

The Conquest of Nature - Water, Landscape and the Making of Modern Germany  
by David Blackbourn. Jonathan Cape 2006.

At a time when there is a profusion of material about adverse changes to the environment caused by global warming, pollution and other indications of human irresponsibility and short-termism, *The Conquest of Nature* is a reminder of the ways that people have always sought to influence the geography which they inhabited.

Commencing with the great reclamation of marshland in the 1740s under Frederick the Great of Prussia the book follows other great projects over the ensuing 2 and a half centuries, including the building of ports and human habitations, changing the route of rivers, constructing dams and developing hydro-electric power.

While at some periods these great activities were performed for the welfare of many and the aggrandizement of a few, in the Nazi period they took on a wholly different tenor, and metamorphosed into a diabolic scheme of physical and ethnic redrawing of eastern Europe.

David Blackbourn details the ways in which Germany took the lead in many aspects of Western European industrial and topographic development in the modern period, as well as considering the legacy of the defeat of Nazism, notably manifested by the damage to eastern Germany of its Soviet-style command economy between 1945 and 1989.

This is a most unusual and intriguing analysis of a rich period in human history.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh