



## Subjugate the Earth: The Beginning and End of Human Domination of Nature

**Philipp Blom**

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*Subjugate the Earth* is Philipp Blom's insightful, timely, and ambitious survey of the history of ideas related to humanity's domination of nature.

Rigorous and comprehensive, the book examines a range of philosophical ideas related to humanity and nature—from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to the “prophets” of Silicon Valley. Central throughout is the influence of Christianity and its “moral imperative conferred on humans” by a universal God. Although Western writers put their own spin on such ideas, most reinforced the message of subjugation, Blom shows.

Analyzing Babylonian and biblical tales alongside the works of Plato, St. Augustine, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Jefferson, Blom argues that ideas of subjugation, domination, and growth have been used to justify “holy” war, slavery, colonial expeditions, cruelty to animals, and the control of women and nature. In the twentieth century, the manipulation of nature accelerated, he shows, in the extraction of fossil fuels, industrial meat production, war machines, and the “messianic-theological” messages of technology leaders. The book links ideas of subjugation to catastrophic developments including climate change and the collapse of biodiversity, claiming that ingrained ideas could lead to humanity's destruction.

Thinkers who broke from the conventions of subjugation are emphasized in counter to these tendencies. Baruch Spinoza, for instance, called nature “an infinitely complex system whose laws are ignored and twisted by humans.” The insights of contemporary thinkers including Merlin Sheldrake, who focused on the interconnecting structures of mycelium and fungal network, are also cited. Revealing works of art that are reflective of their era's approaches to the subjugation of nature are featured too, from the Venus of Willendorf to J.M.W. Turner's painting depicting the Great Western Railroad.

*Subjugate the Earth* probes Western intellectual history to understand the ongoing implications of deep-seated human ideas about our place in nature.

KRISTEN RABE (January / February 2025)

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