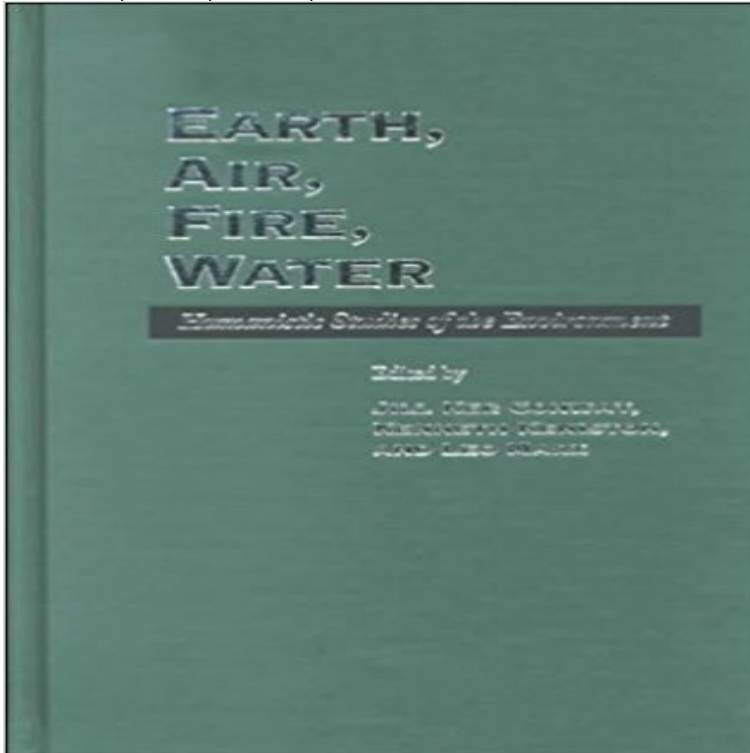


Earth, Air, Fire, Water: Humanistic Studies of the Environment



Written in a clear, accessible style with a general audience in mind, the essays in this volume offer fresh approaches to thinking about environmental issues. When we consider the forms of environmental decline most urgently in need of attention -- eroding soils, shrinking forests, expanding deserts, acid rain, ozone depletion, air pollution, poisoned water supplies, the loss of biological diversity -- it may seem logical that scientists should be the people mobilized to tackle these problems. Yet to devise effective solutions for today's environmental threats, we must situate them within their larger historical, societal, and cultural settings. Amelioration does not require exclusively scientific knowledge, but also changes based upon law and public policy, on institutional structures and practices, on habits of consumption, and on countless other facets of daily life. *Earth, Air, Fire, Water* seeks to redirect our thinking about environmental issues by locating them in the behavior of human beings -- in the institutions, beliefs, and practices that mediate between people and that obscure but beautiful nonhuman world we refer to as nature. The book opens with a section on the elements and the ways humans have understood them in the past. There follows a section devoted to social institutions and the ways in which we can learn from current and past efforts to study the interaction between people and nature. The concluding section analyzes the culture of modernity and the ways in which the human imagination has changed in response to the arrival of modern technology.

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