

# The Origins of Conquest Mentalities and the Nature-Culture Binary

Utilitarian and conquest concepts

Organic Conception of Earth

Scientific Revolution

Nature as feminine

Nature as mechanism

Francis Bacon and René Descartes

Scientific progress □ social progress

Serving capitalism and uneven progress

technological innovations and mastery over nature

Modernization theory and Global South

Communism and Conquest Mentality

Capitalism and Nature-Culture Binary

What images come to mind when you hear the word “nature?”

# Utilitarian concept

- Use a “nature” deemed to be “out there” to suit our own needs and interests. Nature is a set of resources humans (or those who control economic production) utilize to produce material goods and provide services

# Conquest concept

- Humans have dominion over the earth
- We can and must subordinate a nature that's separate from us, we are superior to other living things, thus rendering this “nature” passive and servile to us

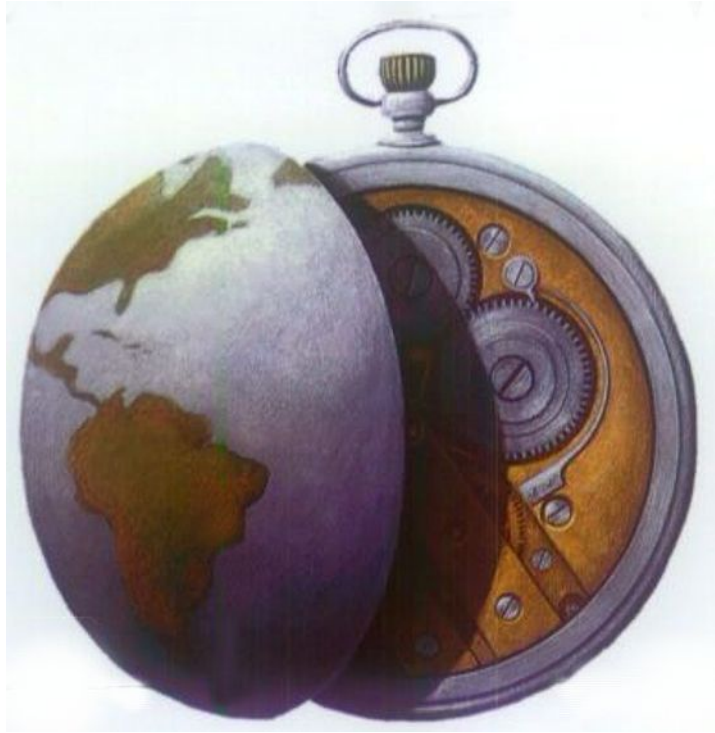
Both related concepts produced and help maintain the nature-culture binary

How did most humans come to ascribe to this way of thinking?

- Organic conceptions of the earth
  - Harmony, interconnection, living and active
  - Nurture and cultivation (often times gendered)
- The Scientific Revolution and the rise of the Conquest mentality

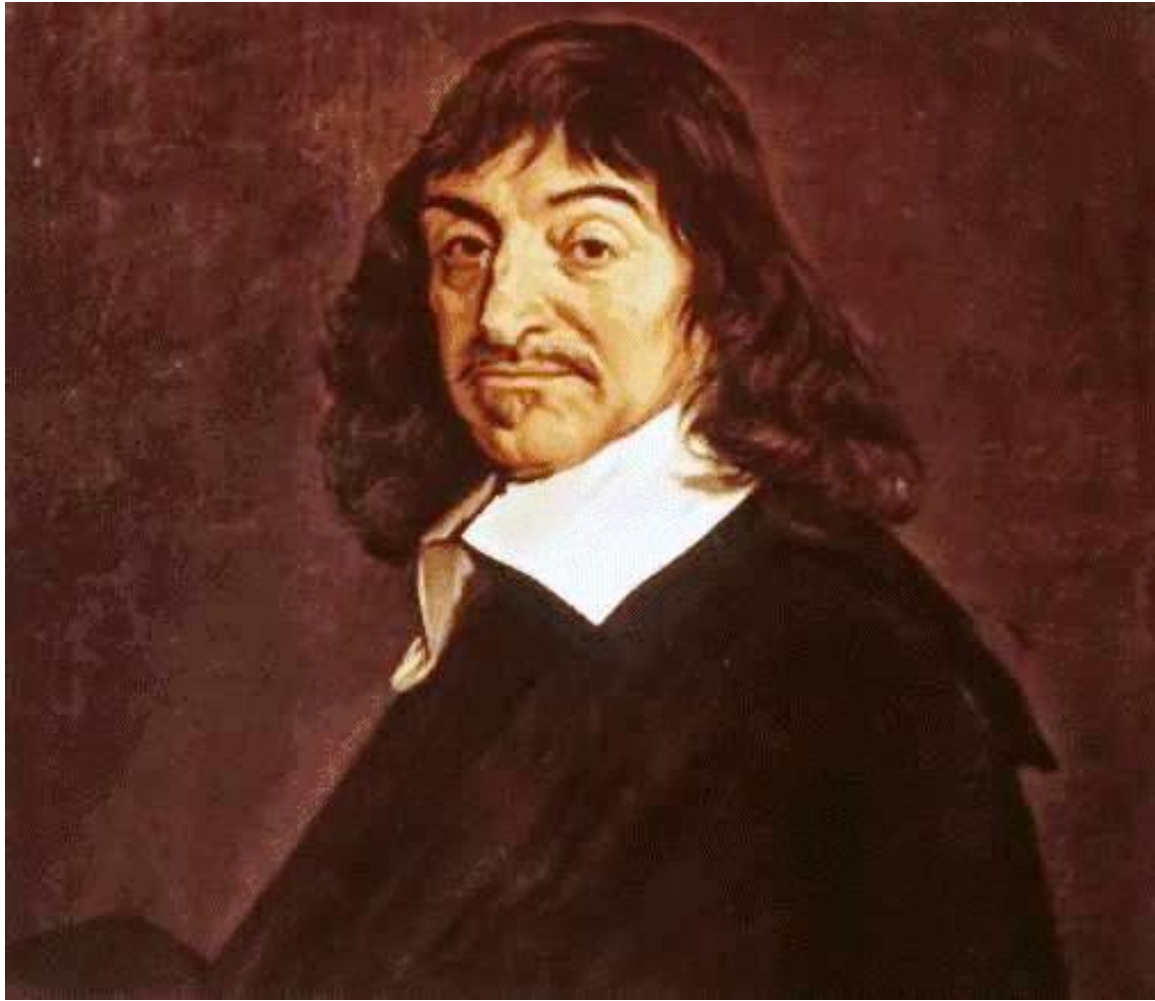
# Scientific Revolution and the Rise of the Conquest Mentality

- Scientific Method and an objective nature about which human knowledge increases
- Use knowledge to control nature and benefit from
- Nature as bound into service to man (gendered).
- Knowledge of nature's workings □ power and dominion over it
- Occurring at same time commercial capitalism spreading around world via Euro colonialism









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# Scientific progress

- Science would lead to human progress via understanding nature and applying technologies based on that science.
- Scientific expertise would lead to universal human welfare
- Anti-political. No need for politics, politicians could simply let scientific experts and technicians solve social problems. (the technological fix)
- But, is it universal progress? Whose science? Whose technology? Is the conception of nature correct?

# Conquest mentality outside Europe and within socialist societies

- Modernization theory and politics of development
- Science and technology as key drivers of modernization
- Conquest philosophy seeps into socialism and communism
- Capitalism versus communism: a struggle for development (understood as greater production and consumption) via conquest of nature



# Nixon-Krushchev “kitchen” debate, 1959

- <https://youtu.be/-CvQOuNecy4>

## **Capitalism and the provenance of the Nature-Culture Binary**

Capitalism's tendency to commodify nature bring all nature into production

Nature becomes resource, or set of inputs in productive sphere

Nature that submits to capitalist production via technological innovations and labor power is viewed as inert, controlled, no longer active.

People began to view true nature as outside production. It was the wilderness  
Or so-called pristine nature. Wilderness in Western imagination.

Can nature be extirpated and/or controlled? Not exactly.



The conviction that humans are separate from nature and can conquer or dominate the natural world derives from:

- A. The Scientific Revolution and the ideas of Francis Bacon
- B. Chinese nationalists breaking dams that held back the Yellow River in 1938
- C. Capitalists' and government experts' application of new and invasive technologies that increase production
- D. The arrival to cities of millions of poor farmers who could no longer live off their land or who had their land usurped by large landowners
- E. A and C