wisdom of environmentalism. Drawing on the latest research from anthropology to neuroscience and her own field experience, she argues that the biggest challenge to human survival isn't our fossil fuel dependency, melting glaciers, or other calamities. Rather, it's our faulty way of thinking about these environmental crises that robs us of power. Lappé dismantles seven common "thought traps"—from limits to growth to the failings of democracy—that belie what we now know about nature, including our own, and offers contrasting "thought leaps" that reveal our hidden power. Like her *Diet for a Small Planet* classic, *EcoMind* is challenging, controversial and empowering.

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Customer Reviews

For quite some time, Frances Moore Lappé has been a household name among those concerned with the global crises around food, poverty, and the environment. Her book, *Diet for a Small Planet*, published in the nineteen seventies, became a world-wide success. Since then, climate change has emerged as an additional, if not all-encompassing, crisis. Among the many authors writing on this range of topics, Lappé, award winning author with eighteen books to her name, educator and activist, stands out not only for her thorough and broad-based and cross-cutting analysis of the roots of hunger, poverty and environmental crises but also for her engaging reflections on solutions that are emerging worldwide through what she calls "Living democracy", initiatives that are based in

and growing out from communities - from the bottom-up. In her new book, *EcoMind*, she presents, among other concerns, a convincing case that "world hunger is not the result of food shortages" but of a lack of sustained access by poor and marginalized people to the means of adequate food production and/or food supplies. Her central argument is that "solutions to global crises are within reach [...] the challenge for us is to free ourselves from self-defeating thought-traps so that we can bring these solutions to life." *EcoMind* is structured around seven "thought traps" which the author discusses in turn, providing numerous examples that give context and depth to her arguments. The traps, Lappé finds, hold "widely held environmental messages and related ideas - some of them largely unspoken assumptions - that now shape our culture's responses to the global environmental and poverty crises.

EcoMind is another thought-provoking and insightful work from visionary author and activist Frances Moore Lappé. I am a professor of environmental studies at a smallish liberal arts college. I face the challenge of motivating and empowering undergraduate students on a daily basis, and I return again and again to Lappé's works. I have used many of her books and articles in my classes, and have already adopted *EcoMind* for an advanced seminar on critical thinking that I am teaching in spring 2012. Lappé's works have always provided intensely thoughtful and thought-provoking content for both an academic and general audience, and *EcoMind* is no exception. While I agree with many (though not all, and not uniformly) of the assumptions Lappé confronts in the book, it is the way she writes that so resonates with me and my students. She is keenly aware of the need to weave rhetorical craft, emotional openness, and intellectual rigor into hard questions - this has been her approach since *Diet for a Small Planet* was first published in 1971 (a book that remains current 40 years later), and is the thread that connects her work in many areas, including international aid, democracy, empowerment, and of course food systems. *EcoMind* is an easy book to read - because it's so well written - but asks us to grapple with hard questions. In this, Lappé provides access to challenging ideas in a manner that helps us better understand how to position ourselves in a society faced with complex and often frightening problems that are clearly in need of our greater attention. Her work rests alongside that of Bill McKibben and Thomas Friedman, among others, in achieving the balance of depth and readability.

In the introduction to *EcoMind*, Frances Moore Lappé wisely states that "if our mental frame is flawed, we'll fail no matter how hard and sincerely we struggle." This statement is a reasonable summary of the main theme of the book. Moore Lappé guides the reader through a tour of seven

"Thought Traps" that she contends are responsible for the stagnation we have seen in achieving sustainability. These Thought Traps include notions such as the idea that in this brave new world of Facebook, fried foods, and freeways, we urban humans have lost our connection to nature; or that humans have a natural tendency to over-consume, making exploitation of the Earth inevitable; or indeed that even if we as a society collectively decide to take action, it's already too late. Whether you agree with Moore LappÃ©'s characterization of these Thought Traps or not, it is hard to argue with the central premise: that people often don't even look at the frameworks that guide our thinking, and that only by looking closely at why we hold certain opinions can we begin to shape them in a more positive direction. For example, one subtle misconception that Moore LappÃ© discusses is the idea that humans have always lived in the way we do now in the United States (with the corollary being that this lifestyle is "natural" or "non-negotiable"). Moore LappÃ© does not challenge people's right to live comfortable lives (in fact, she takes the opposite view, that it is a myth that we have to give up comfort in order to live sustainably), but she hammers home the case that we currently live is most certainly an aberration. Case in point: "In the one hundred years of the twentieth century, humans used ten times more energy than we did in the previous 1,000 years."

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