Australian Environment History – Essay:
(Done By: Peter Evans)

Abstract:
The Australian environmental landscape, is unique in its evolution and has changed significantly since 1788. As a result this essay asks how and why this is so, and argues, that the Australian environmental landscape, has changed over the past 250 years, due to the early European colonisation of Australia.

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12/07/07

Australian Environmental History Essay
For many Australian citizens in the 21 century, there is an very important question that needs to be answered in regards an Australian environmental history and that is, why is it that within an evolutionary time context, the Australian environmental landscape has changed extremely rapidly over the past 150 year period. Specifically since European settlement of Australian land mass took place in 1788? (1) Consequently, In this essay I will attempt to answer this question and propose, that a 17-18th century, European enlightenment thought process, engaged an explorative, ecological imperialism concept, within the Australian environmental landscape and that a similar process has continued throughout Australia’s environmental history, to the present day. Infact I will explain as to how and why a 17-18th century enlightenment conciseness, engaged an ecological imperialism concept, within the Australian, environmental landscape. I will also elaborate how and why, such a process has continued throughout Australia’s environmental history, to the present day. In essence then, this essay is to be a historical account, of how and why a human selective perception, can impact upon an environmental landscape.

But Firstly, who were some the philosophers that were advocating the use an epistemological, empirically orientated enlightenment thought process within an 17-18 century Europe? Some of these were Newton, Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Hume, Bentham and Kant. (2) Many of these philosophers were already starting to perceive that science, utilitarianism, and the concept of improvement / progress, were essential components for enlightenment development. And this was especially the case with English Imperial colonies abroad (3) (4) (5). Or as Gascoigne would imply “Enlightenment thought, in essence, was to be, a construction of the “Science of Man” (6) P.183.Secondly, what is an ecological imperialism concept and what initiated the demographic take over of other countries, of such a concept? According to Crosby there are five are significant determinants, within a 17-18 century European epistemological and ecological imperialism, demographic take over of another country. These are. ‘1. An expanding European population.2. A limited a supply of home based cultivated land available. 3. Nationalistic tensions and competition. 4. Persecution of the less fortunate in society. 5. And the arrival of the industrial revolution’ ” (7). P.5. What then broadly speaking is an ecological imperialism concept then? Once again Crosby would tend to imply, that an ecological imperialism concept is an invasion or assimilation of specific countries / culture, epistemological and ecological characteristics, onto / into another culture / county (8). Infact, according to Crosby an ecological imperialism concept has four specific categories within itself, these are: “1. Human beings.2. All desirable or vermin animals associated with human beings, such as, horses, pigs, rats, rabbits, etc. 3. Pathological infections, that causes diseases in humans and animals.4. The introduction of weeds, into a foreign environmental landscape” (9). P.32.

Actually for an early 18 century European explorer, envisioning the Australian landscape for the first time was an extremely challenging, anti-homogeneous encounters. Indeed, in 1513 the Australian landmass was originally known as a land incognita (unknown land) and then later in the early 18 century it was coined a land Terra Australs (A land not yet known) (10). Indeed, to the early 18 century European explorer, the landscape seemed to undulate with inconstancies. For instance, mountains, were where they were they were not meant to be, on the coast and rivers flowed the wrong way, inland. Infact, according to Major Robert Ross, possibly arriving with the first fleet of the coast of Sydney, New South Wales, “New Holland (Australia).he suggested Australia was a county were everything is topsy turvey, and everything seems to be around the wrong way” (11). p.11. Infact, in logs, journals and mail exchanges written by many early 17-18 century entrepreneurs, explorers, it was routinely indicated that the Australian landscape was viewed as a reversal of nature in all its extremities (12). For example it was hard for the early explores and colonists to understand why the blue mountain escarpment, that surrounded Sydney town, did not seem to protect and buffet Sydney, from the hot westerly winds that routinely ravaged the cumberland plain region. For
in a European environmental landscape hot westerly winds, never originated from beyond any coastal plains, mountain ranges (13). Moreover the unique flora and fauna within the Australian environmental landscape was perceived within a European focused perception, as odd, freakish, and an antiquated antipodes, perversity of nature (14). For example, the monotroin egg laying mammals, like the platypus, emu and wombat where viewed as odd, unnatural phenomena and were often captured, so’s to be exhibited and analysed within many European virtuoso’s collections (15). Infact, Joseph Banks himself had one of Europe’s biggest virtuoso’s collections, in the late 18 century (16). Hence, in a sense then, a 17-18 century European explorer could be forgiven for perceiving the continent as a land incognita and Terra Astrals. For within their world view paradigm, New Holland (Australia) was truly seen as a remote wild frontier region, that enticed extreme imaginings of the exotica and uncertainty (17). (18). Consequently, to alleviate such self doubting, of uncivilized imaginings and concerns, an enlightenment conciseness concept, in essence was to become a vital requirement, for a European explorers, mental and physical self survival within a perceived harsh landscape (19) (20). Actually, many would suggest, that an early 19th century Australian government’s use of, a Georgian landscape survey method, to initiate the development of closer settler societies, in turn enhanced an early enlightenment self deceiving thought dilemma concept within an early 19 century Australian colonists worldview paradigm (21). For example, with the early colonists using a Georgian survey landscape method, which was methodical, and space structured in conception, this itself becomes a good example of how indoctrinating and affirming, an early 19 century European government’s, enlightenment thought processes, was on an unsuspecting public of the time (22). So that in turn, a settler or squatter could feel comfortable and secure, in neglecting any early indications of impending disastrous environmental impacts, that were to evolve in latter years, such as the 20 century environmental problems of soil salinity and wind erosion on pastoral lands, etc (23) (24). Infact, according to the Social Scientist, Thrift, any, empirical knowledge activity of a Government. (Such as the above mentioned early 19 century European survey tactics). In turn creates, new empirically orientated, political and cultural knowledge activities within a specific world view paradigm. So that also in turn, there is a new way of perceiving and envisioning, all empirical knowledge within that specific world view paradigm concept. And that consequentially, such processes, also enhance a specific epistemological, knowledge development process as well within a certain worldview paradigm concept. (The early paradigm beginnings of, an Enlightenment thought, development process) (25). Or in Thrift’s own words, “The activities of any government are inextricably bound up in the activities of thought” (26). P.5. Consequently, many 16-19 century European thinkers / exploiters and colonists could only but understand and envisage the Australian, environmental landscape, within their own, specific enlightened, worldview paradigm context (27). Therefore, for a present day environmental historian to assume / imply otherwise in effect denies any real understanding, of the tautological, historical context of the time, yes?

However, if much of an Australia’s environmental history process seems to be envisaged, within only one environmental historical process, as mentioned above. Which is within a European environmental, anthropocentric and ethnocentric perception (28)? That was initially, determined when the English discovered Australia in 1770 (29). Why then is that such an environmental history assumption is continually fraught with contradictions and inconstancies within it’s environmental historical process? Infact I would suggest that as many 16-18 century European thinkers / exploiters could only understand and envisage the Australian, environmental landscape, within their own specific, enlightened, worldview paradigm context (30) (31). It became natural for them to try to improve, and transform the Australian environmental landscape, within their own “climate of opinion” context, into an environmental scene, reminiscent of a European environmental landscape (32). For example Baiba Berszins mentions in the book: the coming of strangers. " That because Australia in the late 18 century, was a strange and terrifying landscape, it became essential to make the landscape more familiar and tolerable to a European perception” (33). p.54 (34). Indeed as...
instigator of the natural phenomena, enlightenment thinking, the early 16th-century philosopher, Frances Bacon, would have to be credited, with many 17th-century explorers and colonists metaphysical environmental, reality paradigm concepts (35) (36). For example, Bacon advocated the concept of the four idols, so’s to delineate any mistakes that may arise within a critique of any natural or non-natural, empirical information. (The idol of the Theatre, the idol of the Market place, the idol of the cave the idol of the tribe) (37). Therefore with an early 17th-century explorer and colonist engaging such a epistemology enlighten mind set as Bacons four idols concepts, the Australian environmental landscape was perceived within a categorised, scientific worldview paradigm (38). For example, Banks himself, in 1781, collected 500 plant seed specimens on his endeavour voyages, so that they could be scientifically analysed and categorised and then propagated in a garden, in Chelsea, England (39).

Moreover, the 20th-century philosopher, John Cottingtingham, implies that because an early 18th-century, enlightenment conciseness process, engaged many Cartesian Dualism processes. Such as Bacons, the four idols concepts and Descartes, Petit-Trait’s, philosophical concepts within the enlightenment thought structure process. This in turn, could only but enhance a specific kind of worldview perception, in regards to observing and understanding the Australian environmental landscape (40). Cottingtingham, J, 1992, “Cartesian Dualism” pp.236-256, Reprinted in Murdoch University reader, PHIL-230, S-2, 2007, Murdoch University pub, Murdoch, Australia, Ch-7. For example, in 1630, Descartes implied, within his Petit-Trait’s, philosophical enquiry, that the soul (mind) is independent of the body. However to dominate, all pure and incorporeal thought structure developments, in regards to an enlightenment conciseness concept, the soul / mind (science) is to engage and bond with the body (matter) within a Cartesian Dualism process. Indeed, Descartes suggests, that all pure and incorporeal accounts of the mind (soul) are intellectually based within our essence of being. (Hence, a philosophical example of, the early beginnings of a 17th-century, enlightenment conciseness concept). However, this in turn, denies the existence of many other Cartesian Dualisms concepts, such as the sensual and imaginative thought structure processes, that are empirically embodied within a natural environmental landscape (41). Consequently, this implies, there tended to be many contradictions and misunderstandings within a European enlightenment worldview perception, in regards the understanding of a foreign environmental landscape, other than their own. Or in other words, a European enlightenment thought process, could only but envision any environmental landscape formation within the context of their own home based, environmental landscape formations (42) (43). For example Descartes, implies paradoxically, in a 1637 letter, just such a Cartesian Dualism dilemma within an enlightenment thought process, when he mentions. “That a man who doubts everything empirically orientated towards the material, also doubts his own existence” (44) p.242. Consequently, Cottingtingham suggests, that if one was to critique, Descartes concepts of pure and incorporeal accounts of the mind, then one would find many contradictions and inconsistencies within his Petit-Trait’s, treatise. And as such, expose many other Cartesian Dualisms dilemmas within Descartes other enlightenment philosophical enquires as well (45). For example, when Descartes was asked to prove a soul’s, immortality, within a Cartesian Dualism context, in his 2nd mediations philosophical enquiry, he declined the offer. But rather could only hint, that there may be different mind / body concepts involved, so’s to engage the process of immortality (46). Indeed, according to the 20th-century philosopher Jon Nuttall, it’s morally unethical to model any metaphysical moral theory, upon a philosophical theory that has the concept of science and improvement at all costs. Indeed, Nuttall implies that scientific improvement processes does not enhance any sort of enlightenment knowledge development at all. Specifically, because all scientific knowledge, is predominately focussed, upon generalizations of actions / events. Rather than looking at any specific details, of actions / events. And that because of this, the closer an individual / government gets to a particular enlightenment ideal / event, the further away from it they become (47). For example, in the early 19th century, Australia starting using the fallow agriculture machinery method, to improve
Australian agriculture development. But instead, caused major environmental damage within the Australian, environmental landscape, such as wind and soil erosion (48). Hence, the 20 century, environmental philosopher, Frances Matthew’s, concept of a Panpsychism, philosophical enlightenment process, in regards to an early 18 century, European environmental change process within the Australian landscape may ring true for many. For she suggests that, the indigenous, Australians real, impact upon a landscape, was in complete contrast to a European conception of an ideal enlightenment, environmental change process.

For example, she mentions, “that many aboriginal lifestyles tend to remain grounded in the real, rather than escaping into any concept of the enlightened ideal.” (My italics) (49). p.48 Hence, a Europeans enlightenment concept of the ideal, is in essence a process of domination over an environment landscape, rather than a real, adaptation, assimilation into an environmental landscape, which an indigenous Australian culture tends to practice, to this day, within the Australian environmental landscape (50).

Yet, as an essential requirement for survival in an early 18 century Australia, it was imperative that the early 18 century, European colonists introduced and assimilated many well known non-endemic local plant and animal species, so’s to increase their chance of enhancing a stable, supportive self sufficient environmental landscape, on which the prospect of survival and progress intensely depended (49). (51). Infact, according to Coats, it’s implicit within the ideology of improvement and progress, that man has evolved to become an agriculturist. Indeed he mentions. “That once humans became agriculturalists, the paradisiacal nature of pre-history became irretrievably lost forever” (52). p.86. For instance, to exemplify and affirm such a statement, a small example of a 1799 European diet within the Hawkesbury flood plain region, of Sydney, consisted of 6,100 acres of wheat, 2,500 acres of maize, 82 acres of barley and many gardens of corn, lemons, oranges, apricots, pumpkins and apples, etc (53) (54). Infact as the Australian environmental landscape included none of these ideally suited European farming and horticultural plant species, it then became extremely important, to the early 18 century European enlightenment ideology, to introduce as many known European and exotic plant species into the Australian environmental landscape to create a sense of the familiar, so that in turn, an early 18 century colonist and settler, could tolerate the harsh Australian environmental landscape, while alleviating any survival and starvation issues (55). Infact the early 18 century, small landholding, yeoman farmer concept, depended heavily upon the senses of the European familiar, to enhance a self supportive farming culture (56) (57). Indeed, within the context of enlargement thinking and ecological expansion, its relevant to cite Samuel Johnson, who mentioned on a visit to France, in 1775, on commenting on the aesthetic beauty of the French country side, Johnson replied “A blade of Grass is always a blade of grass, weather in one country or in another country” (58). P.84. Or it could be said, its elementary evolution my dear friends, as Darwin himself would imply, I suspect.

However, unknown to an early 18 century Australian explorer and colonist, Australia was to truly test the meat, of an early 18 century, rationalistic, enlightenment thought structure process and infact was to become one of the last vestige places, of imperialistic European colonial development (59). For within this enlightened, 17-18 century explorer and colonist mind set, came the introduction of many exotic European plant and animal species, into the Australian environmental landscape. For example in the year 1827 the European rabbit was introduced into the Tasmanian pastoral regions, but the most damage first originated within the State of Victoria. Specifically in and around the Geelong region and within a 50 year period it had decimated much of the unique outback landscape surrounding this region (60) (61). Another negative consequence of an ecological imperialism concept can be cited within a pastoral context, whereby the introduction of hard hoved sheep and cattle within the Australian landscape compacted and hardend an extremely soft and old soil structure, which is estimated to be at least 10,000 years old (62) (63). This is specifically because, all of
Australia, prior to European settlement, encompassed only soft hosed fauna, such as kangaroos, emus and wallabies, etc, that did not affect the old soil structure in the extreme (64). Moreover, as these are only just a few examples, of how an 18 century European settler and colonists envisaged New Holland, it’s not surprisingly then, as Crosby himself tends to imply, many early European settlers and colonists, in turn consulted science and their egos, in regards to environmental management and civilization building. Rather than entertaining thoughts of, adaptive and sustainable ecological environmental management and civilization building principles within their 18 century settler development psyches (65). Indeed, it was not long until the first Australian conservation order was issued in 1788, to stop many of the early 18 century colonists and settlers from neglecting the environment and exploiting the landscape, by polluting an embryonic Sydney town with rubbish, and raw sewage, and engaging in indiscriminate environmental degradation, such as rampant land clearing and introductions of exotic plant and animal species, etc (66) (67). Indeed, with the 1830s with the initiation of the Georgian, method, of straight line grid system surveying being used within the Australian landscape, it irreversibly changed the Australian landscape indefinitely. For example, because every thing within the Australian landscape was surveyed within a square grid Patten, without any attempt to incorporate, any diverse Australian bush landscape formations within the grid system Patten, this in turn denied the uniquely Australian environmental landscape, any opportunity to exit or expand in any way. Indeed, the Georgian, straight line surveying method, essentially became the ideal tool for the early Europeans to divide and conquer the Australian landmass. Infact by using such a structured surveying and planning method, early Europeans, in turn, also became conforming slaves to their own realistic oriented, enlightenment paradigm process. Without gaining any true understanding, the Australian, environmental landscape (68). Indeed, because of early European exploring efforts, by 1835 pastoral leases were already exiting 350 miles inland from Sydney and in Western Australia, 6 years after the colonization of the swan river, there were pastoral leases exiting within the Avon valley region, 60 miles from Perth (69). Consequently, its no surprise that, the poet Judith Wright mentions within her 1974 critique of, the Biological Man.” That a European, ecological imperialism attitude, is akin manipulating the Australian landscape, to a specific European need, instead of adapting and assimilating, a European attitude into an Australian, environmental landscape” (70). P.358. Obviously, such a statement begs the question, was this case in regards to an Australian environmental history?

In conclusion in this essay I have endeavoured to critique and understand how and why an early 17-18 century European explorer envisaged the Australian landscape within their own unique historical context. Consequently, I engaged, hopefully, a similar historian’s hindsight, such as Powel’s, and asked the question. “Was an early, 17-18 century European explorer’s concept of progress, simply different proceeding form an alternative base? So’s to correct and improve an environmental landscape, and to then turn it into what they deemed to be better purposes and long lasting results”? (71) P.66. Infact, I suggested the main reason as to why many Australians envisaged Australian environmental history within a seemingly European focused reality, is because an early 18th century, European enlightenment thought process, engaged and enhanced an explorative, ecological imperialism concept, within the Australian environmental landscape, and that such a process, has continued throughout Australia’s environmental history, to the present day. Consequently, I explained as to how and why an early 18th century enlightenment conscious engaged and enhanced an explorative ecological imperialism concept, within the Australian, environmental landscape. I also elaborated on as to how and why, such a process continued throughout Australia’s environmental history, to the present day. Indeed, in the words of David Worster. “Why Is it that the most important lesson that we have not learnt, within a environmental historical context, that despite all our scientific expertise, in the name of improvement and progress, and with all our investment in productive machinery, and with all the wealth we have acquired, that we still have not escaped from the inadequacy of our own epistemological focused, environmental knowledge processes? (72) P.206. Yes, indeed, we may wonder why we have not learnt from history.
End Notes


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